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*A thrilling weird story of super-science and a conflict to the death with a genius that threatened the world*

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# THE SONG OF A MAD MINSTREL

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

I am the thorn in the foot, I am the blur in the sight;  
I am the worm at the root, I am the thief in the night.  
I am the rat in the wall, the leper that leers at the gate;  
I am the ghost in the hall, herald of horror and hate.

I am the rust on the corn, I am the smut on the wheat,  
Laughing man's labor to scorn, weaving a web for his feet.  
I am canker and mildew and blight, danger and death and decay;  
The rot of the rain by night, the blast of the sun by day.

I warp and wither with drouth, I work in the swamp's foul yeast;  
I bring the black plague from the south and the leprosy in from the east.  
I rend from the hemlock boughs wine steeped in the petals of dooms;  
Where the fat black serpents drowse I gather the Upas blooms.

I have plumbed the northern ice for a spell like frozen lead;  
In lost gray fields of rice, I have learned from Mongol dead.  
Where a bleak black mountain stands I have looted grisly caves;  
I have digged in the desert sands to plunder terrible graves.

Never the sun goes forth, never the moon glows red,  
But out of the south or the north, I come with the slaving dead.  
I come with hideous spells, black chants and ghastly tunes;  
I have looted the hidden hells and plundered the lost black moons.

There was never a king or priest to cheer me by word or look,  
There was never a man or beast in the blood-black ways I took.  
There were crimson gulfs unplumbed, there were black wings over a sea;  
There were pits where mad things drummed, and foaming blasphemy.

There were vast ungodly tombs where slimy monsters dreamed;  
There were clouds like blood-drenched plumes where unborn demons  
screamed.  
There were ages dead to Time, and lands lost out of Space;  
There were adders in the slime, and a dim unholy Face.

Oh, the heart in my breast turned stone, and the brain froze in my skull—  
But I won through, I alone, and I poured my chalice full  
Of horrors and dooms and spells, black buds and bitter roots—  
From the hells beneath the hells, I bring you my deathly fruits.