INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of People Created *Drummer*Millions of People Read *Drummer*

CHASING DRUMMER

In the Golden Age of Leather, It Took a Village to Raise a Magazine

Toward an Autobiography of Drummer

"My Heart's a Drummer!"
—Barbara Streisand,
"Don't Rain on My Parade"

This book of investigative journalism is an eyewitness oral history about a soon-to-be-lost generation of a once-important subculture of gay pioneers.

This is a gay Origin Story.

This is a guide not a gospel.

Drummer was a first draft of leather history.

This popular culture memoir about *Drummer* is a second draft in nineteen fluid chapters of interwoven eyewitness testimony. As in Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* or Lawrence Durrell's novels in *The Alexandria Quartet*, what may seem like repetition is the quantum build of testimony from many *Drummer* eyewitness insiders experiencing the same things and coming away with differing truths, even as, over time, each is also changing his or her own memory's spiraling point of view. What happened depends on whom you ask. I hope this *frisson* encourages readers to peruse the rich text and fire up their own critical thinking. This is oral history about the institutional memory of *Drummer* written down for remembrance. This is memoir ricocheting off Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography*.

Readers may understand the huge task of writing history that includes the melodrama of so many of our own lives lived in the first liberated decades of gay life and gay publishing after Stonewall. The legacy of *Drummer* has many sides and to ignore one or the other because it is untidy is to

subtract from the total. Willie Walker, the founder of the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society wrote: "Drummer was a center of a whole cultural phenomenon....and its editor Jack Fritscher is a prolific writer who since the late sixties has helped document the gay world and the changes it has undergone....if queer people do not preserve our own history, most of it will simply disappear."

Drummer helped create the very culture it reported on. *Drummer* was a revolutionary idea in motion. In our leather archetribe, *Drummer* vicariously portrayed our desires to organize our thoughts to inform our practices.

Drummer published 214 issues from June 1975 to April 1999, and quit business on Folsom Fair weekend, September 30, 1999. A stack of 214 issues of Drummer is a coffee-table sculpture 3.5 feet tall weighing 120 pounds. Laid flat, top-to-bottom, Drummer stretches sixty-four yards: two-thirds of the length of a football field.

Drummer was the autobiography of us all, or at least a lot of us, written and drawn and photographed by many of us to entertain the rest of us from 1975 to its end in 1999.

At a rough ninety pages per issue, *Drummer* comprised a total 20,000 pages of advocacy journalism created by hundreds of writers, artists, photographers, and designers including even more thousands of revealing autobiographical Personals ads written by readers, with advertisers displaying their own commercial wares as pop-culture signifiers of the times. It took a village to fill *Drummer*. It took the Village People to act it out.

A group photo of every person who helped create *Drummer* would rival the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

So how does this "J. Alfred Prufrock" dare to eat a peach, and wear my leather trousers rolled?

As its founding San Francisco editor-in-chief for nearly three years (March 17, 1977-December 31, 1979) and its most frequent contributor of writing and photography during twenty-four years, I enjoyed backstage access that over time made me one of many eyewitnesses of its evolving institutional history under the three publishers, John Embry (1975-1986), Anthony DeBlase (1986-1992), and Martijn Bakker (1992-1999). Keeping notes during 24 years, I observed *Drummer* for 2.5 times longer than Embry who owned *Drummer* for only 11 years, and fought with it for 13 years; and 4 times longer than DeBlase who struggled with *Drummer* for 6 years, and Bakker who killed *Drummer* in an assisted suicide that took 7 years.

Editing monthly *Drummer* daily in real time was a wild literary ride in gay popular culture when readers demanded authenticity and truth in reporting the emergence of BDSM rites and rights. Near the end of *Drummer*'s

first five years at the end of 1979, by chance of good fortune, I had edited half of the *Drummer* issues in existence.

SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT

"What rollicking fun...to reopen old friendships and even some ancient hostilities of that golden age. To be a bystander to those vibrant talents and hear again those voices.... Can you imagine the pleasure in being able to put one's arms around some of those people, just like you maybe should have done back then when they were still around and available?"

"What happened in 1977 could fill a book. We hired A. Jay's friend, Jack Fritscher, as editor-in-chief, and bought a building on Harriet Street."

—John Embry, *Manifest Reader* 33 (1997) and *Drummer* 188 (September 1995), 20th Anniversary Issue

With a 42,000 copy press run for each issue in the 1970s, and with a pass-along rate of at least one reader in addition to each subscriber, approximately 80,000 people handled each issue of *Drummer* for an estimated total nearing twenty million people. The mobbed Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco hosts 100,000 leather guests every September. Even if publisher Embry, the self-appointed antagonist in this history, exaggerated his claim of 42,000 monthly copies and did a press run of only 21,000 copies, each issue of *Drummer* would have passed through the hands of nearly 50,000 people. In gay book publishing, 5,000 copies sold is considered a best seller.

Drummer was a people's magazine that helped invent modern gay publishing as we know it. First came the magazines in the 1970s and then the book publishers in the 1980s. More eyes have likely read one issue of Drummer than have read any one book by any deeply established GLBT author on the top hundred list of best-sellers in the gay literary canon, including James Baldwin, John Rechy, Rita Mae Brown, Edmund White, and Larry Kramer.

A book is published once while a magazine renews its lively connection to readers monthly. That's why, having been a young and tenured university professor and a founding member of the American Popular Culture Association in 1968, I added the tag line to the masthead of *Drummer* 23 (July 1978): "The American Review of Gay Popular Culture."

Drummer was a home and a home run. For thirty years, among the millions of leatherfolk in North America and Europe, there was hardly a player alive who had not heard of or read *Drummer*. Years after *Drummer* closed, readers continue to report that as teenagers they had managed to find *Drummer*, even in Iowa and Arkansas, and that the assertive primer that was *Drummer* had mentored, shaped, and emboldened their gender and kink identities. There was political empowerment in erotic representation.

MARCHING ORDERS Printed on the Contents Page in every issue except 4-12

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

-Henry David Thoreau, Walden: Or, Life in the Woods (1854)

The liberal beauty of *Drummer* was its social permissiveness anchored in marching to one's own drummer. Self-reliance was the *Drummer* philosophy. *Drummer* was descriptive—not prescriptive—about leather behavior. Descriptive *Drummer* was non-judgmental in simply reporting how grass-roots leather lives were actually lived without commandments. Even though the *Drummer* editorial voice was a "Top" seducing subscribers who mostly liked to read from a deliciously overpowered "bottom" point of view, *Drummer* was no domineering Dutch uncle demanding, "Thou Shalt" or "Thou Shalt Not." *Drummer* never prescribed that there was a politically correct way to live leather because while there may be rules around sex, nobody's sure what they are.

Drummer was never Old Guard or New Guard.

Drummer was always Avant Garde.

SINGING SONGS FROM A TIME SOME DANCE TO REMEMBER

For those aching with a personal nostalgia for the Auld Lang Syne of Leather, think of where you were when you first read *Drummer*.

For those born in 1980 as the speeding Titanic 1970s cruised into the iceberg of HIV, you were nineteen when *Drummer* closed; but if you have intellectual or emotional or erotic curiosity about the way we were, and how high we flew, during the last twenty-five years of the twentieth-century,

consider how the black-box flight recorder I have recovered from the take-off, cruising altitude, and crash of *Drummer* may reveal how *Drummer* shaped the gay popular culture of leather and kink for the twenty-first century.

David "Trooper" Vargo Mr. Florida Drummer 1992, and International Mr. Drummer, First Runner-Up

Drummer was my bible, my textbook for Life. I still have every issue in my possession (safely tucked away in an air-controlled storage unit). Yes, there are pages that are covered in notes, and some pages are still sticky. Some pages have tears and rips and holes. But so do I. I learned how to be a Man from Drummer. I learned how to "play" from Drummer. I learned how to conduct myself as a Leatherman from Drummer, and most importantly I discovered who I was and who I continue to be from the pages of Drummer magazine. It came at a time when I was just coming out not only as a gay man but as a Leatherman. It all happened at once. I was young and impressionable, and Drummer resonated deep within my psyche, a mystical union between a boy and the printed page. I followed it to the letter. And when it died, I mourned its loss like the death of a best old friend. Thank you, Jack, in many ways, you raised me.

—David Vargo, Mr. Florida Drummer 1992, International Mr. Drummer First Runner-Up, June 20, 2012

Richard Hunter, Owner, Mr. S Leather Co. San Francisco

Most of us may never have had the introduction to this Leather scene had it not been for John Embry and the Original *Drummer* Magazine....I know it's how I first realized I wasn't alone in all my perverted fantasies. Finding that *Drummer* magazine on a news stand in New Orleans in 1981 changed my life....and you can see where it all led for me [into a stylish leather goods business serving the community]. Tens of thousands of guys worldwide read *Drummer* every month and felt a bonding connection to each other because of it.

—Richard Hunter, Owner, *Mr. S Leather Co. Newsletter*, October 13, 2010

Erotic writing begins with one stroke of the pen and ends with many strokes of the penis. Paying my dues while editor-in-chief, I had by the end of 1979 contributed 147 pieces of writing and 266 photographs under my own byline or my pen names for writing, using "Denny Sargent" and "Eric van Meter" once each, and for photography, "Larry Olson" once, and "David Sparrow" and "Sparrow Photography" many times, as well as beginning in the mid-1980s, "Palm Drive Video." Estimating that each ninety-page issue of *Drummer* equaled a nearly four-hundred-page trade paperback book, I edited 942 pages of *Drummer* 18-33, the equivalent of a 3,778-page book.

Following the popular 1960s style of the New Journalism of American writers Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, and George Plimpton who immersed themselves in a subject or an experience to write what they knew with authenticity and authority, *Drummer* created, coached, validated, and enabled the authentic voices of many leatherfolk who, freely outing themselves as eyewitnesses inside the kink BDSM scene, reported what they knew in their grass-roots and first-person you-are-there articles, stories, drawings, and photographs.

"The *Drummer* Salon" was so named by member Samuel Steward/ Phil Andros who was part of Gertrude Stein's Salon. Included variously among many talents identified with *Drummer* were Jeanne Barney, Robert Mapplethorpe, Tom of Finland, Al Shapiro, Larry Townsend, Etienne, Anthony DeBlase, A. Jay, Rex, Chuck Arnett, Mark I. Chester, Joseph W. Bean, Lou Thomas, Bill Ward, Mikal Bales, David Sparrow, Steven Saylor, Old Reliable David Hurles, Domino, Jim Kane, Roger Earl, Patrick Califia, Hank Trout, Guy Baldwin, Jim Wigler, Olaf, Rick Leathers, Judy Tallwing McCarthy, The Hun, Fred Halsted, Robert Opel, George Birimisa, Tim Barrus, Rick Castro, Mr. Marcus Hernandez, Rick Leathers, Jim Stewart, Wickie Stamps, and Robert Davolt.

FOUNDING LA EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JEANNE BARNEY, WOMEN IN *DRUMMER*, AND GENDER

At Stonewall in 1969, gay character changed. At the founding of *Drummer* in 1975, leather character changed. In that first decade of gay liberation after Stonewall, homosexuality itself changed from not daring to speak its name to shouting out its many erotic identities.

Drummer led the gay liberation stampede out of the closet with transformational erotica. To write about the new psychology as well as emerging sex acts previously unnamed in polite society, we introduced or created new images and new concepts, and coined new vocabulary that advanced the gay

cultural conversation with words like *homomasculinity* with its complement *homofemininity*.

Starting with Jeanne Barney, the founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief, *Drummer* began as a men's magazine, but it was never separatist. Even as our core subscribers identified themselves in the Personals ads as masculine men whose point of desire was masculinity itself, *Drummer* continued to evolve editorially to include in its innate reader-responsiveness leatherwomen and leatherfolk of diverse gender-fluid identities in our leather archetribe. Of its two founding activist editors, Barney showcased gender-bender drag in *Drummer* 9, and I authored the first article on women in *Drummer* in my feature essay on Society of Janus founder Cynthia Slater in *Drummer* 27.

In fact, much of *Drummer*'s early tone came from the generous heart and inventive mind of Jeanne Barney (issues 1-11) whose brave eyewitness testimony in this book is essential and brilliantly honest. Barney envisioned the Los Angeles infant *Drummer* as a kind of *Evergreen Review*. I thought of the San Francisco teenaged *Drummer* as the gay love child of the New Journalism in *Esquire* and the straight pulp S&M of men's mid-century adventure magazines featuring bondage, kink, and sex, like *Argosy*, *Saga*, *Soldier of Fortune*, and *True: The Men's Magazine*.

Barney, whose relation to Embry caused her to want to quit during production of issue two, edited only those first eleven issues before she split from the contentious publisher whose personal *Drummer* Blacklist bullied contributors, destroyed reputations, and triggered shameful partisan infighting that, to this day, causes covetous and abusive separatist elites to continue to duke out what leather persons or leather groups own leather culture which is too diverse to be claimed by anyone.

Even so, for many years, Pat Califia, who transitioned into Patrick Califia, was an associate editor and wrote a popular and educational monthly pan-sexual advice column. Cynthia Slater, co-founder of the female-piloted Society of Janus, was often consulted, interviewed, and reported on importantly. Anne Rice, who, despite feminist fantasy, never wrote for *Drummer*, was represented three times with brief excerpts from her novels. Frequent contributor Judy Tallwing McCarthy, International Ms. Leather 1987, wrote about the politics of gender in the landmark issue, *Drummer* 100, and her "Gay Birds" S&M cartoons ran for more than a year. The second female managing editor and editorial director was gothic novelist and filmmaker Wickie Stamps who bravely fashioned *Drummer* issues 183 to 208 against all odds during its crash in the 1990s.

Susie Bright, founding editor of the lesbian magazine *On Our Backs*, wrote, "The gay men who edited *Drummer* were our mentors in many ways:

John Rowberry, John Preston, and Jack Fritscher." (Susie Bright's Journal, "A Brief History of On Our Backs, 1984-1991," November 15, 2011)

Leather pioneer and historian Viola Johnson, founder of the resource-rich Carter/Johnson Leather Library, recalled a delightful gender friendly story in her *C/JLL Newsletter*, March 2011, about kink-identified women in Greenwich Village discovering *Drummer* in the 1970s during what happened to be my three-year tenure as editor-in-chief creating issues 18 to 33, March 1977 to December 31, 1979.

In the...1970s, Jill and I sporadically read hand-me-down copies of *Drummer*. Yes, I was a woman married to another woman, but I still loved looking at the male form. Beauty is beauty regardless of sex or gender. I knew the date and the time *Drummer* would hit the only newsstand in the Village that sold it....I couldn't wait to get my hands on the latest adventures of Mr. Benson and his slave Jamie. Then one night after a Eulenspiegel (TES) meeting a group of us went out to eat and one of the dominants at the table asked if anyone would loan her their *Drummer*.... Within a few minutes all the women at the table, dominant and submissive were talking about *Drummer* and what they liked or read in the magazine. We were all surprised to know that there were other women who read *Drummer* also. It didn't matter that *Drummer* was a gay men's magazine. We read *Drummer*, learned from it and enjoyed it.

MAGICAL THINKING, TOM OF FINLAND, AND THE ALGORITHM OF THE MARLBORO MAN

Masturbation is magical thinking. So, initially, what we did to make *Drummer* pulsate hard was add realism and availability to the spank bank fantasies of one-handed readers who wanted a virile magazine that made the frontiers of newly liberated sex seem possible, accessible, and boundless. What they wanted they found in the homomasculine media image of themselves as newly minted leathermen come alive in the *cinema verite* stories and the *reality-show* photos and drawings reflecting what gay men really did at night.

Drummer changed the homophobic image of queers into the Platonic Ideal of the masculine-identified new gay man. And the algorithm of the new label "Leatherman" went viral in American popular culture, films, and fashion.

The Tom of Finland Foundation, headed by Durk Dehner, declared that "*Drummer*, groundbreaking for its time, set precedence for all homomasculine representation to come."

Years ago when I was thirty-seven, I arrived at *Drummer* with seventeen years' experience in magazine publishing. In the Swinging Sixties of Andy Warhol and Pop Art, I had taken my cue from one of the most successful, influential, and erotic popular-culture advertising campaigns in history. I mindfully took scissors and cut dozens of Marlboro Man ads from magazines and glued the iteration of icons, like a meaningful repetition of Warhol Soup Cans, into studied meditation collages to reveal their masturbatory essence. So, in the 1970s, I based the algorithm of "the Platonic Ideal of the Leatherman" in *Drummer* on that quintessentially American image of the self-reliant Marlboro Man whose rugged existential appeal as homomasculine avatar was his cool independence because he marched to no drummer but his own.

WARHOL, SHILTS, KEPNER: THE TRADITION OF BOOKS WRITTEN ABOUT THE INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY OF GAY MAGAZINES

Knowledge accumulates. We each contribute our bit, and history selects what evolution needs to enlighten itself. During the twenty years of sleuthing, interviewing, studying, researching, and writing for this book, and its companion volume, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* (2008), I found good company in several books written specifically about the institutional memory of magazines, especially *Interview* magazine editor Bob Colacello's *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, Mark Thompson's and Randy Shilts' *The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, and the great Jim Kepner's *Rough News, Daring Views: 1950s Pioneer Gay Press Journalism* (1998), a memoir of politics, philosophy, and personalities inside gay publishing at *ONE* magazine that led to the founding of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives in virtually the same way that *Drummer*, steered by its publisher DeBlase in concert with pioneer photographer Chuck Renslow, led to the founding of the Leather Archives & Museum.

Because testimony can be hearsay without corroboration from a second witness, the fact-checked investigative journalism in this book is constructed 1) on the testimony of dozens of eyewitnesses, to whom I am forever grateful, as well as 2) on the internal evidence found in *Drummer* itself, and 3) in the journals, diaries, letters, photographs, interviews, recordings, magazines, and newspapers in the gay popular culture and leather archives my

husband Mark Hemry and I, following the advice of the American Popular Culture Association, have collected and curated since the early 1960s.

My labor of love is not the last word on *Drummer* because *Drummer* is as mysterious a creation as the "Mona Lisa" whose creator and smile are as enigmatic as *Drummer*'s own creators and mystique. Each artwork has penetrated cultural consciousness. So many mysteries remain inside *Drummer*'s acculturations of journalism, fiction, poetry, stage plays, film scripts, art, and photography, that even I who have read every page, can only begin to introduce the *Drummer* Origin Story of who created what with whom, where, when, how, and, maybe, why.

Riffing on closeted poet T. S. Eliot's existential gay man, "J. Alfred Prufrock" who dares question everything, I penned these analogous lines to explain my concerns and motivations for the Sisyphean challenge of writing this book.

Sometimes iconoclasm is a good thing.
Sometimes a memoir is a portrait
in a fun house mirror.
Sometimes it pays to investigate
where truth lies.
Sometimes it's wise to dare
to wear one's trousers rolled,
and to eat a peach,
because in the empty rooms
the queerfolk come and go
speaking of Michael and Angelo.

Against all odds, *Drummer* survived twenty-four years of stress not only from mismanagement, but also from censorship, plague, and politics that, in one early plot twist of bad luck becoming good luck, got the *Drummer* staff and forty subscribers arrested by the LAPD in 1976, causing the ten-monthold infant *Drummer* to move from disaster in Los Angeles to destiny in San Francisco. *Gay Pioneers* is a living history of leatherfolk written in human blood tattooed on tribal skin.

ARCHIVING DRUMMER

Drummer is the Rosetta Stone of leather heritage.

"Who'd a thunk it?" Vanilla author Andrew Halloran snapped in Christopher Street, Issue 231, November 1995. "Who'd a thunk that one

day back issues of *Drummer* would be displayed in glass cases at a library like this (the John Hay Library at Brown University)?"

Or that *Drummer* would be represented in the permanent collections of many institutions including the John Hay, the Getty Museum and Research Center, the Kinsey Institute, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society Museum, the Leslie-Lohman Museum in New York, the Leather Archives & Museum of Chicago, and the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California.

Or that *Drummer* would be featured fearlessly and prominently on screen as a driving cultural force in Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato's award-winning HBO documentary, *Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures* (2016).

HAIL AND FAREWELL

The rise and fall of *Drummer* happened during the best of times after Stonewall and the worst of times after the onslaught of AIDS.

My writer-hero Jack Kennedy, for whom I campaigned and voted in 1960, was president for only thirty-four months of accomplishment while I, as editor-in-chief for thirty-three months, just before the news of HIV, was also granted a once-in-a-lifetime gift to shape the monthly "leather community diary" that was *Drummer* during that exciting first decade of gay liberation when masculine gay men first uncloseted a sex-positive homomasculine identity before Anita Bryant's fundamentalist culture war, and politically correct Marxism, and separatist feminism, and killer plague ripped at the human heart of gay society.

"I know what I have given you. I do not know what you have received."
—Antonio Porchia, Argentinian poet, 1886-1968

I like to think I authored some good writing of my own in *Drummer*, and more, that, as editor-in-chief, I encouraged and nurtured and published some of the next generation of beginning writers in that first decade of liberated neophytes learning the self-shaping words of self-identifying sex.

I enjoy dancing to remember the authors, artists, and photographers who came to me with their first uncloseted work in their hopeful hands, and the looks on their faces when I accepted them for their first publication. I

thank them all as much as I thank the readers who sent so many wonderful letters to the editor.

Because history is *Rashomon* in its many points of view, I've written three books around the richly diverse *Drummer* experience including this one, plus *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, and *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*.

Oh! Allegedly. I must mention allegedly.

In the vertigo of memory, I wrote these eyewitness objective notes and subjective opinions about all these public personalities, and the public lives they led, *allegedly*, because in my finite limits I can only analyze events, manuscripts, and how we people all seemed when we were thrown together, and not the true hearts of persons.

In a sense, writing *Drummer*'s institutional history keeps these 20th-century gay pioneers and players alive in a kind of group eulogy. As a survivor of the Titanic 1970s, I enjoy sharing my own nostalgia for that golden age of gay sex and *Drummer*. While nothing compares to Proust nibbling on his madeleine, I love the smell of old magazines.

It's too sentimental, but, sometimes at night, sitting by the fire, nearing eighty, I love the feel of *Drummer* in my hands while leafing through the stories and articles and photographs of how we were when we were creating the way we were before things fell apart.

What heroes, What villains, What fun.

I adore Jeanne Barney.

I cherish Tony DeBlase.

I'd still shake John Embry's hand.

On his eightieth birthday in 2010, I sent him roses.

Jack Fritscher San Francisco

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The thoughts and opinions expressed and alleged in this book are those of the individual contributors alone and do not necessarily reflect my views any more than my own alleged opinions and allegations reflect theirs. To all of them, especially the one and only Jeanne Barney, founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief of *Drummer*, I remain forever grateful.

"Flash back, not too far back, to one of our favorite resources:

**Drummer Magazine."*

—Leather Archives & Museum of Chicago, July 9, 2012

"Drummer was map of leather culture.

Fritscher and his book are unabashed and uninhibited tour guides."

—Chuck Renslow, Founder, Chicago Leather Archives & Museum, and of the International Mr. Leather Contest (IML)

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"Proust was transported by his tea and his petite madeleine.

I love the damp yellow smell of old magazines that take me back in time to the way we were."

—Jack Fritscher

"A shady business never yields a sunny life."

—B. C. Forbes, founding publisher, Forbes Magazine

DRUMER

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JACK FRITSCHER ON ROBERT

MAPPLETHORPE

"INTELLIGENT PEOPL
MAKING EXCELLED

FAKIR

MUSAFAR

EXPLORING THE SEXUAL-SPIRITUAL FRONTIER

MEN WITH NO NAME

PART II OF THE DUNGEONS OF EUROPE

THE MEN OF

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