

The Magician of Leavenworth

by Donald Wilson

Editor's Introduction

The story of Hadad, a black Senegalese prison inmate of Fort Leavenworth Prison in Kansas, must be one of the strangest accounts in American literature. In three separate penitentiaries he was reported to have successfully committed suicide only to arise from the dead after being placed in the morgue. He claimed to have attended the universities of Carthage and Oxford and, by profession to be a Haitian Zombi priest. His hypnotic powers were astounding and he could influence guards to hand him their belts for his suicide attempts. He could control seizures of epileptics from a distance and cause the figures of the zodiac to rise in welts on his body. Seemingly, he could escape maximum security precautions whenever he wished. He would simply disappear en route from the back of a paddy wagon and appear again later knocking at the front door of the prison asking for admittance. Hadad's story is doubly valuable since it comes from a conventional psychiatrist with no disposition towards the occult and supernatural. Donald Powell Wilson was psychiatrist in the late 1940's at Fort Leavenworth and his "My Six Convicts" is an interesting account of his experiences at the prison. This short account of Hadad, taken from the book, is distinctive because it describes a phenomenal person with powers we know so very little about. "My Six Convicts" was originally published in 1951 by Rinehart and Company.

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Every solitary cell contains endemic drama. I learned this one Friday afternoon as my last year was rounding out. Gordon and I had completed our rounds of the psychopathic wards in the cell block, and went below into "The Hole" to see one of the prisoners, a Negro called Hadad. Thompson and Red, the guards on solitary row, reported that Hadad was acting up again; there had been nothing in his bucket for a week.

I commented that there could not be much from a piece of bread and a gill of water a day. Gordon agreed. But Thompson, he said, just didn't like a man who wouldn't urinate. "It ain't regular," he says.

Gordon had seen him the previous day. "He was in the pink. When I asked him about the empty bucket, he said in that damned Oxford accent of his that his guidance had been contrariwise. 'But a thousand pardons,' he said, 'if I have inconvenienced you by my spiritual ascendancy.' "

The hospital staff was interested in this psychopathic convict. He was a character right out of Sax Rohmer's inkpot. Weird tales surrounded his origin and history, as is always true of these prophets of magic. He claimed to be a Chaldean astrologer with direct lineage reaching back to 400 B.C. He also claimed to have been educated at the universities of Carthage and Oxford, and that by profession he was a Zombi priest from Haiti. Rumor connected him with voodoo rites and devil worship. He fed these rumors by refusing to deny them and offering his own embellishments. His few intimates informed us that he was part Hindu and part Senegalese.

He looked like the latter, large and magnificent in bearing. He was strikingly handsome in a statuesque way.

He had an enviable reputation in some of the large penitentiaries in the country for magic, hypnotism and escape artistry. He claimed friendship with Houdini. To the edification of the prisoners and the mystification of the guards, he was able to escape from handcuffs, strait jackets and cells almost at will.

A warden felt it was an ill wind that brought him Hadad. He completely disrupted the morale of prisons and as often as not left the wardens distrusting their own five senses. How could they be sure when he stood before them whether they were in the presence of his corporeal permeability or his spiritual extenuation? (to use Hadad's own fine words).

There were no such things as authentic records on Hadad. They were always disappearing or changing, especially when under his frequent sentences he was in transit from one institution to another.

He himself had been known to be lost in transit between penitentiaries. It was never a matter of his eluding capture. He was most cooperative. He simply would not be in the paddy wagon when it arrived. He would turn up anon, knocking on the main gate for admission, explaining that he had "gotten lost" on the way, or had been detained on business. He never announced his departures, but no one missed his arrivals. He had been seen by some of our staff in the foyer of a Kansas City theater at the close of a concert. In explanation he said, "It has been some time since I have been to a concert, and I felt it would be such a shame not to go. After all, I am just a short distance from the city."

The warden shouted that his sentence did not include theater privileges.

"But sir, I came back, as I always do," Hadad reasoned. "I have no intention of avoiding my sentence. Whom did I harm in doing this? No one even knew I was gone."

For this last impertinence the warden slapped him in solitary for fifteen days.

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As Gordon and I descended the stairs to solitary row, Thompson the guard, met us with relief. Hadad was a hot potato for any guard. We went directly to Hadad's cell. There was no response to our queries. Thompson opened the steel door and his flashlight revealed a black body hanging against the bars of the cell gate.

"Cut him down," ordered Gordon, "and get the lights on!"

Thompson summoned Red, the relief guard, to help him, and when the latter joined us Gordon gave him a quick look.

"What's holding your pants these days, Red?" Gordon asked.

Red's hands flew to his waist. Then he relaxed.

"You had me scared for a minute, Doc," he said. "I'm too old a hand to pass my belt around in solitary."

Thompson stared at Red. "Ain't that your belt around our late friend's neck?" he asked in a kind of croak.

Red looked at the corpse. "What do you mean, belt?" he demanded of Thompson. "Can't you tell a piece of rope from a belt?"

I looked at Gordon, and Gordon looked at me.

"Anyways, what do you mean, my belt?" continued Red. My belt's right here! Can't you see it?" He tapped his waist.

We all looked. He was hallucinating a belt which definitely was not there. Thompson lost his color, but not his tongue.

"The guy's nuts!" he screeched.

"I'm crazy!" Red was losing his patience. "How do you like that, Doc? Who's crazy around here, I ask you?"

"Tell you later," Gordon replied.

We did, when we brought him out of Hadad's post-hypnotic influence. Even then he remembered nothing except Hadad's getting his attention on his first round early that morning. He recognized his belt, of course. He was badly shaken by the fact that he could not remember being hypnotized. Later, when he learned the denouement of the whole affair, Red requested transfer from solitary row, if not from the penitentiary itself.

Upon superficial examination of the corpse Gordon pronounced Hadad dead.

"How long?" I asked.

"Only a few hours," he said. He told Thompson to put Hadad on ice, and as we left the basement he observed that the belt was not pulled tight enough to cause strangulation. "We'll see what the autopsy shows," he said.

With his background, Hadad was a psychiatric curiosity. His autopsy would be quite an event. It was delayed until Sunday when a consulting neurologist could be present to assist Doctor Fellows.

Sunday morning Fellows, the visiting neurologist, Gordon and I met in the morgue and gathered around the majestic body for the final disposition. Fellows and the neurologist agreed upon Fellows making the abdominal incision to excise the lungs and heart, and the neurologist's

removing the cap of the skull to get at the brain. The two surgeons put on their gloves, and Fellows was picking up the knife from the instrument table when we heard the soughing sound of a breath. Involuntarily we all looked at the corpse—and saw the ripple of Hadad's gleaming black muscles. He stirred, and slowly rose to a sitting position on the slab, as if he were propelled by invisible gears. He opened his eyes, and in his impeccable Oxford accent said, "Gentlemen, I would rather not, if you don't mind."

Nobody moved. Nobody could.

The knife slipped out of Fellows' limp grasp and clattered upon the concrete floor. Hadad slipped from the slab, stooped down, picked up the knife, laid it on the instrument table, sat on the edge of the slab, and asked for a drink of water.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God!" murmured Fellows, crossing himself quickly.

The neurologist tried to hide his shock, but he choked on a nervous cough. Gordon sucked in a startled breath and swore sharply. I began to breathe again at the sound of Gordon's voice.

There was not a man around the table who had not had some experience, either in his practice or in medical school, with catatonic trances, and who did not have some knowledge of Hadad's corporeal heterodoxy. Nevertheless, in spite of our scientific smugness, none of us were prepared for what had just happened. We had all thought Hadad was respectably dead.

Gordon committed Hadad to an unwilling guard with instructions that he be taken to the psychopathic ward for observation, and we men sat around in the morgue talking among ourselves. We did not feel like going back to Sunday golf. We reviewed our experiences with catalepsy mysticism, and extrasensory perception. Fellows, the religionist, made it quite plain that Hadad was my boy from that moment. That was how I wanted it; he would be an interesting study.

Catatonic trances lasting several days are not uncommon in institutions for the insane, in psychological and medical records, and in East Indian magic lore, in the latter of which it is always given an occult complexion. The laws of many states demand that the undertaker embalm a corpse to avoid burial alive, and because of the too-frequent spectacle of a corpse reviving in time to climb out of the coffin and disrupt his own funeral service. Literature is full of tales of a corpse being committed to the family burial vault, and of having the grieving cortege find that the bones of the last interred member of the family were no longer in his crypt, but in a pathetic heap at the vault door. These tales all have their counterpart in fact. It was not very long ago that an undertaker found himself in serious trouble when a ten-year-old boy who had not been embalmed, resuscitated himself during his last rites.

We all agreed that Hadad's three-day trance was not uncommon, but the fact that he had retained consciousness and memory during the trance, so that he could terminate it before Fellows incision was made, put him in select psychological company.

On Monday morning Gordon and I had Hadad brought to my office. One would have thought it was he who summoned us. He addressed us as if we were precocious schoolboys, saving us the banalities of questions.

"You are, of course, interested in the phenomena of the weekend. It was nothing. I did it only as a means of coming to your learned attention."

He paused to study Gordon's and my expressions.

"I can see," he resumed, "that, being scientists, you are naturally skeptics, that you must have proof. Very well. Gentlemen," he said, "you will concur with me that among the epileptics in the psychopathic ward there are several hopeless cases with severe brain deterioration, who suffer seizures daily?"

This was true.

And was it not true, he asked, that even with the use of drugs we still could not delay the seizure of a deteriorated epileptic for as long as three consecutive days?

This was true also. Delay for even a few hours was problematical among such cases.

He straightened in his chair and fixed his black eyes on us. His voice was quiet, intense.

"Gentlemen, as a demonstration of the use of mental telepathy in healing at a distance, I will delay all seizures in the psychopathic ward, including these deteriorated cases, from this hour, until the same hour on Thursday. For three days and three nights. As further proof of my control," he continued, "the seizures will resume on Thursday morning, beginning at this hour."

He looked from Gordon to me, and waited.

What he was proposing to do would be spectacular. He was committing himself to two phenomena: the abrupt cessation of seizures at one hour on one day, and the abrupt resuming of them at the same hour on another day.

"What about you, Hadad?" asked the practical Gordon. "Where will you spend the time between now and Thursday afternoon? You have a history of being A.W.O.L. on several occasions, you know."

Hadad smiled at the dig. "I will stay wherever you wish, sir. In my solitary cell, perhaps?"

"Perhaps is right," murmured Gordon, "What do you say, Wilson?"

I said I would be willing to let him launch his experiment with the epileptics, that even a three-day respite would be something for them.

Hadad inclined his head in thanks. "It is gratifying to find you two gentlemen accessible to the influence of the stars," he murmured. "I can teach you healing, mental telepathy, and psychic control of the body, even at a distance. I can teach you the mysteries of astrology. Not the astrology of the common Hindu and East Indian fakir, but cosmic somatic astrology."

Neither Gordon nor I spoke, a fact which Hadad may have interpreted as skepticism. I was not interested in hocus-pocus, but if underneath his hocus-pocus the man had integrity and altruism, and could add anything to the existing resources of hypnotic therapy, I would go with him as far as I could.

He soon resumed. "You will ask for proof again. My teaching credentials, if you will," he said, bowing to me. "Very well: in a few moments I shall again return to the astral plane. You learned men will call it a trance, catatonia, or even death. But I shall at all times be completely in possession of all my faculties. Gentlemen, I will cause the signs of the zodiac to appear on my body!"

He rose, removed his hospital robe and stood before us naked.

"You will find Aries appearing on my forehead, Cancer on my breast, Sagittarius on the thighs," he said. "All twelve signs of the Zodiac will appear on my body at the appropriate places."

He moved two desks together, lay down on them, and threw himself into rigidity and convulsions. The whole process took only a few minutes.

We bent over his body. It was difficult to establish erythema (red blotching or flushing of the skin) on a body so black, but unmistakable dermographia (raised, hive-like patches) began to appear. The wheals and welts assumed a shade that could, with a little latitude, be called red. Then, while we watched there appeared on forehead, breast and thighs the three signs he had mentioned, and elsewhere on his body the outlines of three others. The remaining six areas, even with generous Gestalt, could not honestly be called the signs of the Zodiac. The phenomenon, however, lay in the fact that without external irritation of the skin, and at will, he had produced localized, controlled dermographia.

Gordon checked the quiet black body, and for the second time in three days pronounced him dead by all tests. There was no stethoscopic heart sound, no breath on the mirror, no corneal reflex.

"Let's see if he will bleed." For this test Gordon punctured one of the veins in Hadad's wrist. As in death, there was not sufficient blood pressure to cause a flow of blood.

"There's everything here but putrefaction," Gordon said, without further conjecture about the state of things in Denmark. "What about these other signs, Professor?"

"I can't honestly say they look like signs of the Zodiac," I said.

At that moment Hadad relaxed his convulsive posture and resumed his precise and patient speech. Our untutored eyes, he said, would properly envision the appropriate astral signs in detail, if we would obtain a large magnifying glass.

This was no ordinary trance or simple suspended animation. It was beyond the usual psychotic catatonia or catalepsy. This was the second time Hadad had retained both consciousness and memory while in a trance, and had terminated it at will. It was not a statistical accident.

While Gordon went for the glass Hadad again induced rigidity, which he maintained until the séance was over. The glass brought out two more signs of reasonable credibility.

Later I asked Hadad how he could remain conscious to the extent of knowing what was taking place, and of speaking to us when he was in such deep trance as to be considered medically dead.

"Suspended animation, Doctor; it is simple," he said.

But it wasn't. The best exponents of the occult cannot, or will not, iterate their own powers. His explanation trailed off into gibberish and superstition.

We watched the epileptics closely night and day in the next seventy-two hours. It was as Hadad had said it would be. There were no seizures in the ward, even among the cases of deterioration. Hadad was kept in his solitary cell, and paid no detectable visits to the psychopathic ward. On Thursday morning the tragic hell of the epileptic broke upon the ward.

Hadad had called this a demonstration of mental telepathy. But inasmuch as he had spent the twenty-four hours from Sunday morning to Monday morning in the psychopathic ward, it was much more probable that the delay of seizures was the result of post-hypnotic suggestion given by Hadad while he was still with the patients from Sunday to Monday. It would have been simple for a hypnotist of Hadad's skill to hypnotize the patients during those twenty-four hours, giving them post-hypnotic amnesia, so that they would not remember being hypnotized. But it demanded hypnosis of a very superior order.

Gordon and I admitted to ourselves that, though science might explain much of Hadad's magic in terms of psychological phenomenon, science was not reproducing it on Hadad's scale. We might explain what his magic was, but, with all our training and knowledge, we could not yet interrupt a deteriorated epileptic's seizures.

We were struck with the incongruity of the fact that here was modern science epitomized in a research hospital with the last word in equipment, and with the best consultants in the country only five telephone minutes away. But no x-ray machine could penetrate, no microscope reveal, nor surgery excise, no cosmic ray illuminate, no test tube break down the rationale of a black man in a dungeon five hundred feet away, quietly working the ancient mysteries of the world outside the body and the senses, quietly reflecting the ancient philosophic victory of mind in the impingement of the unknown and feared upon the known.

We hoped that Hadad might be a man of sufficient character and integrity to work with us in illuminating the unknown and the feared in the "No Man's Land" of the mind. We listened in the weeks that followed for some sign of integrity while he engaged us in dissertations on hypnosis, yogiism, telekinesthesia, mental telepathy and occultism in general. He knew most of the authentic literature in these fields.

He made quite a point of the symbolism of his three-day death and resurrection, which he repeated at our request. He explicitly pointed out that from his Friday afternoon suicide to the Sunday morning autopsy was, as the Orientals reckon, three days. The implication was clearly that Christ had nothing on him.

We were not learning much, beyond his strong sense of his own destiny. He was greater than Mohammed, greater than Christ. One day when we began to weary of his egoism, I asked him why, with all his powers of escape and healing, he found himself in penitentiary.

"Thank you, Doctor. I have been waiting for you to ask. You see, gentlemen, I am here on a mission. It is, in fact, a dual mission. Both are good, although one is a mission of death and the other of life."

Here it comes, I thought. Gordon and I offered him only our combined acute silence, so he continued.

"I am destined to wander throughout the world seeking two excessively evil and malign spirits, and to relieve them of their corporeal anatomy."

Gordon glanced at me with raised brows. Hadad smiled amusedly. "No, no, gentlemen, not you. I have, in fact, already found one of those spirits, and he is not."

Murder in the name of God. I was sorry to hear it.

"The other mission is to find two men upon whom I can bestow my mantle of therapy, the like of which has not been known since Christ. It has been revealed to me that you two gentlemen are the worthy successors."

That was one time Gordon and I didn't look at each other. We both looked at Hadad.

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In addition to our own observations and our conferences with Hadad, we conducted some investigations into his past. Reports from two penitentiaries confirmed his boasts that in each he had committed suicide and that all recognized tests for death had been positive. The doctors, always willing to admit new evidence, had quickly revised their diagnosis to schizophrenic catatonia when on one occasion a watchman in the morgue found the stiff flexing his muscles.

We also found verification of a murder charge, but it was not the murder of which he had told us, or those on which he later elaborated.

One stubborn piece of data stood on record. At one time, perhaps when he was in search of one of the two malign spirits, he had been a member of a famous gang that was terrorizing the Southwest. He was inside the turtleback of a car when the police closed in and riddled it with machine gun bullets. It careened into a cornfield, and Hadad was extracted from the sieve unharmed.

His time was not yet, Hadad explained to us. "I found it expedient to deflect the bullets from the anatomical headquarters of my spirit."

"What do you make of Hadad's anatomical headquarters?" Cordon asked me later.

"I don't know," I said lamely, "I wasn't there."

As the days passed Hadad became increasingly aware that we were more curious than convinced, and he began to press the matter of our succession to The Mantle.

"Since my cosmic mission is almost completed," he said, "and I shall soon depart this sphere, I wish to impart to you these priceless therapeutic secrets in an initiation, a blood rite."

He told us that according to his Order, the rite must take place at astral midnight, which was two o'clock in the morning according to our time, and in the solitary cell which had been the scene of his "death."

Gordon and I wondered between ourselves whose blood would be used for this rite, and exactly how much, and if something beside his mantle would descend on us at astral midnight?

In his last appeal, Hadad assured us that after the initiation we would never be the same again. We would be, among other things, ageless and timeless.

This we could believe.

The prospect of the midnight rite brought to my mind Gordon's words on my first day at the penitentiary. "A little honest fear's a good thing around here."

Hadad was many times a murderer. His activities as the "fingerman" of the terrorizing gang meant that he had used his occult skills nefariously to draw the gang's victims out of hiding, whereupon he liquidated them.

Further, although he was a superior exponent of his profession, he was also a small-time showman. With his lofty sense of personal destiny, it seemed incongruous that he should spend his time turning up missing for the amusement and consternation of credulous prison populations.

Although in his personal relation to Gordon and me he was always cooperative, deferential and charming, he was all these almost to a fault. However charming he was, he lost me when I learned of his murder mission, and when he invited us to a blood rite. I had too much respect for his ability as a hypnotist to put myself under his influence. Hadad was not above

seeking added prestige by discrediting medicine and psychology in a practical joke. Had we placed ourselves in his charge, he could have left us hypnotized in the dungeon, to wake at the morning cell count unable to explain our stuporous presence to the guards or the administration. Or, having hypnotized us, he could have incapacitated us physically or crippled us neurologically. He could have left us mentally dissociated. We could have awakened from the trance insane. He could have given us amnesia for our scientific background and training, and left us wild-eyed exponents of the occult. We had no way of knowing what he might do. He might have killed us.

When Gordon and I declined the Mantle, and when there was no further apparent value in studying his case, Hadad went cooperatively back to the psychopathic ward, and was finally absorbed again into the general prison population.

As has been said, Hadad's parapsychology can hardly be posed as rare in the annals of medicine and psychosomatics. However, the following phenomena in his case were unusual:

- The uninterrupted function of consciousness and memory during his catatonic and cataleptic trances.
- His control of the depth and termination of his trance.
- His controlled, autonomous dermagraphia in producing the signs of the Zodiac upon his body.
- His post-hypnotic therapy with the deteriorated epileptics of the psychopathic ward, who in our knowledge were beyond hope.

In explanation of Hadad's metapsychics, psychology would say that his catatonic trances were induced by autohypnosis; and that his disappearances from paddy wagons and cells, his presence at the concert, and his getting Red's belt to effect a fake suicide were accomplished by his generous endowment in escape artistry and contortionism, and by hypnotizing whoever stood between him and freedom at any given time: a keeper, a guard, an attendant; giving them amnesia for the incident in post-hypnotic suggestion.

He was a magnificent hypnotist. Gordon and I were only sorry he could not have passed on to us his skills in some other way than in a blood rite at astral midnight in a dungeon.

Regarding his corporeal impermeability when he was fired upon in the turtleback, I have no further light. I don't know, I wasn't there.

I hope it will be something more spectacular than the common cold that finally successfully invades Hadad's charming anatomical headquarters. As I remember, he *did* have a highly susceptible upper respiratory tract...