

DREAMER'S WORLDS—*Brilliant Novelette* by EDMOND HAMILTON

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

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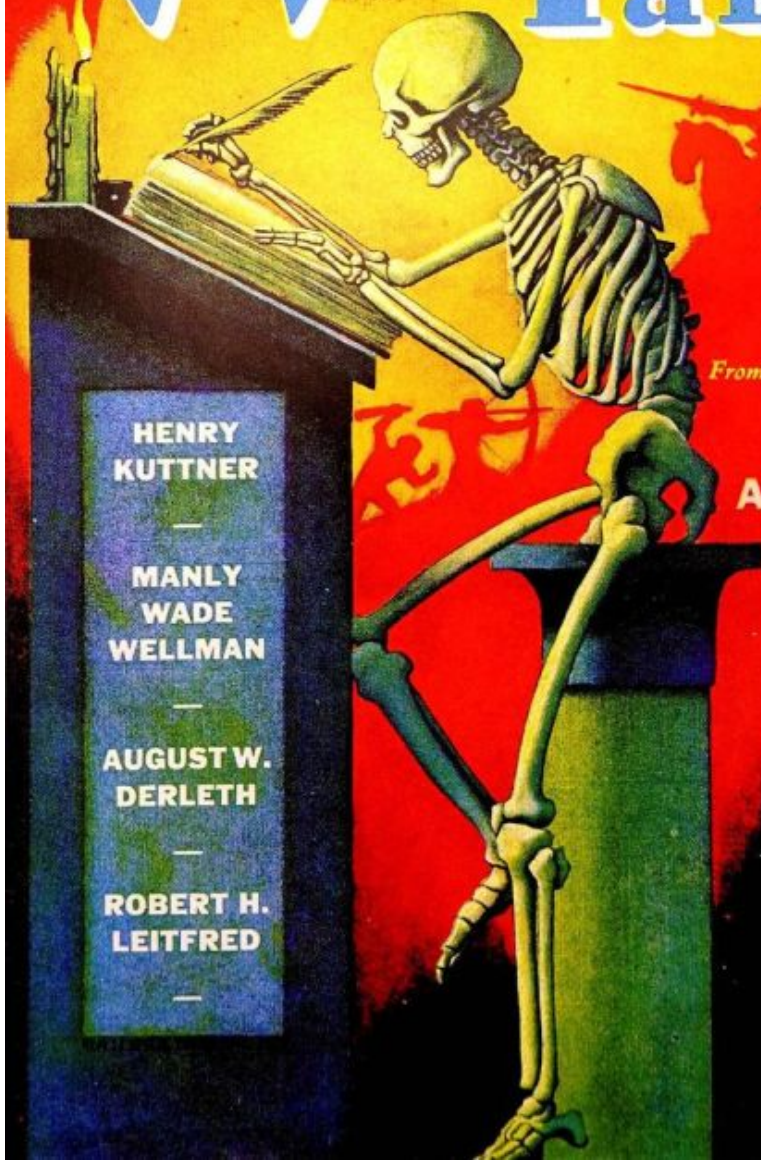
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*A Drama
of World Destiny—*

THE BOOK
OF
THE DEAD

by

FRANK GRUBER



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Chameleon Man

By
HENRY KUTTNER

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He was a changeable sort of fellow—and on occasions resembled a piecemeal zombie assembled by someone entirely ignorant of anatomy!

Tim Vanderhof wavered. He stood ten feet from a glass-paneled door, his apprehensive gaze riveted upon it, and swayed back and forth like a willow. Or, perhaps, an aspen. He wasn't sure. Yes, it was an aspen—a quaking aspen. His ears seemed to twitch gently as he listened to the low rumble of voices from the inner office of S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop, Fifth Avenue's snootiest establishment for supplying exclusive models of dresses, lingerie, and what-not.

Let us examine Mr. Vanderhof. He did not, at the moment, look like a man who, within a very short time, was going to turn into what amounted to something rather like a chameleon. Nevertheless, mentally and spiritually, Tim Vanderhof was a mere mass of quivering protoplasm, and no great wonder, after the interview he had just had. He wasn't bad looking, though slightly pallid. His features were regular, his face a bit chubby, and his eyes held the expression of a startled fawn. They were brown, like his hair, and he had a pug nose.

He shivered slightly as the glass-paneled door opened. A Back appeared. Under it were two short, slightly bowed legs, and it was surmounted by a scarlet billiard-ball of a head. There was no neck. The Back was draped in tweeds, and a strong smell of tobacco, brandy, and horses emanated from it.

The Back extended a large, capable hand, clenched it into a fist, and shook it warningly at someone inside the office.

"Gad, sir!" a deep voice boomed, "Gad! This is the last straw! Mrs. Quester will be furious. And I warn you, Walker, that I shall be furious too. I have stood enough of your trifling. Twice already you promised exclusive models of a dress for my wife, and then failed to deliver."

"But—" said a Voice.

"*Silence!*" bellowed the Back, and the Voice was cowed. "You have promised Model Forty-Three to Mrs. Quester. If you dare to exhibit it at your fashion show this afternoon, I shall call upon you with a riding-whip. I shall be here after the show, and you will have the dress ready for me to take to Mrs. Quester. You have had enough time to make alterations. Gad, sir—in Burma I have had men broken—*utterly* broken—for less than this."

The Voice, with a faint spark of antagonism, rallied. It said, "But."

"But me no buts, damn your eyes! This isn't Burma, but you will find that Colonel Quester still knows how to use his fists—you *tradesman!* I shall be back this afternoon, and—*brrrrmph!*"

"Yes, Colonel," the Voice assented weakly, and the Back turned, revealing to the watching Vanderhof a round, crimson face with a bristling, iron-gray mustache, and beetling brows from beneath which lightning crackled menacingly. Brrmpping, Colonel Quester moved like a

mastodon past the quaking Vanderhof and vanished through a door that seemed to open coveringly of its own accord at the man's advance. Vanderhof immediately turned and started to tiptoe away.

The Voice detected the sound of his departure. "Vanderhof!" it screamed. "Come here!"

Thus summoned, the unfortunate official halted, retraced his steps, and entered the inner sanctum. There he paused like a hypnotized rabbit, watching the Voice, who was also known as S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop.

A hard man, S. Horton Walker. As a child he had pulled the wings off butterflies, and maturity had not improved him. He looked like a shaved ape, with a bristling crop of blue-black hair and a gleaming, vicious eye that was now engaged in skinning Vanderhof.

"Ulp," the later remarked, in a conciliatory tone.

"Don't give me that," Walker growled, crouching behind his desk like the gorilla he resembled. "I told you to keep that so-and-so out of my office. Well?"

"I said you were out," Vanderhof explained. "I—I—"

"You—you—" Walker mocked, pointing a stubby sausage of a finger. "Bah! And, again, bah! What the hell are you, a man or a jellyfish?"

"A man," Vanderhof said hopefully.

Walker's grunt was profoundly skeptical. "You're a weakfish. A non-entity. By God, when I was your age I had twenty-nine men under me. By sheer force of personality I made myself what I am today. And I like men with drive—push—get-up-and-go."

Vanderhof, seeing an opportunity of escape, began to get-up-and-go, but relapsed at Walker's furious yelp. "Why, do you realize that Colonel Quester would have punched me in the eye if I hadn't impressed him with my personality? He's an outrageous person."

"You did promise those exclusive models to his wife though."

"We get a better price elsewhere," Walker said, and pondered. "But Model Forty-Three will be ready for him when he calls this afternoon. A dangerous man, the colonel. Where was I? Oh, yes. You're a fool, Vanderhof."

Vanderhof nodded and looked like a fool. Walker groaned in exasperation.

"Haven't you any personality at all? No, you haven't. You're a—a—a chameleon, that's what. I've noticed that before. When you're talking to a ditch-digger, you act like one yourself. When you're talking to a banker, you turn into a banker. You're a *mirror*, that's what!"

It was unfortunate that Vanderhof did not leave at that moment. After his interview with the excitable Colonel Quester, he was mere protoplasm, and somewhat too receptive to suggestion. It was, of course, true, that Vanderhof had little character of his own. He had lost it, after years of associating with the virulent Walker. He was a complete yes-man, and needed only a catalyst to complete a certain chemical reaction that was already taking place.

"*You're a chameleon*," Walker said, with emphasis, and his eyes bored into Vanderhof's.

It was at that precise moment that Mr. Tim Vanderhof turned into a chameleon.

Not physically, of course. The metamorphosis was far more subtle. Adept for years at assuming the traits of others, Vanderhof was rather shockingly receptive. Though all he did was to sit down in a chair opposite his boss.

Walker stared, frowned, and hesitated.

Vanderhof stared, frowned, and didn't say anything.

Walker lifted a large hand and pointed accusingly.

Vanderhof lifted a smaller hand and also pointed accusingly.

Walker flushed. So did Vanderhof. The president of The Svelte Shop rose like a behemoth from his chair and growled, “Are you mocking me?”

Then he stopped, amazed, because Vanderhof had risen and said exactly the same thing.

“You—you—you—” Walker’s face was purple. Vanderhof guessed what was coming. With a mighty effort he asserted what little remained of his will-power.

“D-don’t go on!” he pleaded frantically. “P-please—”

“You chameleon!” S. Horton Walker thundered.

“*You chameleon!*” Vanderhof thundered.

Such bare-faced, impudent mockery was unendurable. Walker quivered in every muscle. “You’re fired!” he said. “What’s that? What did you say? What do you mean, *I’m* fired? Stop imitating me, you stupid clown. Don’t call me a stupid clown! *Nrrgh!*”

“—nrrgh!” Vanderhof finished, not quite realizing what was happening to him. Walker sat down weakly. He was shaken a little, but his natural malignancy was still undimmed. A natural snake, S. Horton Walker.

“I—”

“I—” said Vanderhof.

Walker bellowed, “*Shut up!*” And, so strong was his will, for the moment Vanderhof remained perfectly quiet.

“Are you going to get out?” he asked at length, in a low, deadly voice. “Damn it, stop mocking me! I’ll have you thrown out! *What?* Have me thrown out of my own office?”

Goaded to insensate fury by the fact that Vanderhof was repeating perfectly everything he said and did—and, curiously enough, at exactly the same time he said and did it—Walker stuck out his thumb to press a button on the desk. It collided with Vanderhof’s thumb.

Walker sat back, palpitating, a mute Vesuvius. Obviously Vanderhof had gone mad. And yet—

“I wish you’d go and drown yourself,” said the president, meaning every word. He was somewhat astonished when Tim Vanderhof quietly arose and left the office. He would have been even more surprised had he seen Vanderhof walk down 42nd Street to Times Square, and then board the Brighton Beach subway train bound for Coney Island. Somehow, it is doubtful whether Walker would have regretted the incident or recalled his words. He was evil to the core, and a hard man, as has been mentioned previously. He turned back to his preparations for the exclusive fashion show that afternoon, while the metamorphosed Tim Vanderhof hurried off to go and drown himself.

Now Tim was really a nice guy. He shot a fair game of golf, had once made ten straight passes while shooting craps at a stag party, and was kind to dogs, blind men, and small children. He explained the latter eccentricity by stating that he had once been a small child himself, which was no doubt true enough. Under other circumstances, Mr. Vanderhof might have achieved a genuine personality of his own, but he had the misfortune always to be associated with rats like Walker. Self-made men invariably contend that *they* had to fight their way through obstacles, so they create new obstacles for those under them, probably with the best intentions in the world. The fact remains that Walker had provided the ultimate catalyst for Tim Vanderhof, who got off the subway at Coney Island—it had now, by some strange metamorphosis, been transformed into an elevated—and wandered along the boardwalk, peering contemplatively at the ocean.

It was large, gray, and wet. A great deal of H₂O, to put it scientifically. Vanderhof's mind was dulled; he found it difficult to think clearly, and he kept hearing Walker's command over and over again.

“—go and drown yourself. Go and drown yourself.”

The sky was cloudy. It had been a hot day, one of those Turkish bath affairs which make Manhattan, in the summer, a suburb of hell, and so there were vast quantities of people at Coney. Large bulging women lumbered about shepherding brats, who fed voraciously on ice-cream, pickles, hokey-pokey, hot dogs, and similar juicy tidbits. Brawny young men and flimsy girls, hot and perspiring, tried to gulp down air quite as humid as in the city. Meanwhile, the Atlantic Ocean beckoned to Tim Vanderhof.

His eyes were glazed as he made a beeline for the nearest pier. In the back of his mind a little remnant of sanity shrieked warning, but Vanderhof could not obey. Stripped of the last remnant of personality and will-power, he walked on. . . .

“—go and drown yourself. Go and drown yourself.”

Vanderhof made a mighty effort to break the spell, but it was useless. He walked on, his gaze riveted on the greasy slate-colored water at the end of the pier. Not a man, woman, or child among the crowd noticed him. He tried to call for help, but no sound came from his lips.

People were running. Rain began to splash down, first in droplets, then in ever-increasing torrents. The gray clouds were fulfilling their promise. People ran, with newspapers over their heads, to the nearest shelter.

Wavering on the edge of the pier, Vanderhof felt something pull him back. Magnetically he was made to retreat a few staggering steps. He turned. He started to walk back along the wharf, then he was running with the rest of the crowd. No longer did he hear Walker's voice demanding suicide. In its place was an urgent whisper that said:

“Run! Run!”

Hundreds of men, women, and children were rushing to shelter. The effect of this mass hegira was too much for the human chameleon. A wave seemed to bear him along with the others. Vainly he tried to struggle against the impulse. No use, of course. Rain splashed in his face.

It was like running in a dream, without conscious volition. Lines of force seemed to drag him onward. Off the pier. On the boardwalk, and along it, in the midst of the crowd. As various members of the mob dived for shelter, poor Vanderhof was tossed about like a leaf in a gale. A group leaped into a hot-dog stand, and Vanderhof veered after them. Then a larger group came past, and he skittered in their wake, utterly helpless.

They entered Luna Park, and he perforce followed.

Somehow he was caught in the eddy, and found himself, limp and perspiring, in a penny arcade, almost deserted. A semblance of sanity came back to him. Gasping and drenched to the skin, Vanderhof cowered behind a “grind-box” labeled “Paris Night—For Men Only,” and wondered what in hell was happening to him.

He tried to think. What had Walker said? A human chameleon. It seemed to have come true. Adept for years at assuming the traits of others, the ultimate transformation had taken place. Whenever he looked at anyone now, he assumed the traits of that person.

It was really far worse, only Vanderhof didn't realize it quite yet.

Logically, the only solution was to stay away from people. A man without personality is bound to reflect the personality of others. Vanderhof peeped out, looking glumly at a rotund little man with white whiskers who was standing at the entrance to the arcade, staring

virtuously at nothing. A pleasant little man, he thought. He probably had not a worry in the world. Vanderhof wished he were that man.

He was startled by the sound of footsteps, and even more startled when a veritable giantess of a woman smacked him over the head with her umbrella. The unfortunate Vanderhof reeled, seeing stars. He gasped, “W-w-wha—”

“Worm!” the Amazon boomed. “I told you not to enter this—this *peep-show!*” Her voice quivered with menace. Utterly at a loss, Vanderhof raised his hand to his stinging head, but it was entrapped halfway in what seemed to be a maze of dangling spaghetti. He investigated. It was a set of white whiskers, exactly like the man at whom he had been looking—only the whiskers were on Vanderhof’s face!

The giantess had turned momentarily to wither the arcade with a glance, and Vanderhof caught sight of himself in a nearby mirror. It did not, however, much resemble Tim Vanderhof. What he saw was a rotund little man with white whiskers.

With an astonished shriek Vanderhof turned back to his normal self. The apparition in the mirror resumed its usual and familiar semblance. It was again Tim Vanderhof.

“Oh, my God,” the man murmured faintly. “I’m dreaming.”

“What?” The Amazon turned, her umbrella raised. Then her eyes dilated. How the devil had her husband managed to get out of sight so suddenly, leaving an utter stranger in place of himself? She didn’t know. She stared balefully at Vanderhof, who shrank back, his eyes on the umbrella.

Just then the giantess caught sight of the fat little man at the arcade’s entrance. She turned, lumbering away. This time she disdained the use of the umbrella. Going, apparently, on a variation of the principle that fingers were made before forks, she lifted a ham-like hand and smote the fat little man athwart the ear. The beard rippled like a white banner as the wretched creature was hurled out into the rain.

He raised himself from the mud and dazedly contemplated his wife. She had never before struck him without good cause—what she considered good cause, anyway. If she was going to beat him on sudden, mad impulses, the future would be dark indeed, thought the fat little man.

He rose and ran rapidly away.

The giantess followed, crying threats.

Tim Vanderhof shuddered convulsively. He was going insane. Or else. . . . No, it was too ghastly. He couldn’t be a jellyfish as well as a chameleon. He might, perhaps, assume the traits of somebody else, but he *couldn’t* acquire their actual physical appearance as well!

“No,” Vanderhof said urgently. “Please—*no!*”

Yet it was profoundly and disturbingly logical. He had looked at the fat little man, and had become the fat little man, white whiskers and all. The shock of seeing himself in the mirror had caused him to return to a more normal appearance. What would be the ultimate result? Would Tim Vanderhof fade into a shadow—a mere thing? Yipe.

Such was the cry that burst from Vanderhof’s dry throat at the very prospect. He *couldn’t* go about the world turning into everybody he met. And yet—chameleons did it, in so far as pigmentation went. A specialized animal like a man might go even further. The powers of the mind and the will were unplumbed. Vanderhof knew that, from much perusal of Sunday supplements and science-fiction magazines. Recalling stories he had read by such authors as H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Henry Kuttner, he groaned as he realized that the heroes of such tales usually met a sticky end.

“Oh, no!” Vanderhof whispered involuntarily. “I don’t want to die. I’m too young to die.”

Footsteps clumped into the arcade. Hurriedly Vanderhof whirled, burying his face in the nearest slot-machine, which featured a presumably authentic reel telling how native women were kidnapped by gorillas in the Congo. It was neither natural shyness nor a genuine interest in anthropology which caused Vanderhof’s sudden retreat. He feared to face anyone, believing, logically enough, that he might turn into that person.

He dropped a penny in the slot and whirled the crank, scarcely seeing the faded cards that flickered into view and out again inside the machine. A gorilla was engaged in wandering through its native jungle.

Someone behind Vanderhof began to laugh maniacally. His cries rose into shrill screams.

There were answering, inquiring shouts. Feet thudded. Someone called, “What’s the matter there?”

“A monkey!” came the hysterical response. “There’s a gorilla looking at dirty pictures! I’ve got the jumping jitters again!”

Vanderhof hurriedly turned to face a tall, skinny man with a horselike face and bloodshot eyes. He carried a cane and apparently a large cargo of Scotch.

“It’s coming after me!” the man screeched, retreating. “First snakes, and now this. Ah-h, those awful glaring eyes!”

“Sh-h!” said Vanderhof, lifting a placating hand. The drunk shivered in every limb.

“It hisses like a snake!” he cried, and thrust out the cane like a fencer. Its metal tip caught Vanderhof in the middle, and he doubled up, breathless and gasping. And, simultaneously, he saw himself in a mirror.

It didn’t look like Tim Vanderhof. It was wearing Tim Vanderhof’s clothes, but it was, unquestionably a gorilla—the kind that kidnap native women in the Congo. The sound of footsteps grew louder. The new arrivals were almost at the arcade.

Vanderhof put forth a mighty effort of will, inadvertently baring his fangs. The drunk emitted a short, sharp cry and covered his eyes. But Vanderhof ignored him. He was glaring, wildly, at the mirror.

And, suddenly, the gorilla was gone. Vanderhof was himself again.

Tenderly rubbing his stomach, Vanderhof straightened to meet the red-rimmed gaze of the horse-faced man.

“Where is it?” the latter babbled. “Where did it go?”

“Where did what go?” Vanderhof asked coldly, still maintaining the mental effort that enabled him to keep his rightful form.

“The gorilla—” There was a pause as people poured into the arcade, asking questions. There was confusion and tumult. And shouting. This died, eventually, as Vanderhof indicated the horse-faced man and explained that he was drunk.

“I’m not that drunk,” was the surly response. “Snakes, yes. But not gorillas. Where is it? I know.” The man’s glazed eyes brightened. “You hid it!”

“You’re drunk,” Vanderhof said.

“Yeah? For two cents I’d punch your face in. Gr-r!” His confusion crystallized into belligerency, the drunk rolled forward, waving the cane. Vanderhof fled—

It was a hard life, he thought dismally, as he slunk through Luna Park, carefully avoiding crowds. The rain had stopped now, but people were still wary. This was all to the good.

Vanderhof could, he found, retain his normal shape by putting forth a strong mental effort, but this could not be kept up for long. Already he felt weak.

Yet, at the back of his mind, a queer, perverse excitement was slowly, imperceptibly growing. In a way, it was rather fun. Imagine being able to turn yourself into a gorilla! Everybody was afraid of gorillas!

People shot them, too, Vanderhof recalled, and shut his eyes. He wavered, hearing faintly the tones of a hoarse, rasping voice that plucked at his nerves. It was like—like—what?

Like Walker's voice. Urgent—commanding. Demanding that he do something—

He opened his eyes and found himself before a side-show. The barker stood above him on a box, derby tilted back, checkered suit, garish, thrusting out a commanding finger.

"C'mon, folks! Here it is, greatest side-show on Earth! Tiniest dwarf ever born of woman, tallest giant since Creation, all the wonders of the Universe gathered here for your inspection. Step inside! You, there—only a dime! Step right forward, mister! The girl will take your dime!"

"No!" Vanderhof squeaked faintly, and tried to retreat. Instead, he found himself walking forward.

"Right this way, mister! Pay your dime! *R-r-right* in here! Step inside—"

Vanderhof found a dime and paid the admission charge. He didn't want to go into the side-show. He had a singularly horrid idea of what might happen there. But the barker's will-power was too strong for him, and he could no longer exert the mental effort that partially insulated him from danger. He was exhausted.

"I'm a jellyfish," poor Vanderhof mourned as he entered the show. "That's what I am. Walker was right. Oh, damn!" he ended futilely, tears of frustrated rage in his eyes. "I wish this would stop!"

But wishing didn't do any good. The chameleon man found himself in the side-show—surrounded by freaks!

He caught one glimpse of innumerable people—terrifying to him, under the circumstances—ranged around the big room, and then fled through a doorway on his right. It was definitely no time to face giants, dwarfs, dog-faced boys, or wild men from Sumatra. Vanderhof wanted only peace and quiet.

He got neither.

He found himself in a small ante-room containing a mirror and a dwarf. The latter whirled and snapped. "Didn't you see the sign over the door? This is private! I-huh?"

He stopped talking, and presently resumed. "Say, that's a clever trick. Are you one of the boys? A magician, huh?"

"Yeah," said the now dwarfish Mr. Vanderhof. "I d-do it with mirrors."

"Damn good," returned the little man, whose name was Bingo. "Wait a minute. I want Ajax to see this."

"Don't bother," Vanderhof started, but he was too late. Bingo whistled, and immediately the room was darkened by the shadow of Ajax, who was seven feet nine inches tall, and would have had no need for snowshoes.

Vanderhof shut his eyes. He tried to assert his will-power, or what little remained of it, and was rewarded with pleased noises from giant and dwarf. "Clever!" said the latter. "Did you see that? He was little a minute ago. Now he isn't."

“That’s right,” the giant rumbled. “He looked like you, too, Bingo. Did you notice? Who are you, Mister?”

“I wish I knew,” Vanderhof gasped, feeling lost and helpless. He dared not open his eyes. He was again in his normal semblance, but the very sight of either Ajax or Bingo might cause another metamorphosis.

“You!” a new voice broke in—one familiar to Vanderhof as that of the drunk in the arcade. “I been looking for you. I want to punch you in the snoot.”

Vanderhof, feeling set-upon, almost had a mad impulse to sock the drunk, but habit prevailed. He took refuge in flight, or tried to. Unfortunately, he ran into the mirror, bumped his nose, and turned, opening his eyes.

He saw Ajax and Bingo.

The drunk lunged forward, lifting his cane. Then he halted, and a scream of stark terror burst from his throat.

“Yaaaah!” he shrieked. Apparently considering this an insufficient comment, he threw up his hands and added, “Waaaah!”

He fled, leaving a memento in the form of his cane, which he flung at Vanderhof with unerring aim. Nose and cane collided.

Ajax and Bingo whistled in chorus: “Wow!” said the latter. “Didja see that? Mister, you’re good! You almost scared me.”

Vanderhof, tears of pain in his eyes, turned to the mirror. “Yeah,” he said in a shaky voice. “You may not believe it, but I’m scaring myself. Am I crazy, or do I look like both of you?”

“Well,” the dwarf said judiciously, “the top part of you looks like me, but the bottom half looks like Ajax. I don’t see how you do it. You must be on the big time.”

Vanderhof was silent, considering the impossible reflection in the mirror. From the waist up he was Bingo, the dwarf. His lower extremities were those of a giant. The result was harrowing in the extreme. It was like putting a chameleon on Scotch plaid.

With a mighty effort he resumed his normal appearance. There were cries of amazement and appreciation from his companions. Leaving them to their simple pleasures, Vanderhof walked unsteadily back into the main show. He was bound for fresh air—lots of it. And peace.

Chameleons, however, do not lead peaceful lives, contrary to the opinions of some. The unexpected is always happening.

As Vanderhof crossed the big room, he was trying to understand what had happened. He had assumed the outward appearance of two people at the same time—abnormal people at that. Things were getting worse. Ajax and Bingo. Bingo and Ajax. Giant and—

Whup! Vanderhof had entered another room, over the doorway of which was a sign reading, “Magic Mirrors,” and paused, facing the only normal mirror in the place. He was looking at the same conglomeration of dwarf and giant that he had viewed before.

Good Lord! Could he change his shape by merely—*thinking*? The thought was appalling, yet it possessed a curious, perverse fascination for Vanderhof. Standing perfectly motionless, he concentrated on his own normal self.

And there was the reflection of Tim Vanderhof facing him!

That, at least, was a relief. But, feeling slightly safer now, Vanderhof didn’t stop. He wanted to make sure. He thought of the side-show barker outside, and visualized him mentally. Derby hat, cigar, checkered suit.

The reflection in the glass showed the barker, though there was neither derby, cigar, nor checkered suit. Apparently only Vanderhof himself could change. His clothing remained

unaltered. That was natural enough.

He returned to his normal self.

“You!” said a familiar voice. “I been looking for you! None of your tricks, now! I wanna punch your nose.”

“Oh, my goodness!” Vanderhof said, turning. “You again!”

“Yeah!” said the drunk belligerently. “Wanna make something out of it?” He lifted the cane and advanced. Vanderhof, perforce, retreated into the room of Magic Mirrors. He found himself being backed into a corner, his fascinated gaze riveted on the cane. Its metal tip looked extremely hard. The drunk had recovered it, or else acquired a new one. In any case, it seemed to be a dangerous weapon.

The horsey face bore a malignant expression. “I’m gonna *smash* you,” it said, and thrust itself forward. Vanderhof backed away, feeling the cold surface of a mirror at his back. He was trapped. The room was empty. No use to call for help. The din from the next room, where a band was loudly playing, would drown any but the loudest shrieks.

Abruptly Vanderhof felt irritation. His stomach was still sore from the cane’s tip, and his nose, too, was aching. He said, “Go away.”

“No,” the drunk growled. “I’m gonna *smash* you.”

Sudden, violent rage boiled up in Vanderhof. He thought of Ajax and Bingo. If they were there, they’d help him. But—

Vanderhof thought diligently, visualizing giant and dwarf. From the startled look that came over the drunk, he realized that the metamorphosis had once again taken place.

He stepped forward, warily at first, and the horse-faced man retreated.

At that precise moment Vanderhof caught sight of himself in one of the mirrors that lined the place. The change was not quite the same as before. This time, from the waist down, Vanderhof was Bingo, the dwarf. His upper portion resembled Ajax the giant.

Nor was that the worst. The mirror that reflected the insane image was no normal one. It was a distorting mirror, designed to cause laughter by warping and twisting images. Concave, it reflected Vanderhof not only as a half-giant, half-dwarf, but as a swooping arc—a being bent like a bow, such as had never before existed on Earth.

The drunk shrieked. “No, no!” he babbled. “Not that!”

Vanderhof realized that he had taken on the attributes of the distorted image. He glanced at the cowering horse-faced man, and felt a warm glow of triumph.

It faded as he was punched in the stomach by the cane.

Vanderhof got mad. He said, with slow emphasis, “Okay. You asked for it. Now you’re going to—*get it!*”

The other showed his teeth.

Vanderhof looked at the nearest mirror. The result was shocking, but did not quite satisfy him. He looked at another, and then another, after that turning to confront his enemy.

Not even Samson could have faced the chaotic Vanderhof without screaming then. He looked like a piecemeal zombie assembled by someone with no knowledge of anatomy. One leg was six feet longer than the other. He had five arms. His chest was like a balloon, and his waist measured perhaps three inches around.

His head resembled a fried egg that had broken in the pan. The mouth was, oddly enough, in the forehead, and there was a tasty assortment of eyes scattered around them, all of these

glaring furiously. He towered to the ceiling, and the horse-faced man, giving up all thought of hostility, skittered away like a rabbit.

“Go `way!” he babbled. “Don’t touch me! You’re not human, that’s what you ain’t!”

“You don’t get out of it that easily,” Vanderhof snapped, barring the door with a fifteen-foot arm. “What do you think I am, anyhow?”

“The devil himself,” said the drunk, with a flash of sudden insight. “*Awrrrrgh!* Don’t do that!”

“I’ll do it again,” Vanderhof announced, and a scream of pain from the drunk bore testimony to the fact that he had done it again. “Thus.”

The wild and impassioned shrieks of the horse-faced man bore fruit. Vanderhof heard faint cries from behind him. He turned to see faces peering in through the door.

They went white and drew back. Someone cried, “A freak! He’s gone mad!”

“He’s murdering me!” the drunk announced. “Help!”

Heartened by reinforcements, he made the mistake of prodding Vanderhof from the rear with his cane. At this all semblance of sanity departed from Tim Vanderhof. Completely forgetting everything else, he bent all his energies to the task of reducing the horse-faced man to a state of babbling idiocy.

“Give me that cane!” he grated.

“So you can ram it down my throat?” came the prescient reply. “I won’t.”

At this Vanderhof looked in a mirror, sprouted another arm, grew two feet, and advanced toward his opponent. He got the cane and broke it into six pieces. One in each hand, he commenced to tattoo a rhythm on the drunk.

This wasn’t quite satisfactory, so he gave it up, and concentrated on scaring the wretched man to death. Never was any revenge more horrifying or complete. Vanderhof felt a random sense of warning; it might be wiser, safer, to leave now, before more trouble arrived. But—what the hell!

He grinned, and the horse-faced man bellowed in anguish. “He’s going to eat me!” he cried. “Don’t let him eat me!”

“There they are,” someone observed. “In there, Sergeant. It’s a freak. Quite mad.”

“It’s a freak, all right,” said a gruff voice. “But I’m thinking that I’m the looney one. Will you look at the horrid thing!”

“I’ve been looking at it for ten minutes,” said the other voice. “Ever since I turned in the alarm. You’ve got your squad with you. Arrest him before he kills that man.”

Vanderhof turned. The doorway held a burly, grizzled oldster in police uniform, and behind him a group of plainclothes men, their profession easily established by a glance at their feet. There were guns.

He was sent staggering. The horse-faced man had made a break for freedom. Vanderhof, boiling with rage, plunged in pursuit. There was chaos on the threshold; then Vanderhof was past, and racing after his victim.

A bullet whistled past his ear.

Oh-oh! This altered matters. Vanderhof, hidden momentarily behind the bandstand, paused, looking around. He saw no one—the horse-faced man had vanished—but heard voices.

“He went behind there—get him—guns ready, men!”

Vanderhof thought hard. He visualized the drunk. And, instantly, he assumed the appearance of the drunk.

He ran out from behind the bandstand, almost colliding with the sergeant and a plainclothes man with him.

“Hey—”

“He went that way!” Vanderhof cried. “After him! Don’t let him get away!”

Without waiting for an answer, he ran for the exit. There was startled silence, and then the sergeant and his crew raced in pursuit.

Vanderhof leaped out into the open air, flattened himself against the wall of the building, and concentrated on the face of the plainclothes man who had accompanied the sergeant. And, of course, the inevitable happened.

The sergeant appeared. He cast a swift glance at Vanderhof.

“Where is he, Clancy?” he bellowed. “Which way did he go?”

“There!” said the pseudo-Clancy, and pointed. He was borne away in a mob of detectives who gushed out of the exit. All of them were busily searching for a freak with six arms and an impossible head—a freak who no longer existed!

Ten minutes later Vanderhof, in his normal guise, was on the train bound back for Manhattan. It had been easy to drift away from the detectives, who naturally suspected nothing. And, after that, Vanderhof wanted only to get away from Coney Island. His nerves were in bad shape. He needed a rest.

So, illogically enough, he went back to New York.

He was still angry about the horse-faced man. He would have dearly loved to have taken another poke at the guy. But the police had interrupted. Vanderhof’s resentment wandered, and finally focused on a man with bristling blue-black hair and a vicious gleam in his eyes. The guy looked uncommonly like S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop.

Walker—nuts to Walker, Vanderhof thought. “Fire me, will he?” the chameleon man brooded. “Just on account of Colonel Quester! Tchah!” The fashion show would be going on soon, he remembered. And, simultaneously with the thought, Vanderhof grinned.

A singularly malicious and unpleasant grin. . . .

“Fire me, will he?” he asked rhetorically, turning into Ajax for a brief moment. “I’ll fix him!”

While making his way toward the Fifth Avenue store, he pondered. He was achieving some sort of mastery over his chameleon-like changes. If he visualized a person, he could become that person—though his clothing never altered. And, with an effort of will, he could resume his normal form. Good enough. What now?

The fashion show was in full swing when Vanderhof slipped quietly into The Svelte Shop, unobtrusively making his way behind the scenes. Dowagers and damsels in tons of jewelry were sitting about, feeding on canapes and *hors d’oeuvres*, while all sorts and conditions of men waited uneasily upon their respective daughters, wives, and lady friends. Park Avenue had turned out in force for the initial showing of exclusive gowns by The Svelte Shop. Mannequins were gliding along the runways, and over all presided the figure of S. Horton Walker, resplendent in specially-tailored garments, and looking more than ever like a shaved ape.

“And Model Twelve?” a slightly decayed socialite inquired from above her tiers of chins. “The exclusive Model Twelve, Mr. Walker?”

“Soon,” said Walker, rubbing his hands. “Very soon, Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe.”

Peering through drapes of wine-colored fabric, Vanderhof sucked in his lower lip. Model Twelve was already famous.

It was super-exclusive. Only one gown on this model had been created. And, when it showed, the bidding would be high—almost like an auction, though, of course, most genteel. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe would probably get it. She was the wealthiest woman in New York, and cream on the elite's upper crust, to put it mildly.

"Nuts to you, Mr. Walker," Vanderhof said silently, and fled. He made his way to the dressing-rooms, pausing at sight of Susan Vail, the shop's loveliest model. The girl nodded, smiled, and went on her way.

Vanderhof visualized her. Suddenly he was gone. A perfect duplicate of Susan Vail stood in the passage, looking rather odd in Tim Vanderhof's garments.

Now for Model Twelve. It was carefully stored away, but Vanderhof knew where to look. Tenderly, almost reverently, he drew it from its hiding-place, and held up the gown. It was a gorgeous creation—one that would transform any woman.

"Why, Susan," a soft voice said, "what are you doing in those clothes?"

Vanderhof turned hurriedly, to confront a small brown-haired model with wide eyes. "I—" "And what's the matter with your voice? Got a cold?"

"No," said Vanderhof shrilly. "It—it's just a gag." Seizing Model Twelve, he fled into the nearest dressing-room.

A few minutes later he came out, wearing the gown. Since he looked exactly like Susan Vail, it wasn't at all unbecoming. But his plans weren't finished yet. He wanted to perform an experiment.

He entered a room replete with tall mirrors, reflecting him from various angles. And he concentrated. If he could become two men at once, surely he could transform himself into two or more Susan Vails.

The results were beyond all expectations. From every angle Susan Vails materialized. They appeared like rabbits out of a hat. And all of them wore Model Twelve.

Meanwhile, Walker was preening himself as he made the announcement for which everyone was waiting.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, the event of the afternoon. At great expense, we have secured an ultra-exclusive model—a veritable symphony. There is only one like it in the world."

"How do we know that?" asked a skeptical man with sideburns.

Walker turned a hurt stare upon him. "The Svelte Shop stands ready to guarantee my statement. Our integrity has never been questioned. And now—Model Twelve!"

He flung out an arm toward the runway. The curtains shook convulsively. Through them appeared Susan Vail. A soft gasp went up from the women at sight of Model Twelve.

Then another gasp went up. Another Susan Vail had slipped through the curtains and was following in the track of the first. She, too, wore Model Twelve.

"Hey—" said the skeptical man with sideburns.

He stopped. A third Model Twelve was coming.

Then another. And another!

"My God!" the skeptical man gasped. "Quintuplets!"

Walker had turned a delicate shade of mauve. Cries of outraged fury went up from the audience. "Exclusive model," somebody snapped. "Hah!"

Meanwhile the army of Model Twelves was marching steadily through the curtains. The room was filled with them. Walker was clawing at his hair and making gurgling sounds. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe arose, waggled her chins haughtily, and departed.

“One might as well shop in the five-and-ten,” she observed.

“It’s sabotage!” Walker whispered faintly. “B-boring from within—”

His eyes brightened a trifle. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe had reconsidered. She wasn’t leaving, after all. She was returning, her eyes very wide, and behind her was a large, bulky man with a mask on his face.

Other men arrived. Five of them. And they had guns, and were masked.

“This,” said the leader, “is a stick-up. Squat, beetle-puss.” He pushed Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe into a chair. “And keep your trap shut. That goes for all of you.” He waved a gleaming automatic. “Cover the exits, boys.”

The boys obeyed. The guests sat, frozen with horror. One dowager attempted to swallow her diamonds, but was dissuaded. Walker gasped for air.

“This will ruin me!” he squawked. “My customers—my clients, I mean—”

“Shaddap,” remarked the big man. “Or I’ll let you have it. Don’t anybody move. Frisk ’em, boys.”

One of the boys produced a canvas bag and made the rounds, collecting whatever jewelry and money he could unearth. A pearl necklace, the existence of which had heretofore gone unsuspected, was revealed when Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe was compelled to stare ceiling-ward.

“Hey!” said one of the boys. “What the hell—what—*ulp!*”

“*Look!*” he finished. “Jeez, boss—look!”

The big man looked. He, too, stared. Model Twelve was in action.

There were about twenty Susan Vails lined up on the runway. The last of them had stepped forward and—*merged*—with the one in front of her. This, Vanderhof had found, was the only way of consolidating his various images. He merely had to walk into himself.

The nineteenth Susan Vail merged with the eighteenth. And the eighteenth stepped forward—

Nobody else moved.

There was a stricken silence as the fifteenth Susan Vail became the fourteenth—and so on—the third became the second; there was only one Susan Vail now.

She hurried toward the exit.

But now the stasis broke. One of the thugs barred her path, lifting his gun menacingly.

Susan Vail—or Vanderhof—veered aside, toward an ante-room lined with mirrors. She ducked into it and slid the curtain in place after her.

The leader snapped, “Get her, Phil.”

Phil said reluctantly, “There ain’t no way for her to get outa there.”

“I said—”

“Okay,” Phil placated. “Just gimme time. That dame ain’t normal.”

He moved forward, gun lifted. His hand touched the curtain. Then he turned.

“Boss, there ain’t nothing in there but a lot of mirrors. What’s the use—”

“You heard me!” the boss yelped.

“Okay,” said Phil, and yanked the curtain aside.

Apparently there *was* another way out of the ante-room, for Susan Vail wasn't there any more. Instead, there were fifteen men, and they all looked exactly like Tim Vanderhof. Oddly enough, they all wore Model Twelve.

"*Yaah!*" said Phil shrilly, staggering back.

Two Tim Vanderhofs sprang upon him. One struck the gun from his hand, while the other planted a hard fist on Phil's jaw. The thug folded up limply.

One Vanderhof had pulled the curtain back into place, but Vanderhofs were emerging through it in twos, threes, and dozens. The room was suddenly flooded with Vanderhofs, all wearing Model Twelve. It was as though the ante-room had suddenly decided to give birth. It erupted Vanderhofs. It spewed them forth, and as fast as they emerged new ones followed. For there were many mirrors in that little room.

The element of surprise was in Vanderhof's favor. The crooks were struck dumb by this insane manifestation of men in evening gowns. Before they could recover, each one found himself borne down under a tangle of slugging, punching, kicking, homicidally-active Vanderhofs.

Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe threw up her hands in holy horror. A Vanderhof paused to chuck her under the chins. "Keep your shirt on, babe," he advised. "I'll get your jewels back."

The lady fainted.

Not all the Vanderhofs were engaged in taking care of the crooks. Twenty of them had mounted the runway and were delicately parading, showing off Model Twelve, which, to say the least, looked rather startling on Tim Vanderhof's masculine figure. A half-dozen more had surrounded the pallid, paralyzed Walker and were engaged in making horrific faces at him. Another group of Vanderhofs were holding an impromptu jam session in a corner, while still another had recaptured the canvas bag and was strewing its contents around the room, shouting, "Pig pig pig pig" in a hoarse voice. The clients were on hands and knees, scrambling after their stolen property.

It was a scene of utter chaos.

And Tim Vanderhof was—or were—having a glorious time. He hadn't enjoyed himself so much in years. He was doing a dozen different things, all at the same time, and the most delightful one of all dealt with the thugs, who by this time were trying only to escape from the veritable army that was assailing them.

Someone cried, "The police!"

That brought Vanderhof back to sanity. He hurriedly knocked out the thugs—not a difficult task, since they were already nearly smothered by sheer weight of numbers—and then fled in a body, leaving confusion in his wake.

When the police arrived, they found six unconscious gangsters and a horde of socialites on hands and knees, squabbling over the division of their property. Walker was counting his fingers, with a vague air of skeptical disbelief. And there was no sign of a Vanderhof.

Indeed, there was only one Vanderhof by that time. The process of assimilation had again taken place, and the resultant single Vanderhof had removed Model Twelve—now torn into shreds—and resumed his own clothing. He didn't wait for events to happen, though. He took them into his own hands.

The elevator lifted him fifteen stories above Fifth Avenue, letting him out at the private office of Enoch Throckmorton, the actual owner of The Svelte Shop, as well as a number of other enterprises. Vanderhof had never seen Throckmorton; there were vague rumors of his

existence on some Olympian height. Walker sometimes visited the man, and even dined with him on occasion. Now, leaving the elevator, Vanderhof thought of Walker, and visualized the man, blue-black hair, flashing eyes, and apish face.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Walker,” said the receptionist. “Go right in.”

Vanderhof nodded and opened a door, facing a glass-brick desk about a mile long. Behind it sat a shriveled little fellow who was chewing a cigar.

This was Enoch Throckmorton.

Or, better yet: This was—*Enoch Throckmorton!*

“Ha,” said Throckmorton in a cracked voice, “sit down, Walker. I’ve just been getting a telephone call from downstairs. Quite a little fuss, eh?”

“Nothing much,” Vanderhof shrugged, grinning to himself. Apparently his resemblance to Walker was so complete that even Throckmorton was deceived.

“Nothing much! Indeed! This man Vanderhof deserves recognition! He captured those bandits himself—we’d have had to make good on every cent stolen if he hadn’t. I still don’t know how he did it, but—he did it. That’s the important thing.”

“Well,” Vanderhof said, “I’ve been intending to talk to you about Vanderhof for some time. He’s the smartest man we have. Candidly, I think he deserves promotion.”

“Very well. What have you in mind?”

“Manager. At a corresponding salary.”

Throckmorton said slowly, “You know, of course, that the manager of The Svelte Shop is responsible only to me. You will have no authority over Vanderhof if—”

“I know my limitations,” Vanderhof shrugged. “Vanderhof needs no discipline.”

“Very well,” said Throckmorton, pressing a button. “I’ll attend to it immediately.”

“Uh—” Vanderhof stood up. “By the way—if I should change my mind—”

Steel glinted in Throckmorton’s beady eyes. “Indeed! You should have thought of that before. Do you, or do you not, recommend Vanderhof’s promotion.”

“I do.”

“Then he’s promoted. And the matter is now out of your hands—entirely!”

Vanderhof smiled and turned. He walked out on clouds. He did not even know that the elevator was taking him downstairs. Nuts to Walker. . . .

So engrossed was he in day-dreams that he forgot to resume his normal appearance by the time he reached the general offices—which was, save for one person, deserted. This person wore tweeds, and now turned a round, crimson face and a bristling mustache on Vanderhof. It was Colonel Quester.

“Hah!” the colonel bellowed gently. “There you are! I see you’ve kept me waiting again.”

“Uh—”

“Silence!” said Colonel Quester, and the ceiling shook. “I have come for Model Forty-three. Mrs. Quester’s still furious, but the gown will placate her, I am sure. Is it ready? It had better be.”

“Yes,” said Vanderhof faintly. “I—I’ll get it.”

He fled. He got Model Forty-three. And, looking into a nearby mirror, he saw that he still exactly resembled S. Horton Walker.

Carrying the gown over his arm, on the way back he met one of the models. “Why, there you are, Mr. Walker,” the girl said. “I thought you were in your office.”

“I—uh—just stepped out for a minute.”

So Walker was in his office! Vanderhof started to grin. He was beaming like a Cheshire cat when he entered the room where Colonel Quester waited, rumbling faintly like a miniature Vesuvius.

But the colonel softened at sight of the dress. “Ha!” he remarked. “A beauty! It is exclusive, you say?”

Vanderhof stepped back a pace. “The only one in existence,” he remarked. “How do you like it, bottle-nose?”

There was a dead silence. Colonel Quester breathed through his nose. At last he asked, in a quiet voice, “What did you say?”

“Bottle-nose was the term,” said Vanderhof happily. “Also, now that I think of it, you rather resemble a wart-hog.”

“*Brrrrmph!*” Quester rumbled warningly.

“*Brrrrmph* to you,” said Vanderhof. “You rhinoceros. So you want Model Forty-three, do you, fathead? Well, look.”

He held up Model Forty-three, and with a strong tug ripped the dress from top to bottom.

Quester turned magenta.

Vanderhof ripped the dress again.

Quester turned blue.

Vanderhof finished the job by ripping Model Forty-three into ribbons and throwing it into the colonel’s face. Then he waited.

Colonel Quester was having difficulty in breathing. His mighty fists were clenched. “Wait,” he promised. “Just wait till I control my blood-pressure. I’ll break you for this—”

He took a step forward, and simultaneously Vanderhof dived for the inner office. He slipped through the door, held it shut behind him, and saw before him the blue-black thatch of S. Horton Walker, who was looking down at some papers on his desk.

Vanderhof asserted his will-power. Instantly he changed his shape.

Walker looked up. “Vanderhof?” he snapped. “I want to talk to you—”

“Just a minute. You have a caller.”

“Wait!”

Vanderhof didn’t wait. He stepped out of the office, carefully closing the door, and turned to confront Colonel Quester.

“Ah,” he said. “What can I do for you, Colonel?”

“Get out of my way,” said Quester, in a low, impassioned voice.

“With pleasure,” Vanderhof smiled, stepping aside. “If you’re looking for Mr. Walker, he’s right inside.”

To this the colonel made no answer. He entered the inner office, and Vanderhof gently shut the door after him. There was a brief silence.

It was broken by a dull thud, and a short, sharp cry, mingled with a bellow of triumph. Other noises followed.

“Model Forty-three, hey?” a hoarse voice boomed. “By Gad, sir, you’ll eat it!”

“Ah?” Vanderhof murmured, walking away. “That lace collar should make a tasty mouthful.”

He dusted his hands delicately. He was thinking that he had managed to acquire a personality of his own, and that his weird power of metamorphosis would gradually fade and vanish of its own accord. He was no longer a jellyfish—a chameleon.

He was the manager of The Svelte Shop. A choked gurgle of stark anguish came faintly from the distance.

Tim Vanderhof lifted his eyebrows. “Heigh-ho,” he observed. “It’s five o’clock. Another day.”

[End of *Chameleon Man* by Henry Kuttner]