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## Contents for March, 1932

- Cover Design ----- C. C. Senf  
*Illustrating a scene in "The Vengeance of Ixmal"*
- The Eyrie ----- 148  
*A chat with the readers*
- The Vengeance of Ixmal ----- Kirk Mashburn 296  
*An eerie story of a vampire-haunted village, and quivering human sacrifices on an Aztec altar*
- The House of the Living Dead ----- Harold Ward 310  
*A shuddery tale—a story of revived corpses taken from the grave to live and love again*
- The Man Who Played With Time ----- A. W. Bernal 330  
*A strange weird-scientific tale of the fourth dimension and a tragic journey into the past*

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

- The Last Day** ----- Robert E. Howard 345  
*Verse*
- The Answer of the Dead** ----- J. Paul Suter 346  
*The protecting arms of a dead man reached back from the grave to shield the woman he loved*
- Island of Doom** ----- Bassett Morgan 354  
*A thrill-tale of brain transplantation, a surgical horror that was consummated on a little island in the South Pacific*
- The Planet of the Dead** ----- Clark Ashton Smith 364  
*A unique story of star-gazing—a bizarre tale of life in two planets and the splendors of a far world*
- Death** ----- Wilfred Blanch Talman 372  
*Verse*
- The Devil's Bride (Part 2)** ----- Seabury Quinn 373  
*A novel of devil-worship, that contains horror, thrills, shudders, breath-taking interest, suspense, and vivid action*
- Flight** ----- James W. Bennett and Soong Kwen-Ling 397  
*A brief Chinese story of a strange occult adventure—a tale which summarizes the Taoist conception of life after death*
- The Milk Carts** ----- Violet A. Methley 401  
*The story of a horror on the golf links—an elemental being out of the dim distant past*
- The Thing in the Cellar** ----- David H. Keller 405  
*A strange and blood-freezing evil awaited the boy as he went to his doom in that dark room*
- Laughter in the Night** -- August W. Derleth and Mark Schorer 409  
*A hideous burst of laughter from the moor where the gallows-tree once stood portended tragedy*
- Weird Story Reprint:**  
**The Wolf-Leader (Conclusion)** ----- Alexandre Dumas 417  
*A werewolf story by a great French novelist, which does not appear in his collected works in English*

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# The Milk Carts

By VIOLET A. METHLEY

*Croft's efforts to keep the golf course in good condition met with weird obstacles from out of the past*

**T**WO men in plus-fours tramped over the crest of the down. The taller could best be described as bluff; the other smaller, slimmer, paced more slowly, his lips moving as he measured the yards. Frowning, he made entries in a notebook, examined every crease and fold in the ground, with an eye keen as the hawk's, hovering overhead.

"Grand site, eh? High—breezy—fine views——" The bigger man waved his hand with large vagueness, and his companion nodded approvingly, with pursed lips.

"Perfect—couldn't have done it better if I'd planned it myself from the beginning."

Thus did Mr. Seton Croft congratulate the Almighty upon the creation of an ideal natural golf course, and did so without any conscious conceit. For years he had practised golf-course construction; he was without a rival in craft and subtlety of bunkers and hazards, and it was his boast never to make two holes alike.

"Good!" Gilbert Scayles, owner of the land, beamed complacently. "Then we'll get it in hand at once—open next Easter, eh? I'll give you a free hand about engaging labor, and you and your wife can live at the lodge to keep an eye on things."

Seton Croft nodded absent-mindedly.

"This stretch will make a grand twelfth hole—the longest on the course," he said thoughtfully. "Five hundred

yards of turf for fairway—trees on one side—sand pits on the other. Put an artificial bunker midway—and there's the twelfth green."

They were now on the crest of the down; only the mounds of the Roman camp rose higher, and Croft pointed to the half-moon of sandy hollows and outcropping rock which ended the vista.

As they set off toward it, along the natural fairway, the golf-architect came to a frowning standstill, staring down.

"Sinful, positively sinful!" he muttered. "A glorious fairway spoilt like that."

Right across, from side to side, ran the furrows of wheel-tracks, bitten through the soft skin of turf to the flesh and bone of chalk and rock beneath.

"By Gad, yes—a confounded shame!" Scayles bent to examine the ruts. "They must be turfed over, and I'll stop anyone from driving this way in future. I've got all rights over the land, and I'll see to it at once."

"We'll get the ruts leveled and turfed first thing, then," Croft commented. "Yes, as I thought, the green almost plans itself; it should be one of the best holes on the course."

Seton Croft was not the man to let grass grow under his feet, except where such grass was required, on a new golf course. Within a week, expert labor was engaged and he was established with his wife in the lodge, spending his days on the course, his evenings with a large sand-

filled tray, in which he had constructed a fascinating small-scale model, complete even to the tiny flags on the greens. Croft was a methodical man.

After giving orders for the first roughing-out of the whole course, he concentrated his own attention upon the planning of the first hole, a difficult bit of work. Consequently, it was not for two or three weeks that he took a general survey to see how the work was progressing, and, in the course of it, reached the twelfth hole, and walked along the fairway to view the returning of the furrows. Once again, Croft stopped short.

"Look here, Long!" he summoned one of the workmen busy on the twelfth green. "Didn't I give particular orders that these ruts were to be leveled and turfed?"

"Yes, sir, and so they were," the man spoke aggrievedly. "But yesterday evening or early this morning carts have been along the track again, tearing it up like you see."

"Confound them!" Croft, who rarely swore, broke out furiously. "Get it put right as soon as possible, and I'll speak to Mr. Scayles at once. This shan't happen again."

Scayles was as indignant as could be wished. Notice-boards were set up, orders sent all round the estate, whilst Croft concentrated upon the repair of the damage, laying fresh soil in the ruts, applying turf like new-grafted skin.

Inquiries had not led to the discovery of the culprits; all the cart-owners in the neighborhood denied having driven across the golf course; as one of them put it, reasonably enough:

"It isn't a short cut anywhere, and it don't lead nowhere, so what'd be the sense of doing it?"

But the trouble was not over. Two days after all had been put right, Croft took his wife round the course, to hear

her opinion of it as a practical golfer, which he himself was not. She was properly and satisfactorily enthusiastic—until they reached the fairway of the twelfth hole. And there, once again, the turf was torn transversely by those deeply bitten cart-tracks.

Croft lost his temper completely for once.

"It'll never be in condition now by the time of the opening," he declared. "It must be some cursed swine of villagers who've made up their minds that it's a right of way across the course, and drive their carts over it on purpose."

In corroboration of his words came a voice from close by, and the Crofts became aware of an aged rustic, with gnarled hands clasped on the top of a knotted stick from which they were almost indistinguishable. He worked his toothless mouth and blinked rheumy eyes, speaking quaveringly.

"Eee, Mester, 'e'll niver keep them ruts smooth, niver in this world," he mouthed. "They'll be druv theer agin."

"Why—do you know who makes them?" Croft demanded.

"Iss—iss!" the old fellow nodded shakily. "For sure I do. 'Tes the milk-carts."

"Where from? Whose milk-carts are they?" Croft asked.

"Can't tell 'ee that. But they do always come, tearing up the ruts, whatever 'ee do. Rattling and clattering, they comes, all the cans a-jangling—they plaguey milk-carts!"

**T**HE old man shuffled away, mumbling. Croft could obtain no more information from him, nor did further inquiries help matters much. Scayles and his steward both insisted that there were no dairy-farms with carts and cans in the neighborhood. Moreover, old Ted Hollins was known to be soft in the brain,

and you could not take anything he said for truth; he rambled most of his time.

Nevertheless, the old man's words had made an impression upon Croft, which was to be unpleasantly revived some weeks after the ruts had once more been repaired. For the architect returned to the lodge and his wife one lunchtime, with looks which boded disaster.

"Those cursed carts again!" he burst out. "Deeper tracks than ever. It's the most deliberate blackguardism I ever saw, and there must be connivance in the district. Scayles is furious, and I'm about ready to chuck the whole thing. You can't work against determined opposition like this—it's heartbreaking."

"You'd feel worse if you gave up," his wife said wisely, and Croft nodded, with gloomy assent.

"You're right. I'd rather catch the brutes. The workmen are inclined to give trouble, too—want me to alter the lie of the hole, say they'll make the turf good this once, but not again. And I can't coerce 'em; if those fellows turn sulky and strike work, we'll never get the job done in time."

"It's absolutely sickening—but what can you do, dear, to prevent it happening again?" Mrs. Croft said sympathetically.

To that question Croft supplied an answer on the evening after the re-turfing had been again finished. After dinner, he put on his boots again, with a grimly set mouth.

"Going out again, dear?" his wife asked.

"Yes—going to spend the night at the twelfth hole," Croft told her. "Going to spend every night there, till I catch those scoundrels. I'm not taking any chance this time; if they come again, they'll have me to reckon with. Don't fuss, old girl."

Being a wise wife, Mrs. Croft did not. She contented herself with making sure that her husband put on a warm over-

coat, and took a packet of sandwiches and a whisky-flask in the pockets.

THE night was overcast, with a dim moon giving an air of unreality to the whole scene, which Croft felt vaguely, as he took a short cut across the course toward the twelfth fairway.

He walked along the edge of the rough, where sorrel and scabious grew in the yellowish grass. A little squealing creature ran out from almost under his feet, a bird gave a feeble pipe; otherwise it was very silent.

Croft reached a point where the ground fell away on the left, whilst to the right the slope rose smoothly toward the earthworks of the Roman camp, except for a deep cleft in the downs sparsely filled with bushes. The twelfth green was no more than fifty yards away; the newly-placed turves showed in bright stripes across the brownish-green of the fairway. Croft glanced toward them anxiously, but they were smooth and untouched, and with a sigh of relief he sat down on the edge of the fairway.

It was a lonely vigil. Croft smoked, ate his sandwiches, sat gazing out over the wide, misty stretch of valley, playing fantastically with the idea of it as a huge golf course to be planned, that distant ridge a bunker—that rising field a green. But it was all rather dream-like; Croft was half dozing when the first sound broke the stillness, a clank-clank-clank of metal, the jangle of cans. Old Ted was right then—the milk-carts were coming.

Croft sprang to his feet and looked round. The clanking jangle grew louder, coming from the rising ground on the right, the bush-filled cleft. He thought, now, he could catch men's voices, and the trampling of horse-hoofs was unmistakable.

Anger and irritation came surging back. These malicious boors thought

they'd have it all their own way again, did they? Well, they should find out! Croft grasped the stick which he carried and advanced in the direction of the growing sounds.

Suddenly, with clatter of metal and creak of harness a vehicle emerged from the chalk-cleft and swung down toward the smooth turf of the fairway. It was driven, milk-cart fashion, by a driver who stood behind the high, curved front, and behind could be caught a glimpse of another, and another. Croft strode forward, raising his stick threateningly.

"Here, you get way out of this!" he cried. "You've no business here. If you claim any rights, do it through the law courts, not by wilful destruction of——"

His voice trailed off, for no answer came from the driver, and he urged his horse forward steadily. More furious than he had ever been in his life before, Croft snatched at the bridle.

As he did so, something thrust him on one side, some power, scarcely physical, which stunned and bewildered him. He found himself a-sprawl on the turf, with the vehicle sweeping by, clattering, jangling, followed by another, and another. Gleaming with metal-work, drawn by horses under high yokes, they were not quite milk-carts, Croft realized, dragging himself on to his knees and staring in amazement. The drivers were swarthy, with strong features, and thick bodies, in closely molded leather jerkins.

Straight across the fairway they drove, wheeling into the rough grass beyond; one shouted to another in a strange tongue, which was somehow familiar, and they were off, with a clatter and jingle, the drivers bending low—cracking their long whips.

And Croft still watched, dazed and bewildered. . . .

Now they were returning at breakneck speed; they passed close to him; with a clatter and jangle, with a roar and a swirl they were gone, up and away toward the silent, dominant earthworks of the Roman camp.

But Seton Croft, golf-architect, sat huddled on the dry grass, trying to realize what strange spectacle he had seen in the misty moonlight, and what was its meaning.

"Chariots—Roman soldiers chariot-racing, men from the camp on the hill," he whispered. "This is where they did their training, when they were in garrison here—by Gad, yes!"

Presently he rose, and went to where the deep wheel-ruts showed on the new-laid turf, stood staring for some moments. It was almost daylight when he reached the lodge, and found a heavy-eyed wife waiting for him anxiously.

"My dear, you must be half dead," she fussed over him. "I've made a fire, so sit down and get warm, and drink this cocoa—Seton, how funny and dazed you look. Did you catch them?"

"Yes," Croft answered. "I caught them in the act."

"Oh, the wretches! How dared they? Did you give them in charge?"

"No," Croft spoke slowly. "You see, they proved to me that they had a prior claim to be there. . . . I rather think I shall alter that hole after all."

SO THAT is why the twelfth hole of Seton Croft's latest masterpiece in golf courses takes quite an unexpected direction. He tells people who criticize it that there are a lot of things to consider in country districts—rights of user, for instance. It only makes trouble to go against the older inhabitants of a place, when you're laying out a golf course, Croft says wisely.