

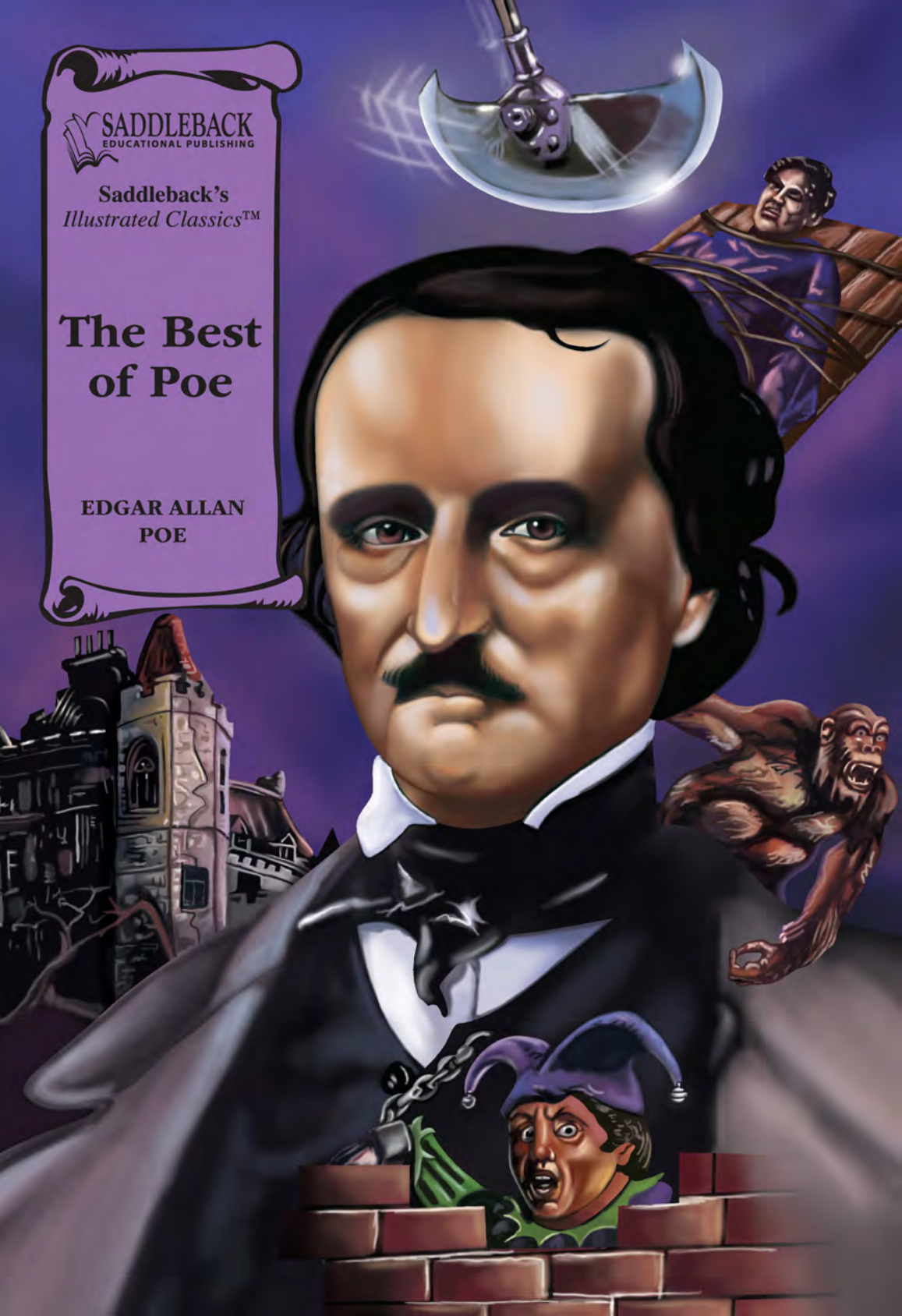


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The Best of Poe

EDGAR ALLAN
POE



Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston in 1809 and is considered to be one of the most famous figures in American literary history. His works included poetry, literary criticisms, as well as short stories. He is known for writings that were morbid and bizarre.

His father and mother were traveling actors. Poe was orphaned at the age of two. He became the ward of John Allan, a Richmond merchant. John Allan supported Poe when he enrolled at the University of Virginia. But Poe was addicted to gambling and ran up huge gambling debts. When Mr. Allan refused to pay them, Poe was forced to leave the University.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1827 and entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. He excelled in the study of languages but was expelled in 1831 for neglecting his duties. At this time Mr. Allan disowned him. His entire life Poe behaved erratically, making it difficult for him to hold down a steady job.

Some of his well-known poems are "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee." He published many short stories as well as poems. "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Gold Bug," and "The Fall of the House of Usher" are well-known short stories written by Poe. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is considered to be the first modern detective story.

He died in 1849 at the age of forty after several years of poor health. He suffered from periodic alcoholism complicated by drug use.

Edgar Allan Poe

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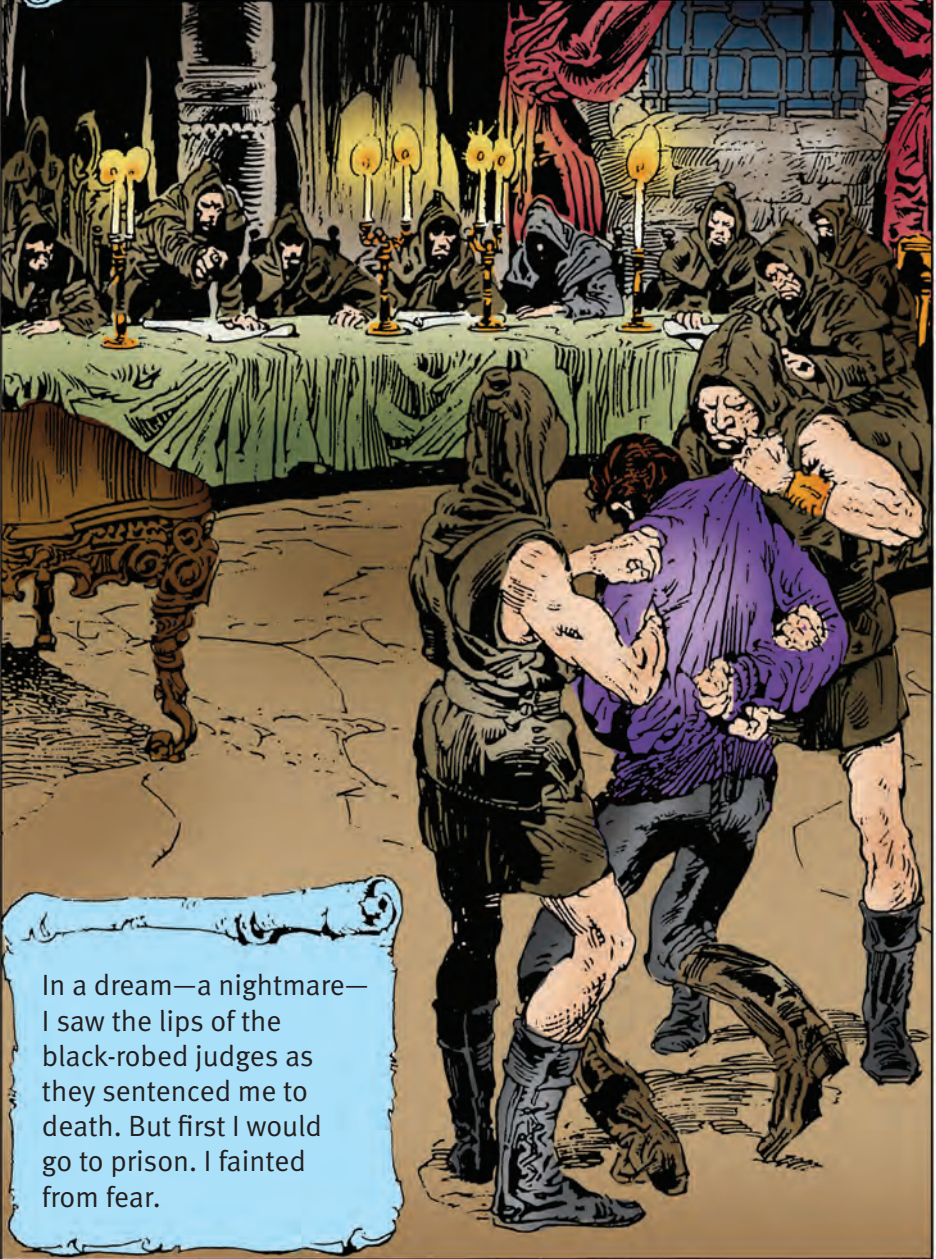
The Pit and the Pendulum 9 – 16

The Fall of the House of Usher 17 – 26

The Cask of Amontillado 27 – 32

The Murders in the Rue Morgue 33 – 63

The Pit and the Pendulum



In a dream—a nightmare—I saw the lips of the black-robed judges as they sentenced me to death. But first I would go to prison. I fainted from fear.

There were shadow memories of tall figures that lifted and carried me down....



At length I came to. I lay on my back in the dark. My hands were no longer tied.



Without opening my eyes I reached out my hand. It lay upon something damp and hard.

I was afraid to open my eyes, afraid that I would see—nothing! I tried, and it was so! There was only the dark.



I leaped to my feet and reached wildly in all directions. I was afraid I would feel the walls of a tomb!



At length my hands found a wall, smooth, slimy, and cold. I walked around it trying to figure out the size of my prison.

The ground was slippery. Soon I stumbled and fell.



Too tired to get up again, I remained there and fell asleep.



Awakening, I felt bread and water beside me. I ate and drank eagerly. Then I decided to explore further. I would try to cross my prison.

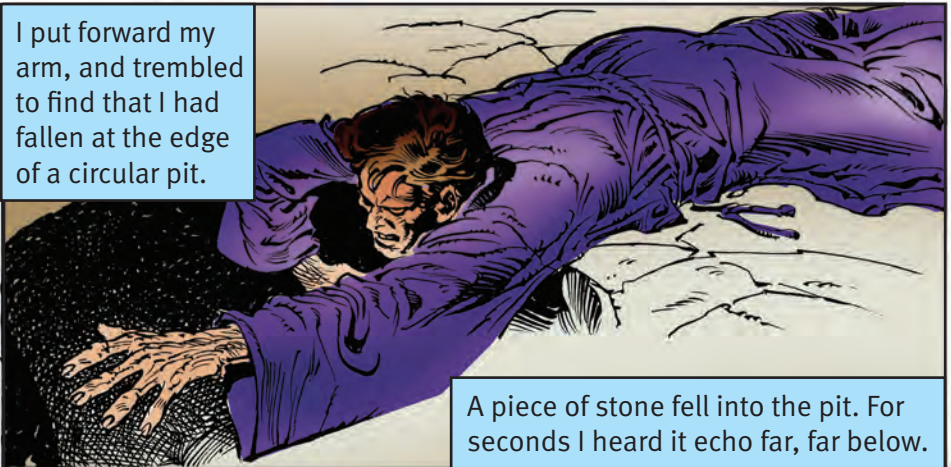
I stepped out carefully at first, then more freely. Suddenly I stumbled on the torn hem of my robe and fell forward.



I lay on my face. My chin rested on the prison floor. But from my lips up, my head touched nothing!



I put forward my arm, and trembled to find that I had fallen at the edge of a circular pit.



A piece of stone fell into the pit. For seconds I heard it echo far, far below.

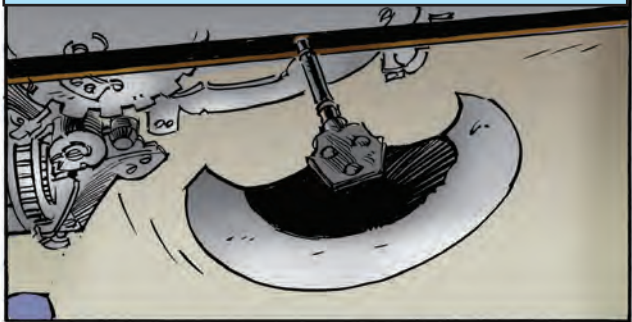
Shaking all over, I felt my way back to the wall. Finally I fell into a heavy sleep. When I awoke, everything had changed.



A light came from somewhere above me, and I raised my head to look around. Frightening figures were painted on the walls. The circular pit lay in the exact center of my prison.

Above me on the high ceiling was painted a figure of old Father Time, with a clock's pendulum in place of his scythe.

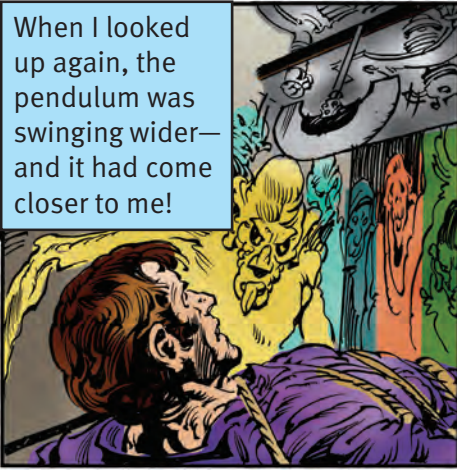
Was the pendulum, as I first thought, part of the painting? Or did it really move?



A slight noise made me turn my head. Looking at the floor, I saw troops of large rats coming from the pit. They were after some meat that had been left beside me.



When I looked up again, the pendulum was swinging wider—and it had come closer to me!



At its end was a half-circle of steel—like a giant razor blade!



For hours—perhaps days—I watched in terror as it swung above me:

closer...



and closer...



...and yet closer.



And then, almost too late, I began to think. I reached for the remains of the meat and rubbed the straps that were holding me. Then I lay still.



The rats leaped in hundreds upon me and chewed at the straps.

Just as the blade began to cut through my robe, I felt the straps loosen. Carefully I rolled away and off the platform. I was free!



Then the pendulum stopped. It was drawn up to the ceiling. But the metal walls began to glow with heat!



My prison grew terribly hot—and the walls began to close in on me!

