

Down Among the Dead Men

GARDNER DOZOIS AND JACK DANN

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This story was first published in Oui magazine because initially none of the fantasy or science fiction magazines (including OMNI) would take it. It was too “tough” and possibly “tasteless” a subject. There is an actual vampire in this story, and in a world where humans are monstrous to each other is he any worse a monster?

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Bruckman first discovered that Wernecke was a vampire when they went to the quarry that morning. He was bending down to pick up a large rock when he thought he heard something in the gully nearby. He looked around and saw Wernecke huddled over a *Musselmann*, one of the walking dead, a new man who had not been able to wake up to the terrible reality of the camp.

“Do you need any help?” Bruckman asked Wernecke in a low voice.

Wernecke looked up, startled, and covered his mouth with his hand, as if he were signing to Bruckman to be quiet.

But Bruckman was certain that he had glimpsed blood smeared on Wernecke’s mouth. “The *Musselmann*, is he alive?” Wernecke had often risked his own life to save one or another of the men in his barracks. But to risk one’s life for a *Musselmann*? “What’s wrong?”

“Get away.”

All right, Bruckman thought. Best to leave him alone. He looked pale, perhaps it was typhus. The guards were working him hard enough, and Wernecke was older than the rest of the men in the work gang. Let him sit for a moment and rest. But what about that blood?...

“Hey, you, what are you doing?” one of the young SS guards shouted to Bruckman.

Bruckman picked up the rock and, as if he had not heard the guard, began to walk away from the gully, toward the rusty brown cart on the tracks that led back to the barbed-wire fence of the camp. He would try to draw the guard’s attention away from Wernecke.

But the guard shouted at him to halt. “Were you taking a little rest, is that it?” he asked, and Bruckman

tensed, ready for a beating. This guard was new, neatly and cleanly dressed—and an unknown quantity. He walked over to the gully and, seeing Wernecke and the Musselmann, said, “Aha, so your friend is taking care of the sick.” He motioned Bruckman to follow him into the gully.

Bruckman had done the unpardonable—he had brought it on Wernecke. He swore at himself. He had been in this camp long enough to know to keep his mouth shut.

The guard kicked Wernecke sharply in the ribs. “I want you to put the Musselmann in the cart. Now!” He kicked Wernecke again, as if as an afterthought. Wernecke groaned, but got to his feet. “Help him put the Musselmann in the cart,” the guard said to Bruckman; then he smiled and drew a circle in the air—the sign of smoke, the smoke which rose from the tall gray chimneys behind them. This Musselmann would be in the oven within an hour, his ashes soon to be floating in the hot, stale air, as if they were the very particles of his soul.

Wernecke kicked the Musselmann, and the guard chuckled, waved to another guard who had been watching, and stepped back a few feet. He stood with his hands on his hips. “Come on, dead man, get up or you’re going to die in the oven,” Wernecke whispered as he tried to pull the man to his feet. Bruckman supported the unsteady Musselmann, who began to wail softly. Wernecke slapped him hard. “Do you want to live, Musselmann? Do you want to see your family again, feel the touch of a woman, smell grass after it’s been mowed? Then *move*.” The Musselmann shambled forward between Wernecke and Bruckman. “You’re dead, aren’t you Musselmann,” goaded Wernecke. “As dead as your father and mother, as dead as your sweet wife, if you ever had one, aren’t you? Dead!”

The Musselmann groaned, shook his head, and whispered, “Not dead, my wife...”

“Ah, it talks,” Wernecke said, loud enough so the guard walking a step behind them could hear. “Do you have a name, corpse?”

“Josef, and I’m not a Musselmann.”

“The corpse says he’s alive,” Wernecke said, again loud enough for the SS guard to hear. Then in a whisper, he said, “Josef, if you’re not a Musselmann, then you must work now, do you understand?” Josef tripped, and Bruckman caught him. “Let him be,” said Wernecke. “Let him walk to the cart himself.”

“Not the cart,” Josef mumbled. “Not to die, not—”

“Then get down and pick up stones, show the fart-eating guard you can work.”

“Can’t. I’m sick, I’m...”

“Musselmann!”

Josef bent down, fell to his knees, but took hold of a stone and stood up.

“You see,” Wernecke said to the guard, “it’s not dead yet. It can still work.”

“I told you to carry him to the cart, didn’t I,” the guard said petulantly.

“Show him you can work,” Wernecke said to Josef, “or you’ll surely be smoke.”

And Josef stumbled away from Wernecke and Bruckman, leaning forward, as if following the rock he was carrying.

“Bring him *back!*” shouted the guard, but his attention was distracted from Josef by some other prisoners, who, sensing the trouble, began to mill about. One of the other guards began to shout and kick at the men on the periphery, and the new guard joined him. For the moment, he had forgotten about Josef.

“Let’s get to work, lest they notice us again,” Wernecke said.

“I’m sorry that I—”

Wernecke laughed and made a fluttering gesture with his hand— smoke rising. “It’s all hazard, my friend. All luck.” Again the laugh. “It was a venial sin,” and his face seemed to darken. “Never do it again, though, lest I think of you as bad luck.”

“Carl, are you all right?” Bruckman asked. “I noticed some blood when—”

“Do the sores on your feet bleed in the morning?” Wernecke countered angrily. Bruckman nodded, feeling foolish and embarrassed. “And so it is with my gums. Now go away, unlucky one, and let me live.”

At dusk, the guards broke the hypnosis of lifting and grunting and sweating and formed the prisoners into ranks. They marched back to the camp through the fields, beside the railroad tracks, the electrified wire, conical towers, and into the main gate of the camp.

Josef walked beside them, but he kept stumbling, as he was once again slipping back into death, becoming a Musselmann. Wernecke helped him walk, pushed him along. “We should let this man become dead,” Wernecke said to Bruckman.

Bruckman only nodded, but he felt a chill sweep over his sweating back. He was seeing Wernecke’s face again as it was for that instant in the morning. Smearred with blood.

Yes, Bruckman thought, we should let the Musselmann become dead. We should all be dead...

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Wernecke served up the lukewarm water with bits of spoiled turnip floating on the top, what passed as soup for the prisoners. Everyone sat or kneeled on the rough-planked floor, as there were no chairs.

Bruckman ate his portion, counting the sips and bites, forcing himself to take his time. Later, he would take a very small bite of the bread he had in his pocket. He always saved a small morsel of food for later—in the endless world of the camp, he had learned to give himself things to look forward to. Better to dream of bread than to get lost in the present. That was the fate of the Musselmann.

But he always dreamed of food. Hunger was with him every moment of the day and night. Those times when he actually ate were in a way the most difficult, for there was never enough to satisfy him. There was the taste of softness in his mouth, and then in an instant it was gone. The emptiness took the form of pain—it *hurt* to eat. For bread, he thought, he would have killed his father, or his wife. God forgive me, and he watched Wernecke—Wernecke, who had shared his bread with him, who had died a little so he could live. He's a better man than I, Bruckman thought.

It was dim inside the barracks. A bare light bulb hung from the ceiling and cast sharp shadows across the cavernous room. Two tiers of five-foot-deep shelves ran around the room on three sides, bare wooden shelves where the men slept without blankets or mattresses. Set high in the northern wall was a slatted window, which let in the stark white light of the kliegs. Outside, the lights turned the grounds into a deathly imitation of day; only inside the barracks was it night.

“Do you know what tonight is, my friends?” Wernecke asked. He sat in the far corner of the room with Josef, who, hour by hour, was reverting back into a Musselmann. Wernecke's face looked hollow and drawn in the light from the window and the light bulb; his eyes were deep-set and his face was long with deep creases running from his nose to the corners of his thin mouth. His hair was black, and even since Bruckman had known him, quite a bit of it had fallen out. He was a very tall man, almost six feet four, and that made him stand out in a crowd, which was dangerous in a death camp. But Wernecke had his own secret ways of blending with the crowd, of making himself invisible.

“No, tell us what tonight is,” crazy old Bohme said. That men such as Bohme could survive was a miracle—or, as Bruckman thought—a testament to men such as Wernecke who somehow found the strength to help the others live.

“It's Passover,” Wernecke said.

“How does he know that?” someone mumbled, but it didn't matter how Wernecke knew because he *knew*—even if it really wasn't Passover by the calendar. In this dimly lit barrack, it *was* Passover, the feast of

freedom, the time of thanksgiving.

“But how can we have Passover without a *seder*?” asked Bohme. “We don’t even have any *matzoh*,” he whined.

“Nor do we have candles, or a silver cup for Elijah, or the shankbone, or *haroset*—nor would I make a *seder* over the *traif* the Nazis are so generous in giving us,” replied Wernecke with a smile. “But we can pray, can’t we? And when we all get out of here, when we’re in our own homes in the coming year with God’s help, then we’ll have twice as much food—two *afikomens*, a bottle of wine for Elijah, and the *haggadahs* that our fathers and our fathers’ fathers used.”

It was Passover.

“Isadore, do you remember the four questions?” Wernecke asked Bruckman.

And Bruckman heard himself speaking. He was twelve years old again at the long table beside his father, who sat in the seat of honor. To sit next to him was itself an honor. “How does this night differ from all other nights? On all other nights we eat bread and *matzoh*; why on this night do we eat only *matzoh*?”

“*M’a nisht‘ ana halylah hazeah. ...*”

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Sleep would not come to Bruckman that night, although he was so tired that he felt as if the marrow of his bones had been sucked away and replaced with lead.

He lay there in the semidarkness, feeling his muscles ache, feeling the acid biting of his hunger. Usually he was numb enough with exhaustion that he could empty his mind, close himself down, and fall rapidly into oblivion, but not tonight. Tonight he was noticing things again, his surroundings were getting through to him again, in a way that they had not since he had been new in camp. It was smotheringly hot, and the air was filled with the stinks of death and sweat and fever, of stale urine and drying blood. The sleepers thrashed and turned, as though they fought with sleep, and as they slept, many of them talked or muttered or screamed aloud; they lived other lives in their dreams, intensely compressed lives dreamed quickly, for soon it would be dawn, and once more they would be thrust into hell. Cramped in the midst of them, sleepers squeezed in all around him, it suddenly seemed to Bruckman that these pallid white bodies were already dead, that he was sleeping in a graveyard. Suddenly it was the boxcar again. And his wife Miriam was dead again, dead and rotting unburied...

Resolutely, Bruckman emptied his mind. He felt feverish and shaky, and wondered if the typhus were coming back, but he couldn’t afford to worry about it. Those who couldn’t sleep couldn’t survive. Regulate your breathing, force your muscles to relax, don’t think. Don’t think.

For some reason, after he had managed to banish even the memory of his dead wife, he couldn't shake the image of the blood on Wernecke's mouth.

There were other images mixed in with it: Wernecke's uplifted arms and upturned face as he led them in prayer; the pale strained face of the stumbling Musselmann; Wernecke looking up, startled, as he crouched over Josef... but it was the blood to which Bruckman's feverish thoughts returned, and he pictured it again and again as he lay in the rustling, fart-smelling darkness, the watery sheen of blood over Wernecke's lips, the tarry trickle of blood in the corner of his mouth, like a tiny scarlet worm...

Just then a shadow crossed in front of the window, silhouetted blackly for an instant against the harsh white glare, and Bruckman knew from the shadow's height and its curious forward stoop that it was Wernecke.

Where could he be going? Sometimes a prisoner would be unable to wait until morning, when the Germans would let them out to visit the slit-trench latrine again, and would slink shamefacedly into a far corner to piss against a wall, but surely Wernecke was too much of an old hand for that... Most of the prisoners slept on the sleeping platforms, especially during the cold nights when they would huddle together for warmth, but sometimes during the hot weather, people would drift away and sleep on the floor instead; Bruckman had been thinking of doing that, as the jostling bodies of the sleepers around him helped to keep him from sleep. Perhaps Wernecke, who always had trouble fitting into the cramped sleeping niches, was merely looking for a place where he could lie down and stretch his legs...

Then Bruckman remembered that Josef had fallen asleep in the corner of the room where Wernecke had sat and prayed, and that they had left him there alone.

Without knowing why, Bruckman found himself on his feet. As silently as the ghost he sometimes felt he was becoming, he walked across the room in the direction Wernecke had gone, not understanding what he was doing nor why he was doing it. The face of the Musselmann, Josef, seemed to float behind his eyes. Bruckman's feet hurt, and he knew, without looking, that they were bleeding, leaving faint tracks behind him. It was dimmer here in the far corner, away from the window, but Bruckman knew that he must be near the wall by now, and he stopped to let his eyes readjust.

When his eyes had adapted to the dimmer light, he saw Josef sitting on the floor, propped up against the wall. Wernecke was hunched over the Musselmann. Kissing him. One of Josefs hands was tangled in Wernecke's thinning hair.

Before Bruckman could react—such things had been known to happen once or twice before, although it shocked him deeply that *Wernecke* would be involved in such filth—Josef released his grip on Wernecke's hair. Josefs upraised arm fell limply to the side, his hand hitting the floor with a muffled but solid impact that should have been painful—but Josef made no sound.

Wernecke straightened up and turned around. Stronger light from the high window caught him as he straightened to his full height, momentarily illuminating his face.

Wernecke's mouth was smeared with blood.

"My God," Bruckman cried.

Startled, Wernecke flinched, then took two quick steps forward and seized Bruckman by the arm. "Quiet!" Wernecke hissed. His fingers were cold and hard.

At that moment, as though Wernecke's sudden movement were a cue, Josef began to slip down sideways along the wall. As Wernecke and Bruckman watched, both momentarily riveted by the sight, Josef toppled over to the floor, his head striking against the floorboards with a sound such as a dropped melon might make. He had made no attempt to break his fall or cushion his head, and lay now unmoving.

"My *God*," Bruckman said again.

"Quiet, I'll explain," Wernecke said, his lips still glazed with the Musselmann blood. "Do you want to ruin us all? For the love of God, be *quiet*"

But Bruckman had shaken free of Wernecke's grip and crossed to kneel by Josef, leaning over him as Wernecke had done, placing a hand flat on Josefs chest for a moment, then touching the side of Josefs neck. Bruckman looked slowly up at Wernecke. "He's dead," Bruckman said, more quietly.

Wernecke squatted on the other side of Josefs body, and the rest of their conversation was carried out in whispers over Josefs chest, like friends conversing at the sickbed of another friend who has finally fallen into a fitful doze.

"Yes, he's dead," Wernecke said. "He was dead yesterday, wasn't he? Today he had just stopped walking." His eyes were hidden here, in the deeper shadow nearer to the floor, but there was still enough light for Bruckman to see that Wernecke had wiped his lips clean. Or licked them clean, Bruckman thought, and felt a spasm of nausea go through him.

"But *you*," Bruckman said, haltingly. "You were..."

"Drinking his blood?" Wernecke said. "Yes, I was drinking his blood."

Bruckman's mind was numb. He couldn't deal with this, he couldn't understand it at all. "But *why*, Eduard? Why?"

"To live, of course. Why do any of us do anything here? If I am to live, I must have blood. Without it,

I'd face a death even more certain than that doled out by the Nazis.”

Bruckman opened and closed his mouth, but no sound came out, as if the words he wished to speak were too jagged to fit through his throat. At last he managed to croak, “A vampire? You're a vampire? Like in the old stories?”

Wernecke said calmly, “Men would call me that.” He paused, then nodded. “Yes, that's what men would call me... As though they can understand something simply by giving it a name.”

“But Eduard,” Bruckman said weakly, almost petulantly. “The Musselmann...”

“Remember that he *was* a Musselmann,” Wernecke said, leaning forward and speaking more fiercely. “His strength was going, he was sinking. He would have been dead by morning anyway. I took from him something that he no longer needed, but that I needed in order to live. Does it matter? Starving men in lifeboats have eaten the bodies of their dead companions in order to live. Is what I've done any worse than that?”

“But he didn't just die. You *killed* him...”

Wernecke was silent for a moment, and then said, quietly, “What better thing could I have done for him? I won't apologize for what I do, Isadore; I do what I have to do to live. Usually I take only a little blood from a number of men, just enough to survive. And that's fair, isn't it? Haven't I given food to others, to help them survive? To you, Isadore? Only very rarely do I take more than a minimum from any one man, although I'm weak and hungry all the time, believe me. And never have I drained the life from someone who wished to live. Instead I've helped them fight for survival in every way I can, you know that.”

He reached out as though to touch Bruckman, then thought better of it and put his hand back on his own knee. He shook his head. “But these Musselmann, the ones who have given up on life, the walking dead—it is a favor to them to take them, to give them the solace of death. Can you honestly say it is not, *here*? That it is better for them to walk around while they are dead, being beaten and abused by the Nazis until their bodies cannot go on, and then to be thrown into the ovens and burned like trash? Can you say that? Would *they* say that, if they knew what was going on? Or would they thank me?”

Wernecke suddenly stood up, and Bruckman stood up with him. As Wernecke's face came again into the stronger light, Bruckman could see that his eyes had filled with tears. “You have lived under the Nazis,” Wernecke said. “Can you really call me a monster? Aren't I still a Jew, whatever else I might be? Aren't I *here*, in a death camp? Aren't I being persecuted, too, as much as any other? Aren't I in as much danger as anyone else? If I'm not a Jew, then tell the Nazis—they seem to think so.” He paused for a moment, and then smiled wryly. “And forget your superstitious boogey tales. I'm no night spirit. If I could turn myself into a bat and fly away from here, I would have done it long before now, believe me.”

Bruckman smiled reflectively, then grimaced. The two men avoided each other's eyes, Bruckman looking at the floor, and there was an uneasy silence, punctured only by the sighing and moaning of the sleepers on the other side of the cabin. Then, without looking up, in tacit surrender, Bruckman said, "What about *him*? The Nazis will find the body and cause trouble..."

"Don't worry," Wernecke said. "There are no obvious marks. And nobody performs autopsies in a death camp. To the Nazis, he'll be just another Jew who had died of the heat, or from starvation or sickness, or from a broken heart."

Bruckman raised his head then and they stared eye to eye for a moment. Even knowing what he knew, Bruckman found it hard to see Wernecke as anything other than what he appeared to be: an aging, balding Jew, stooping and thin, with sad eyes and a tired, compassionate face.

"Well, then, Isadore," Wernecke said at last, matter-of-factly. "My life is in your hands. I will not be indelicate enough to remind you of how many times your life has been in mine."

Then he was gone, walking back toward the sleeping platforms, a shadow soon lost among other shadows.

Bruckman stood by himself in the gloom for a long time, and then followed him. It took all of his will not to look back over his shoulder at the corner where Josef lay, and even so Bruckman imagined that he could feel Josefs dead eyes watching him, watching reproachfully as he walked away abandoning Josef to the cold and isolated company of the dead.

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Bruckman got no more sleep that night, and in the morning, when the Nazis shattered the gray predawn stillness by bursting into the shack with shouts and shrill whistles and barking police dogs, he felt as if he were a thousand years old.

They were formed into two lines, shivering in the raw morning air, and marched off to the quarry. The clammy dawn mist had yet to burn off, and marching through it, through a white shadowless void, with only the back of the man in front of him dimly visible, Bruckman felt more than ever like a ghost, suspended bodiless in some limbo between Heaven and Earth. Only the bite of pebbles and cinders into his raw, bleeding feet kept him anchored to the world, and he clung to the pain as a lifeline, fighting to shake off a feeling of numbness and unreality. However strange, however outre, the events of the previous night had *happened*. To doubt it, to wonder now if it had all been a feverish dream brought on by starvation and exhaustion, was to take the first step on the road to becoming a Musselmann.

Wernecke is a vampire, he told himself. That was the harsh, unyielding reality that, like the reality of the camp itself, must be faced. Was it any more surreal, any more impossible than the nightmare around them? He must forget the tales that his grandmother had told him as a boy, "boogey tales" as Wernecke

himself had called them, half-remembered tales that turned his knees to water whenever he thought of the blood smeared on Wernecke's mouth, whenever he thought of Wernecke's eyes watching him in the dark...

"Wake up, Jew!" the guard alongside him snarled, whacking him lightly on the arm with his rifle butt. Bruckman stumbled, managed to stay upright and keep going. Yes, he thought, wake up. Wake up to the reality of this, just as you once had to wake up to the reality of the camp. It was just one more unpleasant fact he would have to adapt to, learn to deal with...

Deal with how? he thought, and shivered.

By the time they reached the quarry, the mist had burned off, swirling past them in rags and tatters, and it was already beginning to get hot. There was Wernecke, his balding head gleaming dully in the harsh morning light. He didn't dissolve in the sunlight—there was one boogey tale disproved...

They set to work, like golems, like ragtag clockwork automatons.

Lack of sleep had drained what small reserves of strength Bruckman had, and the work was very hard for him that day. He had learned long ago all the tricks of timing and misdirection, the safe way to snatch short moments of rest, the ways to do a minimum of work with the maximum display of effort, the ways to keep the guards from noticing you, to fade into the faceless crowd of prisoners and not be singled out, but today his head was muzzy and slow, and none of the tricks seemed to work.

His body felt like a sheet of glass, fragile, ready to shatter into dust, and the painful, arthritic slowness of his movements got him first shouted at, and then knocked down. The guard kicked him twice for good measure before he could get up.

When Bruckman had climbed back to his feet again, he saw that Wernecke was watching him, face blank, eyes expressionless, a look that could have meant anything at all.

Bruckman felt the blood trickling from the corner of his mouth and thought, *the blood... he's watching the blood...* and once again he shivered.

Somehow, Bruckman forced himself to work faster, and although his muscles blazed with pain, he wasn't hit again, and the day passed.

When they formed up to go back to camp, Bruckman, almost unconsciously, made sure that he was in a different line than Wernecke.

That night in the cabin, Bruckman watched as Wernecke talked with the other men, here trying to help a new man named Melnick—no more than a boy—adjust to the dreadful reality of the camp, there exhorting someone who was slipping into despair to live and spite his tormentors, joking with old hands

in the flat, black, bitter way that passed for humor among them, eliciting a wan smile or occasionally even a laugh from them, finally leading them all in prayer again, his strong, calm voice raised in the ancient words, giving meaning to those words again...

He keeps up together, Bruckman thought, he keeps us going. Without him, we wouldn't last a week. Surely that's worth a little blood, a bit from each man, not even enough to hurt... Surely they wouldn't even begrudge him it, if they knew and really understood... No, he is a good man, better than the rest of us, in spite of his terrible affliction.

Bruckman had been avoiding Wernecke's eyes, hadn't spoken to him at all that day, and suddenly felt a wave of shame go through him at the thought of how shabbily he had been treating his friend. Yes, his friend, regardless, the man who had saved his life... Deliberately, he caught Wernecke's eyes, and nodded, and then somewhat sheepishly, smiled. After a moment, Wernecke smiled back, and Bruckman felt a spreading warmth and relief uncoil his guts. Everything was going to be all right, as all right as it could be, here...

Nevertheless, as soon as the inside lights clicked off that night, and Bruckman found himself lying alone in the darkness, his flesh began to crawl.

He had been unable to keep his eyes open a moment before, but now, in the sudden darkness, he found himself tensely and tickingly awake. Where was Wernecke? What was he doing, whom was he visiting tonight? Was he out there in the darkness even now, creeping closer, creeping nearer?... Stop it, Bruckman told himself uneasily, forget the boogey tales. This is your friend, a good man, not a monster... But he couldn't control the fear that made the small hairs on his arms stand bristlingly erect, couldn't stop the grisly images from coming...

Wernecke's eyes, gleaming in the darkness... was the blood already glistening on Wernecke's lips, as he drank?... The thought of the blood staining Wernecke's yellowing teeth made Bruckman cold and nauseous, but the image that he couldn't get out of his mind tonight was an image of Josef toppling over in that sinister boneless way, striking his head against the floor... Bruckman had seen people die in many more gruesome ways during this time at the camp, seen people shot, beaten to death, seen them die in convulsions from high fevers or cough their lungs up in bloody tatters from pneumonia, seen them hanging like charred-black scarecrows from the electrified fences, seen them torn apart by dogs... but somehow it was Josef's soft, passive, almost restful slumping into death that bothered him. That, and the obscene limpness of Josef's limbs as he sprawled there like a discarded rag doll, his pale and haggard face gleaming reproachfully in the dark...

When Bruckman could stand it no longer, he got shakily to his feet and moved off through the shadows, once again not knowing where he was going or what he was going to do, but drawn forward by some obscure instinct he himself did not understand. This time he went cautiously, feeling his way and trying to be silent, expecting every second to see Wernecke's coal-black shadow rise up before him.

He paused, a faint noise scratching at his ears, then went on again, even more cautiously, crouching low, almost crawling across the grimy floor.

Whatever instinct had guided him—sounds heard and interpreted subliminally, perhaps?—it had timed his arrival well. Wernecke had someone down on the floor there, perhaps someone he seized and dragged away from the huddled mass of sleepers on one of the sleeping platforms, someone from the outer edge of bodies whose presence would not be missed, or perhaps someone who had gone to sleep on the floor, seeking solitude or greater comfort.

Whoever he was, he struggled in Wernecke's grip, but Wernecke handled him easily, almost negligently, in a manner that spoke of great physical power. Bruckman could hear the man trying to scream, but Wernecke had one hand on his throat, half-throttling him, and all that would come out was a sort of whistling gasp. The man thrashed in Wernecke's hands like a kite in a child's hands flapping in the wind, and, moving deliberately, Wernecke smoothed him out like a kite, pressing him slowly flat on the floor.

Then Wernecke bent over him, and lowered his mouth to his throat.

Bruckman watched in horror, knowing that he should shout, scream, try to rouse the other prisoners, but somehow unable to move, unable to make his mouth open, his lungs pump. He was paralyzed by fear, like a rabbit in the presence of a predator, a terror sharper and more intense than any he'd ever known.

The man's struggles were growing weaker, and Wernecke must have eased up some on the throttling pressure of his hand, because the man moaned "Don't... please don't..." in a weaker, slurred voice. The man had been drumming his fists against Wernecke's back and sides, but now the tempo of the drumming slowed, slowed, and then stopped, the man's arms falling laxly to the floor. "Don't..." the man whispered; he groaned and muttered incomprehensively for a moment or two longer, then became silent. The silence stretched out for a minute, two, three, and Wernecke still crouched over his victim, who was now not moving at all...

Wernecke stirred, a kind of shudder going through him, like a cat stretching. He stood up. His face became visible as he straightened up into the full light from the window, and there was blood on it, glistening black under the harsh glare of the kliegs. As Bruckman watched, Wernecke began to lick his lips clean, his tongue, also black in this light, sliding like some sort of sinuous ebony snake around the rim of his mouth, darting and probing for the last lingering drops...

How smug he looks, Bruckman thought, like a cat who has found the cream, and the anger that flashed through him at the thought enabled him to move and speak again. "Wernecke," he said harshly.

Wernecke glanced casually in his direction. "You again, Isadore?" Wernecke said. "Don't you ever sleep?" Wernecke spoke lazily, quizzically, without surprise, and Bruckman wondered if Wernecke had known all along that he was there. "Or do you just enjoy watching me?"

“Lies,” Bruckman said. “You told me nothing but lies. Why did you bother?”

“You were excited,” Wernecke said. “You had surprised me. It seemed best to tell you what you wanted to hear. If it satisfied you, then that was an easy solution to the problem.”

“Never have I drained the life from someone who wanted to live,” Bruckman said bitterly, mimicking Wernecke. “Only a little from each man! My God—and I believed you! I even felt sorry for you!”

Wernecke shrugged. “Most of it was true. Usually I only take a little from each man, softly and carefully, so that they never know, so that in the morning they are only a little weaker than they would have been anyway...”

“Like Josef?” Bruckman said angrily. “Like the poor devil you killed tonight?”

Wernecke shrugged again. “I have been careless the last few nights, I admit. But I need to build up my strength again.” His eyes gleamed in the darkness. “Events are coming to a head here. Can’t you feel it, Isadore, can’t you sense it? Soon the war will be over, everyone knows that. Before then, this camp will be shut down, and the Nazis will move us back into the interior—either that, or kill us. I have grown weak here, and I will soon need all my strength to survive, to take whatever opportunity presents itself to escape. I *must* be ready. And so I have let myself drink deeply again, drink my fill for the first time in months...” Wernecke licked his lips again, perhaps unconsciously, then smiled bleakly at Bruckman. “You don’t appreciate my restraint, Isadore. You don’t understand how hard it has been for me to hold back, to take only a little each night. You don’t understand how much that restraint has cost me...”

“You are gracious,” Bruckman sneered.

Wernecke laughed. “No, but I am a rational man; I pride myself on that. You other prisoners were my only source of food, and I have had to be very careful to make sure that you would last. I have no access to the Nazis, after all. I am trapped here, a prisoner just like you, whatever else you may believe—and I have not only had to find ways to survive here in the camp, I have had to procure my own food as well! No shepherd has ever watched over his flock more tenderly than I.”

“Is that all we are to you—sheep? Animals to be slaughtered?”

Wernecke smiled. “Precisely.”

When he could control his voice enough to speak, Bruckman said, “You’re worse than the Nazis.”

“I hardly think so,” Wernecke said quietly, and for a moment he looked tired, as though something unimaginably old and unutterably weary had looked out through his eyes. “This camp was built by the Nazis—it wasn’t my doing. The Nazis sent you here—not I. The Nazis have tried to kill you every day

since, in one way or another—and I have tried to keep you alive, even at some risk to myself. No one has more of a vested interest in the survival of his livestock than the farmer, after all, even if he does occasionally slaughter an inferior animal. I have given you food—”

“Food you had no use for yourself! You sacrificed nothing!”

“That’s true, of course. But *you* needed it, remember that. Whatever my motives, I have helped you to survive here—you and many others. By doing so I also acted in my own self-interest, of course, but can you have experienced this camp and still believe in things like altruism? What difference does it make what my reason for helping was—I still helped you, didn’t I?”

“Sophistries!” Bruckman said. “Rationalizations! You twist words to justify yourself, but you can’t disguise what you really are—a monster!”

Wernecke smiled gently, as though Bruckman’s words amused him, and made as if to pass by, but Bruckman raised an arm to bar his way. They did not touch each other, but Wernecke stopped short, and a new quivering kind of tension sprung into existence in the air between them.

“I’ll stop you,” Bruckman said. “Somehow I’ll stop you, I’ll keep you from doing this terrible thing—”

“You’ll do nothing,” Wernecke said. His voice was hard and cold and flat, like a rock speaking. “What can you do? Tell the other prisoners? Who would believe you? They’d think you’d gone insane. Tell the *Nazis*, then?” Wernecke laughed harshly. “They’d think you’d gone crazy, too, and they’d take you to the hospital—and I don’t have to tell you what your chances of getting out of there alive are, do I? No, you’ll do *nothing*.”

Wernecke took a step forward; his eyes were shiny and black and hard, like ice, like the pitiless eyes of a predatory bird, and Bruckman felt a sick rush of fear cut through his anger. Bruckman gave way, stepping backward involuntarily, and Wernecke pushed past him, seeming to brush him aside without touching him.

Once past, Wernecke turned to stare at Bruckman, and Bruckman had to summon up all the defiance that remained in him not to look uneasily away from Wernecke’s agate-hard eyes. “You are the strongest and cleverest of all the other animals, Isadore,” Wernecke said in a calm, conversational voice. “You have been useful to me. Every shepherd needs a good sheepdog. I still need you, to help me manage the others, and to help me keep them going long enough to serve my needs. This is the reason why I have taken so much time with you, instead of just killing you outright.” He shrugged. “So let us both be rational about this—you leave me alone, Isadore, and I will leave you alone also. We will stay away from each other and look after our own affairs. Yes?”

“The others...” Bruckman said weakly.

“They must look after themselves,” Wernecke said. He smiled, a thin and almost invisible motion of his lips. “What did I teach you, Isadore? Here everyone must look after themselves. What difference does it make what happens to the others? In a few weeks almost all of them will be dead anyway.”

“You *are* a monster,” Bruckman said.

“I’m not much different from you, Isadore. The strong survive, whatever the cost.”

“I am *nothing* like you,” Bruckman said, with loathing.

“No?” Wernecke asked, ironically, and moved away; within a few paces he was hobbling and stooping, vanishing into the shadows, once more the harmless old Jew.

Bruckman stood motionless for a moment, and then, moving slowly and reluctantly, he stepped across to where Wernecke’s victim lay.

It was one of new men Wernecke had been talking to earlier in the evening, and, of course, he was quite dead.

Shame and guilt took Bruckman then, emotions he thought he had forgotten—black and strong and bitter, they shook him by the throat the way Wernecke had shaken the new man.

Bruckman couldn’t remember returning across the room to his sleeping platform, but suddenly he was there, lying on his back and staring into the stifling darkness, surrounded by the moaning, thrashing, stinking mass of sleepers. His hands were clasped protectively over his throat, although he couldn’t remember putting them there, and he was shivering convulsively. How many mornings had he awoken with a dull ache in his neck, thinking it was no more than the habitual bodyaches and strained muscles they had all learned to take for granted? How many nights had Wernecke fed on *him*?

Every time Bruckman closed his eyes he would see Wernecke’s face floating there in the luminous darkness behind his eyelids... Wernecke with his eyes half-closed, his face vulpine and cruel and satiated... Wernecke’s face moving closer and closer to him, his eyes opening like black pits, his lips smiling back from his teeth... Wernecke’s lips, sticky and red with blood... and then Bruckman would seem to feel the wet touch of Wernecke’s lips on *his* throat, feel Wernecke’s teeth biting into *his* flesh, and Bruckman’s eyes would fly open again. Staring into the darkness. Nothing there. Nothing there *yet*...

Dawn was a dirty gray imminence against the cabin window before Bruckman could force himself to lower his shielding arms from his throat, and once again he had not slept at all.

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That day’s work was a nightmare of pain and exhaustion for Bruckman, harder than anything he had

known since his first few days at the camp. Somehow he forced himself to get up, somehow he stumbled outside and up the path to the quarry, seeming to float along high off the ground, his head a bloated balloon, his feet a thousand miles away at the end of boneless beanstalk legs he could barely control at all. Twice he fell, and was kicked several times before he could drag himself back to his feet and lurch forward again. The sun was coming up in front of them, a hard red disk in a sickly yellow sky, and to Bruckman it seemed to be a glazed and lidless eye staring dispassionately into the world to watch them flail and struggle and die, like the eye of a scientist peering into a laboratory maze.

He watched the disk of the sun as he stumbled towards it; it seemed to bob and shimmer with every painful step, expanding, swelling, and bloating until it swallowed the sky...

Then he was picking up a rock, moaning with the effort, feeling the rough stone tear his hands...

Reality began to slide away from Bruckman. There were long periods when the world was blank, and he would come slowly back to himself as if from a great distance, and hear his own voice speaking words that he could not understand, or keening mindlessly, or grunting in a hoarse, animalistic way, and he would find that his body was working mechanically, stooping and lifting and carrying, all without volition...

A Musselmann, Bruckman thought, I'm becoming a Musselmann... and felt a chill of fear sweep through him. He fought to hold onto the world, afraid that the next time he slipped away from himself he would not come back, deliberately banging his hands into the rocks, cutting himself, clearing his head with pain.

The world steadied around him. A guard shouted a hoarse admonishment at him and slapped his rifle butt, and Bruckman forced himself to work faster, although he could not keep himself from weeping silently with the pain his movements cost him.

He discovered that Wernecke was watching him, and stared back defiantly, the bitter tears still runneling his dirty cheeks, thinking, *I won't become a Musselmann for you, I won't make it easy for you, I won't provide another helpless victim for you...* Wernecke met Bruckman's gaze for a moment, and then shrugged and turned away.

Bruckman bent for another stone, feeling the muscles in his back crack and the pain drive in like knives. What had Wernecke been thinking behind the blankness of his expressionless face? Had Wernecke, sensing weakness, marked Bruckman for his next victim? Had Wernecke been disappointed or dismayed by the strength of Bruckman's will to survive? Would Wernecke now settle upon someone else?

The morning passed, and Bruckman grew feverish again. He could feel the fever in his face, making his eyes feel sandy and hot, pulling the skin taut over his cheekbones, and he wondered how long he could manage to stay on his feet. To falter, to grow weak and insensible, was certain death; if the Nazis didn't kill him, Wernecke would... Wernecke was out of sight now, on the other side of the quarry, but it

seemed to Bruckman that Wernecke's hard and flinty eyes were everywhere, floating in the air around him, looking out momentarily from the back of a Nazi soldier's head, watching him from the dulled iron side of a quarry cart, peering at him from a dozen different angles. He bent ponderously for another rock, and when he had pried it up from the earth he found Wernecke's eyes beneath it, staring unblinkingly up at him from the damp and pallid soil...

That afternoon there were great flashes of light on the eastern horizon, out across the endless flat expanse of the steppe, flares in rapid sequence that lit up the sullen gray sky, all without sound. The Nazi guards had gathered in a group, looking to the east and talking in subdued voices, ignoring the prisoners for the moment. For the first time Bruckman noticed how disheveled and unshaven the guards had become in the last few days, as though they had given up, as though they no longer cared. Their faces were strained and tight, and more than one of them seemed to be fascinated by the leaping fires on the distant edge of the world.

Melnick said that it was only a thunderstorm, but old Bohme said that it was an artillery battle being fought, and that that meant that the Russians were coming, that soon they would all be liberated.

Bohme grew so excited at the thought that he began shouting, "The Russians! It's the Russians! The Russians are coming to free us!" Dichstein, another one of the new prisoners, and Melnick tried to hush him, but Bohme continued to caper and shout—doing a grotesque kind of jig while he yelled and flapped his arms—until he had attracted the attention of the guards. Infuriated, two of the guards fell upon Bohme and beat him severely, striking him with their rifle butts with more than usual force, knocking him to the ground, continuing to flail at him and kick him while he was down, Bohme writhing like an injured worm under their stamping boots. They probably would have beaten Bohme to death on the spot, but Wernecke organized a distraction among some of the other prisoners, and when the guards moved away to deal with it, Wernecke helped Bohme to stand up and hobble away to the other side of the quarry, where the rest of the prisoners shielded him from sight with their bodies as best they could for the rest of the afternoon.

Something about the way Wernecke urged Bohme to his feet and helped him to limp and lurch away, something about the protective, possessive curve of Wernecke's arm around Bohme's shoulders, told Bruckman that Wernecke had selected his next victim.

That night Bruckman vomited up the meager and rancid meal that they were allowed, his stomach convulsing uncontrollably after the first few bites. Trembling with hunger and exhaustion and fever, he leaned against the wall and watched as Wernecke fussed over Bohme, nursing him as a man might nurse a sick child, talking gently to him, wiping away some of the blood that still oozed from the corner of Bohme's mouth, coaxing Bohme to drink a few sips of soup, finally arranging that Bohme should stretch out on the floor away from the sleeping platforms, where he would not be jostled by the others...

As soon as the interior lights went out that night, Bruckman got up, crossed the floor quickly and unhesitatingly, and lay down in the shadows near the spot where Bohme muttered and twitched and

groaned.

Shivering, Bruckman lay in the darkness, the strong smell of the earth in his nostrils, waiting for Wernecke to come...

In Bruckman's hand, held close to his chest, was a spoon that had been sharpened to a jagged needle point, a spoon he had stolen and begun to sharpen while he was still in a civilian prison in Cologne, so long ago that he almost couldn't remember, scraping it back and forth against the stone wall of his cell every night for hours, managing to keep it hidden on his person during the nightmarish ride in the sweltering boxcar, the first few terrible days at the camp, telling no one about it, not even Wernecke during the months when he'd thought of Wernecke as a kind of saint, keeping it hidden long after the possibility of escape had become too remote even to fantasize about, retaining it then more as a tangible link with the daydream country of his past than as a tool he ever actually hoped to employ, cherishing it almost as a holy relic, as a remnant of a vanished world that he otherwise might almost believe had never existed at all...

And now that it was time to use it at last, he was almost reluctant to do so, to soil it with another man's blood...

He fingered the spoon compulsively, turning it over and over; it was hard and smooth and cold, and he clenched it as tightly as he could, trying to ignore the fine tremoring of his hands.

He had to kill Wernecke...

Nausea and an odd feeling of panic flashed through Bruckman at the thought, but there was no other choice, there was no other way... He couldn't go on like this, his strength was failing; Wernecke was killing him, as surely as he had killed the others, just by keeping him from sleeping... And as long as Wernecke lived, he would never be safe: always there would be the chance that Wernecke would come for him, that Wernecke would strike as soon as his guard was down... Would Wernecke scruple for a second to kill *him*, after all, if he thought that he could do it safely?... No, of course not... Given the chance, Wernecke would kill him without a moment's further thought... No, he must strike *first*...

Bruckman licked his lips uneasily. Tonight. He had to kill Wernecke *tonight*...

There was a stirring, a rustling: Someone was getting up, working his way free from the mass of sleepers on one of the platforms. A shadowy figure crossed the room toward Bruckman, and Bruckman tensed, reflexively running his thumb along the jagged end of the spoon, readying himself to rise, to strike—but at the last second, the figure veered aside and stumbled toward another corner. There was a sound like rain drumming on cloth; the man swayed there for a moment, mumbling, and then slowly returned to his pallet, dragging his feet, as if he had pissed his very life away against the wall. It was not Wernecke.

Bruckman eased himself back down to the floor, his heart seeming to shake his wasted body back and

forth with the force of its beating. His hand was damp with sweat. He wiped it against his tattered pants, and then clutched the spoon again...

Time seemed to stop. Bruckman waited, stretched out along the hard floorboards, the raw wood rasping his skin, dust clogging his mouth and nose, feeling as though he were already dead, a corpse laid out in the rough pine coffin, feeling eternity pile up on his chest like heavy clots of wet black earth... Outside the hut, the kliegs blazed, banishing night, abolishing it, but here inside the hut it was night, here night survived, perhaps the only pocket of night remaining on a klieg-lit planet, the shafts of light that came in through the slatted windows only serving to accentuate the surrounding darkness, to make it greater and more puissant by comparison... Here in the darkness, nothing ever changed... there was only the smothering heat, and the weight of eternal darkness, and the changeless moments that could not pass because there was nothing to differentiate them one from the other...

Many times as he waited Bruckman's eyes would grow heavy and slowly close, but each time his eyes would spring open again at once, and he would find himself staring into the shadows for Wernecke. Sleep would no longer have him, it was a kingdom closed to him now; it spat him out each time he tried to enter it, just as his stomach now spat out the food he placed in it...

The thought of food brought Bruckman to a sharper awareness, and there in the darkness he huddled around his hunger, momentarily forgetting everything else. Never had he been so hungry... He thought of the food he had wasted earlier in the evening, and only the last few shreds of his self-control kept him from moaning aloud.

Bohme did moan aloud then, as though unease were contagious. As Bruckman glanced at him, Bohme said, "Anya," in a clear calm voice; he mumbled a little, and then, a bit more loudly, said, "Tseitel, have you set the table yet?" and Bruckman realized that Bohme was no longer in the camp, that Bohme was back in Dusseldorf in the tiny apartment with his fat wife and his four healthy children, and Bruckman felt a pang of envy go through him, for Bohme, who had escaped.

It was at that moment that Bruckman realized that Wernecke was standing there, just beyond Bohme.

There had been no movement that Bruckman had seen. Wernecke had seemed to slowly materialize from the darkness, atom by atom, bit by incremental bit, until at some point he had been solid enough for his presence to register on Bruckman's consciousness, so that what had been only a shadow a moment before was now unmistakably Wernecke as well, however much a shadow it remained.

Bruckman's mouth went dry with terror, and it almost seemed that he could hear the voice of his dead grandmother whispering in his ears. Boogey tales... Wernecke had said *I'm no night spirit*. Remember that he had said that...

Wernecke was almost close enough to touch. He was staring down at Bohme; his face, lit by a dusty shaft of light from the window, was cold and remote, only the total lack of expression hinting at the

passion that strained and quivered behind the mask. Slowly, lingeringly, Wernecke stooped over Bohme. "Anya," Bohme said again, caressingly, and then Wernecke's mouth was on his throat.

Let him feed, said a cold remorseless voice in Bruckman's mind. It will be easier to take him when he's nearly sated, when he's fully preoccupied and growing lethargic and logy... *growing full*...

Slowly, with infinite caution, Bruckman gathered himself to spring, watching in horror and fascination as Wernecke fed. He could hear Wernecke sucking the juice out of Bohme, as if there were not enough blood in the foolish old man to satiate him, as if there were not enough blood in the whole camp... or perhaps, the whole world... And now Bohme was ceasing his feeble struggling, was becoming still...

Bruckman flung himself upon Wernecke, stabbing him twice in the back before his weight bowled them both over. There was a moment of confusion as they rolled and struggled together, all without sound, and then Bruckman found himself sitting atop Wernecke, Wernecke's white face turned up to him. Bruckman drove his weapon into Wernecke again, the shock of the blow jarring Bruckman's arm to the shoulder. Wernecke made no outcry; his eyes were already glazing, but they looked at Bruckman with recognition, with cold anger, with bitter irony and, oddly, with what might have been resignation or relief, with what might almost have been pity...

Bruckman stabbed again and again, driving the blows home with hysterical strength, panting, rocking atop his victim, feeling Wernecke's blood spatter against his face, wrapped in the heat and steam that rose from Wernecke's torn-open body like a smothering black cloud, coughing and choking on it for a moment, feeling the steam seep in through his pores and sink deep into the marrow of his bones, feeling the world seem to pulse and shimmer and change around him, as though he were suddenly seeing through new eyes, as though something had been born anew inside him, and then abruptly he was *smelling* Wernecke's blood, the hot organic reek of it, leaning closer to drink in that sudden overpowering smell, better than the smell of freshly baked bread, better than anything he could remember, rich and heady and strong beyond imagining.

There was a moment of revulsion and horror, and he tried to wonder how long the ancient contamination had been passing from man to man to man, how far into the past the chain of lives stretched, how Wernecke himself had been trapped, and then his parched lips touched wetness, and he was drinking, drinking deeply and greedily, and his mouth was filled with the strong clean taste of copper.

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The following night, after Bruckman led the memorial prayers for Wernecke and Bohme, Melnick came to him. Melnick's eyes were bright with tears. "How can we go on without Eduard? He was everything to us. What will we do now?..."

"It will be all right, Moishe," Bruckman said. "I promise you, everything will be all right." He put his arm around Melnick for a moment to comfort him, and at the touch sensed the hot blood that pumped

through the intricate network of the boy's veins, just under the skin, rich and warm and nourishing, waiting there inviolate for him to set it free.

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This story started out as a sentence I jotted down in my story-idea notebook: “vampire in death camp, during Second World War.”

It stayed in that form for a couple of years, until one night when Jack Dann was down in Philadelphia for a visit—my calendar shows that it was March 6, 1981—and we were sitting in my living room in my rundown old apartment on Quince Street, kicking around potential ideas for collaborative stories. I got my notebook out and started throwing ideas from it out at Jack; one of them was the vampire sentence. Jack took fire with that idea at once. We talked about the overall plot for a half hour or so, brainstorming, kicking it back and forth, and then Jack got up, sat down behind my ancient, massive Remington office-model standup standard typewriter, which lived on one side of my somewhat-unsteady kitchen table, and started writing the story. He wrote like a madman for a few hours, and by the time he stood up again, he had finished a rough draft of about the first nine manuscript pages, carrying the story through the brilliant Passover scene, which was entirely of his own devising. Then he left, headed back to Binghamton, and the ball was in my court. I worked pretty extensively on the story for a solid week (obviously, I work much more slowly than Jack!), and then worked on it off and on for the next couple of months, with one hurried story conference with Jack at that year's Nebula Banquet to hammer out a plot problem, and the passing back and forth by mail of several different drafts of one particularly difficult scene toward the story's end. The story was finished on May 9, 1981. It bounced around for a while, and finally sold to *Oui*, It was reprinted in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, where its appearance prompted a major horror writer to remark that it was the most morally offensive story he'd ever read. We were quietly proud.

At the core of the story, it seems to me, is the question of identity. In spite of being a supernatural monster, Wernecke is *perceived* by the Nazis as a Jew, and so that's the way they treat him, no better or worse than the other prisoners. To some extent, we are what other people think we are, whether we want to be or not. For me, the real meat of the story is in the two conversations between Wernecke and Bruckman, and in some ways those were the most difficult scenes to write.

I'd always wanted to call a story “Down Among the Dead Men,” a line from an old English folksong, and the title certainly seemed to fit the story well enough, so that's what we called it.

Gardner Dozois

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A noted writer of genre horror once complained that this story was in bad taste, as it depicted a concentration camp internee as a vampire. It is our opinion, however, that in order to rise above genre cookie patterns, fiction must take chances and try to reflect that which really *is* the dark side of human nature.

It has been said that the events of the holocaust were so terrible in themselves that they are beyond any kind of fictive telling. Note some of the statistics: In five years the Nazis exterminated nine million people. Six million were Jews. The efficiency of the concentration camps was such that twenty thousand people could be gassed in a day. The Nazis at Treblinka boasted that they could “process” the Jews who arrived in the cattle cars in forty-five minutes.

In 1943 six hundred desperate Jews revolted and burned Treblinka to the ground. These men were willing to martyr themselves so that a few might live to “testify” and tell a disbelieving world of the atrocities committed in the camps, lest those who had died be forgotten... lest *we* forget those events which are too terrible to contemplate.

Out of the six hundred, forty survived to tell their story.

“Down Among the Dead Men,” like the companion story “Camps,” is our attempt to testify, to bring the terror and horror and discomfort to another generation of readers in the only way we know how. Perhaps through the metaphoric and symbolic medium of horror—of the fantastic—we might catch a dark reflection of that terrible event. Even if it is impossible to grasp the terrible reality of what happened in the camps, still, we must try.

In order to survive, the prisoners had to take part in the “process” of killing other prisoners; that was one of the greatest atrocities of the concentration camps. It became a maxim of the survivors—those who did not let themselves be reduced to *Musselmanner*, the walking, living dead—that “first you save yourself, then you save yourself, and then, and only then, can you try to save others.” Prisoners could survive only against almost impossible odds, and the guilt was impossible to escape. It was built into the Nazi extermination system... into the new technology of genocide.

To live, you had to help kill.

The vampire is... *us*!

Indeed, the vampire is a horrifying metaphor. It would have been much more palatable if we had made him one of the Nazis. But perhaps by testifying, by taking chances, by leaning over the edge of what might be construed as “bad taste,” we can keep the memory of what happened alive.

It is too easy to forget our history.

But as the philosopher George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to

repeat it.” God forbid...

Jack Dann