

introduction

by ANDRE NORTON

Recently there have been many changes in our ways of thinking about the unknown. In a world which gives serious consideration to the investigation of the existence of the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, and the Abominable Snowman, monsters are no longer just a part of superstition. Things once labeled "magic" are known to be "wild talents" which some of us do actually possess—even if they cannot yet be controlled.

Fear, however, remains perhaps the oldest and strongest emotion known to mankind. And that fact has not changed. It is ever at his back, touching him on the shoulder, ready, lurking about the corner to confront him.

We are fascinated by fear—as long as we can keep it under control, our servant rather than our master. Why do so many of us enjoy reading ghost or terror tales? Because therein fear is chained upon the printed page so we are safe and yet can savor the excitement it raises in us.

there was a discussion of what made up fear. One writer stated that her idea of a truly horrifying experience would be to walk out of one's door in the morning, only to discover that the rosebush planted to the right, now stood on the left. Distortion of the everyday provoked, in her, fear carried to a fine art.

I must admit that I have a taste for the eerie, therefore I welcomed the lucky chance of being able to read the stories in this collection. Who does not relish a shiver or two?

The impact of any story depends upon two things: the ability of the writer to create believable characters and background, and the reader to be aroused in turn when some emotion of his own is awakened. The collection of "Baleful Beasts" herein presented is still extraordinary enough, in spite of our present preoccupation with such material, to raise more than a chill along the reader's backbone.

Here the "rosebush" theme of the accepted and familiar becoming the menacing is used to splendid effect with careful and delicate plotting and evocation of atmosphere in two tales—Ms. Butler's truly malicious monkey, and Ms. Ritchie's evil in a box brought in an everyday fashion by the delivery man. Personally I shall distrust *all* calico monkeys and unexplained boxes from now on.

Ms. Gessner returns to old legends for inspiration, as does Mr. Land. But the Yamadan of the Amerindian tales is quite different from the creature that the hero in "Monster Blood" sees in action and is able to combat because he *does* know his legends.

"Tigger," "You Are What You Eat," and "To Face A Monster" deal with alien surprises either on this world or another under exploration, in which creatures utterly beyond our knowledge are the menaces. One delights in the unquenchable Tigger, a Terran hero wearing fur instead

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of a space suit, while the strangers of Ms. Bednarz and Mr. Rathjen are formidable enough to provide those who must deal with them a hard battle.

In "Spell of the Spirit Stones," Ms. Wellman returns to one of the oldest legends - that of the werebeast, human and animal in one. But this tale is set in a background springing from the magic and beliefs of a people unknown to most Americans.

We enjoy being just a little frightened as long, of course, as the ghost and the monster remain only the products of gifted imaginations. This collection will provide stimulation for that part of us. It is shivery and strange, and perhaps not to be taken just before bedtime. But read it by daylight and enjoy it as much as I have done.