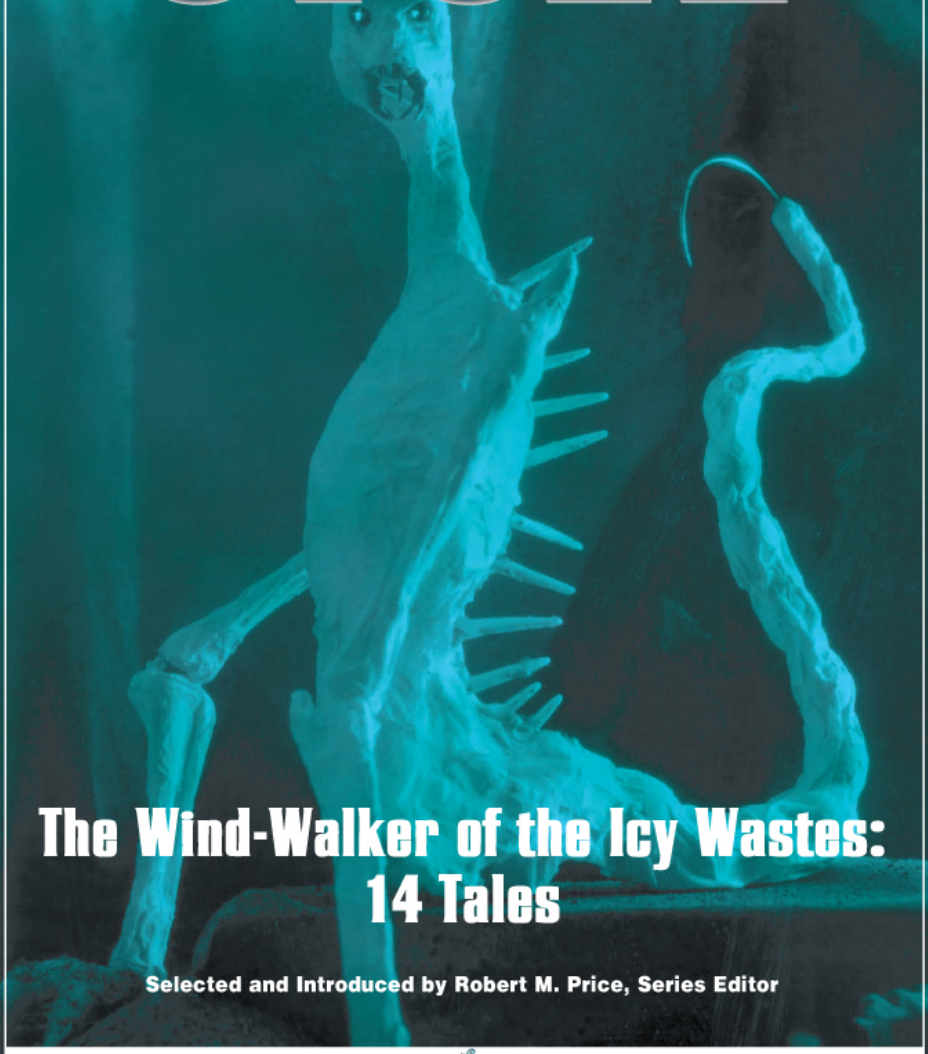
6021

THE ITHAQUA CYCLE



The Wind-Walker of the Icy Wastes: 14 Tales

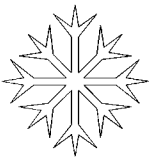
Selected and Introduced by Robert M. Price, Series Editor

CALL OF CTHULHU® FICTION

A CHAOSIUM BOOK

The Ithaqua Cycle

The Wind-Walker of the Icy Wastes: 14 Tales



More Titles from Chaosium

Call of Cthulhu® Fiction
Complete Publication List

The Cthulhu Cycle
Cthulhu's Heirs
The Dunwich Cycle
The Hastur Cycle 2nd Ed.
The Innsmouth Cycle
Made in Goatswood
The Necronomicon
The Nyarlathotep Cycle
Singers of Strange Songs
Lin Carter's The Xothic Legend Cycle
Lord Dunsany's The Complete Pegana

Call of Cthulhu® Fiction

The Ithaqua Cycle

The Wind-Walker of the Icy Wastes

James Ambuehl

Algernon Blackwood

Joseph Payne Brennan

Pierre Comtois

August Derleth

George C. Diezel II

George Allen England

Gordon Linzner

Brian Lumley

Randy Medoff

Stephen Mark Rainey

Scott H. Urban

G. Warlock Vance

Selected and Introduced by Robert M. Price

Cover art by H. E. Fassl

Interior art by Dave Carson

A Chaosium Book

2006

The Ithaqua Cycle is published by Chaosium Inc.

Cover art by H. E. Fassl. Interior art by Dave Carson. Cover layout by Eric Vogt. Interior layout by Shannon Appel. Editor-in-chief Lynn Willis. Proofreading by Tod Briggs, James Naureckas, and Janice Sellers.

Please address questions and comments concerning this book, as well as requests for free notices of Chaosium publications, by mail to Chaosium, Inc., 22568 Mission Blvd. #423, Hayward CA 94541 U.S.A. For a current listing, visit our web page at:

www.chaosium.com

FIRST EDITION

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Chaosium Publication 6021. Published in July 1998.

ISBN 1-56882-191-3

Printed in the USA.

Contents

The Ithaqua Cycle
is dedicated to the fond memory of
SAM MOSKOWITZ
Rider of the Immortal Storm

Ghost Riders in the Sky

With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; it thundered within where Adad, lord of the storm, was riding. In front over the hill and plain Shullat and Hanish, heralds of the storm, led on. Then the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether waters, Ninurta the war-lord threw down the dikes, and the seven judges of hell, the Annunaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness.

— *The Gilgamesh Epic*
(Sandars translation)

Thee I invoke, Angel, Guardian against the URULU,
Dread City of Death, Gate of No Return!
Do thou stand at my side!
Against PAZUZU and HUMWAWA, Fiends of the
Southwest Winds,
do Thou stand firm!
Against the Lords of the Abominations do Thou stand firm!

— *The Necronomicon*
(Simon translation)

Unnamable, shrouded, terrible one!
Thou hunter behind clouds!
Struck down by thy lightning bolt,
Thou mocking eye that stares at me from the dark:
Thus I lie writhing, twisting, tormented
With all eternal tortures,
Hit by thee, cruelest hunter,
Thou unknown god!

— Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
(Kaufmann translation)

Elementary, My Dear Parker

August Derleth's controversial translation of Lovecraft's Great Old Ones into the categories of the four elements is the abstraction corresponding to his own Old One Ithaqua. Or, to step into the other pant leg first, Ithaqua is the mythic-narrative embodiment of the "elementals" schema. The whole business seems to have existed for the sake of Ithaqua and wouldn't have been invoked apart from him. The categories scarcely fit any of the other fictive entities Derleth sought to jam, like square pegs into round holes, into them. Cthulhu does come close to fitting, since Lovecraft certainly packed into his image everything he found repugnant about wriggling sea-

food. Shub-Niggurath, a fertility goddess, understandably might be called an elemental spirit. Remember, though, Cthugha the fire-devil was made to order, after the fact, to plug a gap in the Derlethian Table of the Elements once Francis T. Laney had pointed it out to Derleth. So Ithaqua and the elementals business are one and the same.

This is not the place to enter once again into the debate over whether Derleth had hijacked Lovecraft's concepts and then run them aground via his reinterpretations. Let me only note that the system of elementals is hardly non-Lovecraftian in its implications. The trouble with it, as I see it, is that it utterly fails of application in the cases of entities such as Nyarlathotep, Azathoth, and Yog-Sothoth, who can by no stretch of imagination be considered mascots of earth, air, fire, or water. Lin Carter adjusted the Derlethian premise somewhat at this point, adding the fifth element aethyr, the fabric of space, as the cloth from which these three had been cut. Maybe that's enough to save it.

This World Is Not My Home

In any case, let me point out what it means to ascribe the tutelary spirits of the very elements of creation to monstrous powers inimical to humanity. The result is a gnostic, nihilistic vision according to which the human spirit is a stranger in a strange land, alone and afraid in a world he never made. Early Christian apocalyptists had a similar idea, and if the Derleth Mythos may be said to reflect Judaeo-Christian mythology (as Derleth himself claimed), this is surely the relevant aspect, not Sunday School Christianity. The Intertestamental and New Testament literature preserves the old pre-Jewish biblical myth of Yahve as the king of lesser gods who ruled the world through his deputies, though not very well. You will get the idea perfectly from a side-by-side reading of Lord Dunsany's "How the Gods Avenged Meoul Ki Ning" and Psalm 82, in which, sick of their corrupt mismanagement, God is anticipated as dethroning his subordinates and casting them into Tartarus beneath the earth as his Greek counterparts Uranos did the Giants and Zeus did the Titans. Their stumbling about in the darkness would henceforth serve admirably as an etiological account for earth tremors. That house-cleaning was but a future hope (which developed eventually into full-fledged apocalypticism). For the present one had to rest ill content with the rule of a heavenly bureaucracy of spirits in charge of various departments of nature and of individual earthly kingdoms (each of whom had its own divine patron—Daniel 10:13, 20). These gods might be persuaded to do one's will if the bribe ("sacrifice") were great enough; otherwise one merely muddled along, reminding oneself that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34) so not to worry about tomorrow. Unless, of course, through horoscopes, you could get advance intelligence and dodge the levin-bolts of misfortune.

In this context, the New Testament speaks of *stoicheia*, elementals (Galatians 4:9-10), the angels in charge of the treasuries of rain and snow, etc. (see, e.g., 1 Enoch LIX-LX). Similar were the principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12; Romans 8:38), the *archons*, rulers, of this age (1 Corinthians 2:8). They are the vast, reified, collective structures of government, economy, culture, tradition, establishments, and institutions of all kinds. They may be hard, oppressive, and unfair, but would you be

better off without them? With unbridled Chaos the inevitable result? Probably not. Pessimism? Realism? The word you choose may be a gauge of how naive you are.

Who Has Seen the Wind?

So the fundamental elemental is Ithaqua. As Derleth himself would freely admit, the character is hardly original with him. All he did was to coin a Lovecraftian name for Blackwood's Wendigo, and of course the Wendigo is not Blackwood's invention either. The wind monster is a genuine piece of North American Indian lore, and it is a potent one. Natural for a horror story, the Wendigo is the incarnation of eerie atmosphere into a character in the story, much in the same manner as certain aspects of ancient ritual were eventually personified and deified as gods called on in the rituals. The priestly nectar became the god Soma, while the altar fire became Agni. A rite of appeasement generated the vague entity Meilichios, "He Who Is Appeased", while Thesmophoros ("She Who Carries Charms") personifies the ceremonial acolytes to whom she corresponds (Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, pp. 14-15). So the whipping wind, the howling wind, the moaning mournful wind ceases to be merely the carrier of ghostly voices but becomes the chief ghost itself! The proverbial "dark and stormy night" has come alive and hungers.

Lin Carter was right: Derleth knew what he was doing when he coined the name Ithaqua. It has a true Lovecraftian/Klarkashtonian ring to it. It is as reminiscent, but not more so, of Tsathoggua as Azathoth is of Yog-Sothoth, and redolent of a myth-pattern. Cthugha is another attempt to do the same thing, perhaps less successfully.

Just between you and me, I can't help wondering if there's some sort of in-joke floating around in here someplace. Can "Ithaqua" have anything to do with *Ithaca, New York?* After all, it's certainly the kind of town where, on a blustery night, a hitchhiker might expect to get picked up by the Wendigo.

Come Fly with Me

Lovecraft had already advised the use of Charles Fort's catalogues of oddities as a quarry for weird story associations, and Derleth was quick to heed the advice. He would even quote Fort, as does Seneca Lapham in "The Narrative of Winfield Phillips", for questions to which the machinations of the Old Ones provided the answers. What attracted him the most was the Fortean notion (used also by Lovecraft in "The Outpost" and "Winged Death" and by Frank Belknap Long in "The Horror from the Hills") of the Fishers from Outside, the possibility that space aliens were abducting people at random, and that this explained missing persons cases. In our day, this idea has become the central premise of a virtual religion of self-fancied UFO abductees. Derleth made ample use of the idea in several stories, having hapless mortals given free rides in the company of no less than Nyarlathotep ("The Dweller in Darkness"), Ossadogowah ("Billington's Wood"), and Ithaqua ("The Thing That Walked on the Wind" and others). Eventually he came to decide that Ithaqua was the most natural host for such voyages.

The implications and the comparative religion parallels are intriguing. Once again, Derleth has utilized an ancient apocalyptic motif, but this time he has hybridized it with the Faustian motif so basic to Lovecraft, namely that supramun-

dane knowledge is deadly because, not belonging to this world, it can only belong outside it. The knower is dragged into the airless void of ultramundane entity along with it.

The apocalyptic motif I am thinking of is that of the heavenly journey of revelation. An ancient sage is whisked away into the firmament by an interpreting angel who provides a guided tour, disclosing the secrets either of unknown nature or of the unknown future. Naturally such "truths"—set down in books like the Revelation of John, Daniel, the three Books of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Paul, etc.—are merely the speculations of obscure writers hiding behind authoritative names of the past. The whole genre stems from the propaganda claims of the Babylonian king to have ascended to heaven each New Year's Day to glimpse Marduk's Tablets of Destiny, so he would be prepared for the next year's events. Thus all his subjects might rest assured that the king knew what he was doing (Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*). The earliest biblical intimation of the theme may be found in Genesis 5:24, where it is said of Enoch that he "walked with God", originally denoting his identity as a sun god, striding across the heavens like Vishnu, Helios, etc. It came to be read as a guided tour of the heavens, as witness the three ancient Books of Enoch.

Such revealed knowledge was always held to be a boon to the seer and those to whom he revealed it. Derleth has crossbred the motif with that of Faust, whose Promethean knowledge destroys him. Assumed in this myth is that the unknown is unknown for a pretty good reason: The feeble human mind is incapable of processing it. If it tries, it blows its circuits irreparably. How can Enoch have walked so blithely with God, when God told Moses, "Man shall not see my face and live?" Derleth made precisely this connection. So Ithaqua is the revealing angel, or rather a revealing demon like that which guides the hapless narrator of the *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnets on his way, and the raptured (= rapt up, caught up) visionary does not survive his walk with the god. This is why the Wind-Walker, Derleth says, is also called the Death-Walker. It is the Plague Wind he glides upon, like the Sumerian Pazuzu, who ought to be regarded as one of his avatars.

Thanks so much to Jim Ambuehl and Paul Berglund for their assistance in preparing this collection.

— Robert M. Price
St. Patrick's Day, 1997

About "The Wendigo"

Here is the story absolutely fundamental to the Ithaqua myth cycle. Blackwood's "The Wendigo" is the necessary, though hardly the sufficient, condition for the whole thing. The title creature is, of course, a cannibalistic wind demon from Algonquin mythology. A genuine legend is always scary enough, provided one hears it in the proper circumstances, since it carries with it a claim just possibly to be true. It is a rare story which can successfully adapt a legend without losing its shuddery thrill. Blackwood managed it. (For another, see Robert E. Howard's "Pigeons from Hell".)

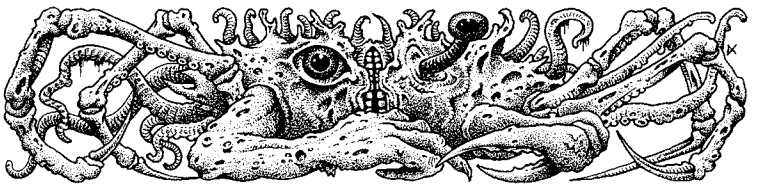
H. P. Lovecraft thought highly of the story. After praising Blackwood's "The Willows", HPL goes on to "The Wendigo": "Another amazingly potent though less artistically finished tale is 'The Wendigo', where we are confronted by horrible evidences of a vast forest daemon about which North Woods lumber men whisper at evening. The manner in which certain footprints tell certain unbelievable things is really a marked triumph in craftsmanship" (*Supernatural Horror in Literature*). In his "The Weird Tale in English since 1890", August Derleth has surprisingly little to say of this tale "of a weird monster inhabiting the north woods" beyond echoing his mentor Lovecraft's praise. Jack Sullivan calls "The Wendigo" "one of Blackwood's weirdest, scariest creations" (*Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural*).

The Wendigo is a prime example of a particular kind of legendary/fictive monster: the genius loci, a spirit embodying the weird ambiance of a particular place. In such a place one feels watched, or that the place is haunted by some malign intelligence. Lovecraft created several of his own monsters to symbolize the atmosphere of certain evocative locales, such as the domed hills of Vermont and the ice deserts of Antarctica. No wonder "The Wendigo" resonated with him.

One thing's for sure: "The Wendigo" is a tale of the Lovecraft Mythos, just as surely as "The Call of Cthulhu" or "The Whisperer in Darkness." This bears pointing out, since, as I argued in the Introduction, Ithaqua is the very incarnation of the Derleth Mythos with its classification of the elementals. The fact remains that Blackwood's tale is perfectly "Lovecraftian" (and thus, we may be sure, an influence on Lovecraft): a tale of the sanity-blasting manifestations of antehuman Powers of Outsideness in remote areas where civilized men tread at their peril.

Finally, let me signal you in advance: Blackwood expects you to know your scripture as well as his divinity student Mr. Simpson does, whom we hear ruminating on Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

"The Wendigo" first appeared in Blackwood's collection *The Lost Valley and Other Stories* (1910).



The Wendigo

by Algernon Blackwood

A considerable number of hunting parties were out that year without finding so much as a fresh trail; for the moose were uncommonly shy, and the various Nimrods returned to the bosoms of their respective families with the best excuses the facts or their imaginations could suggest. Dr. Cathcart, among others, came back without a trophy; but he brought instead the memory of an experience which he declares was worth all the bull-moose that had ever been shot. But then Cathcart, of Aberdeen, was interested in other things besides moose—amongst them the vagaries of the human mind. This particular story, however, found no mention in his book on *Collective Hallucination* for the simple reason (so he confided once to a fellow colleague) that he himself played too intimate a part in it to form a competent judgment of the affair as a whole ....

Besides himself and his guide, Hank Davis, there was young Simpson, his nephew, a divinity student destined for the "Wee Kirk" (then on his first visit to Canadian backwoods), and the latter's guide, Défago. Joseph Défago was a French "Canuck", who had strayed from his native Province of Quebec years before, and had got caught in Rat Portage when the Canadian Pacific Railway was a-building; a man who, in addition to his unparalleled knowledge of woodcraft and bush-lore, could also sing the old *voyageur* songs and tell a capital hunting yarn into the bargain. He was deeply susceptible, moreover, to that singular spell which the wilderness lays upon certain lonely natures, and he loved the wild solitudes with a kind of romantic passion that amounted almost to an obsession. The life of the backwoods fascinated him—whence, doubtless, his surpassing efficiency in dealing with their mysteries.

On this particular expedition he was Hank's choice. Hank knew him and swore by him. He also swore at him, "jest as a pal might", and since he had a vocabulary of picturesque, if utterly meaningless, oaths, the conversation between the two stalwart and hardy woodsmen was often of a rather lively description. This river of expletives, however, Hank agreed to dam a little out of respect for his old "hunting boss", Dr. Cathcart, whom of course

he addressed after the fashion of the country as "Doc"; and also because he understood that young Simpson was already a "bit of a parson." He had, however, one objection to Défago, and one only—which was that the French Canadian sometimes exhibited what Hank described as "the output of a cursed and dismal mind", meaning apparently that he sometimes was true to type, Latin type, and suffered fits of a kind of silent moroseness when nothing could induce him to utter speech. Défago, that is to say, was imaginative and melancholy. As a rule, it was too long a spell of "civilisation" that induced the attacks, for a few days of the wilderness invariably cured them.

This, then, was the party of four that found themselves in camp the last week in October of that "shy moose year" 'way up in the wilderness north of Rat Portage—a forsaken and desolate country. There was also Punk, an Indian, who had accompanied Dr. Cathcart and Hank on their hunting trips in previous years, and who acted as cook. His duty was merely to stay in camp, catch fish, and prepare venison steaks and coffee at a few minutes' notice. He dressed in the worn-out clothes bequeathed to him by former patrons, and, except for his coarse black hair and dark skin, he looked in these city garments no more like a real redskin than a stage Negro looks like a real African. For all that, however, Punk had in him the instincts of his dying race; his taciturn silence and his endurance survived; also his superstition.

The party round the blazing fire that night were despondent, for a week had passed without a single sign of recent moose discovering itself. Défago had sung his song and plunged into a story, but Hank, in bad humour, reminded him so often that "he kep' mussing-up the fac's so, that it was 'most nothing' but a petered-out lie" that the Frenchman had finally subsided into a sulky silence which nothing seemed likely to break. Dr. Cathcart and his nephew were fairly done after an exhausting day. Punk was washing up the dishes, grunting to himself under the lean-to of branches, where he later also slept. No one troubled to stir the slowly dying fire. Overhead the stars were brilliant in a sky quite wintry, and there was so little wind that ice was already forming stealthily along the shores of the still lake behind them. The silence of the vast listening forest stole forward and enveloped them.

Hank broke in suddenly with his nasal voice.

"I'm in favour of breaking new ground tomorrow, Doc," he observed with energy, looking across at his employer. "We don't stand a dead Dago's chance about here."

"Agreed," said Cathcart, always a man of few words. "Think the idea's good."

"Sure, pop, it's good," Hank resumed with confidence. "S'pose, now, you and I strike west, up Garden Lake way for a change! None of us ain't touched that quiet bit o' land yet.—"

"I'm with you."

"And you, Défago, take Mr. Simpson along in the small canoe, skip across the lake, portage over into Fifty Island Water, and take a good squint down that thar southern shore. The moose 'yarded' there like hell last year, and for all we know they may be doin' it agin this year jest to spite us."

Défago, keeping his eyes on the fire, said nothing by way of reply. He was still offended, possibly, about his interrupted story.

"No one's been up that way this year, an' I'll lay my bottom dollar on *that*!" Hank added with emphasis, as though he had a reason for knowing. He looked over at his partner sharply. "Better take the little silk tent and stay away a couple o' nights," he concluded, as though the matter were definitely settled. For Hank was recognised as general organiser of the hunt, and in charge of the party.

It was obvious to anyone that Défago did not jump at the plan, but his silence seemed to convey something more than ordinary disapproval, and across his sensitive dark face there passed a curious expression like a flash of firelight—not so quickly, however, that the three men had not time to catch it. "He funked for some reason, *I* thought," Simpson said afterwards in the tent he shared with his uncle. Dr. Cathcart made no immediate reply, although the look had interested him enough at the time for him to make a mental note of it. The expression had caused him a passing uneasiness he could not quite account for at the moment.

But Hank, of course, had been the first to notice it, and the odd thing was that instead of becoming explosive or angry over the other's reluctance, he at once began to humour him a bit.

"But there ain't no *speshul* reason why no one's been up there this year," he said, with a perceptible hush in his tone; "not the reason *you* mean, anyway! Las' year it was the fires that kep' folks out, and this year I guess—I guess it jest happened so, that's all!" His manner was clearly meant to be encouraging.

Joseph Défago raised his eyes a moment, then dropped them again. A breath of wind stole out of the forest and stirred the embers into a passing blaze. Dr. Cathcart again noticed the expression in the guide's face, and again he did not like it. But this time the nature of the look betrayed itself. In those eyes, for an instant, he caught the gleam of a man scared in his very soul. It disquieted him more than he cared to admit.

"Bad Indians up that way?" he asked, with a laugh to ease matters a little, while Simpson, too sleepy to notice this subtle by-play, moved off to bed with a prodigious yawn. "Or—or anything wrong with the country?" he added, when his nephew was out of hearing.

Hank met his eye with something less than his usual frankness.

"He's just skeered," he replied good-humouredly, "skeered stiff about some ole feery tale! That's all, ain't it, ole pard?" And he gave Défago a friendly kick on the moccasined foot that lay nearest the fire.

Défago looked up quickly, as from an interrupted reverie—a reverie, however, that had not prevented his seeing all that went on about him.

"Skeered—*nuthin'!*" he answered, with a flush of defiance. "There's nothing' in the bush that can skeer Joseph Défago, and don't you forget it!" And the natural energy with which he spoke made it impossible to know whether he told the whole truth or only a part of it.

Hank turned towards the doctor. He was just going to add something when he stopped abruptly and looked round. A sound close behind them in the darkness made all three start. It was old Punk, who had moved up from his lean-to while they talked and now stood there just beyond the circle of firelight—listening.

"'Nother time, Doc!" Hank whispered, with a wink, "when the gallery ain't stepped down into the stalls!" And, springing to his feet, he slapped the Indian on the back and cried noisily, "Come up t' the fire an' warm yer dirty red skin a bit." He dragged him towards the blaze and threw more wood on. "That was a mighty good feed you give us an hour or two back," he continued heartily, as though to set the man's thoughts on another scent, "and it ain't Christian to let you stand out there freezin' yer ole soul to hell while we're getting all good an' toasted!" Punk moved in and warmed his feet, smiling darkly at the other's volubility, which he only half understood, but saying nothing. Presently Dr. Cathcart, seeing that further conversation was impossible, followed his nephew's example and moved off to the tent, leaving the three men smoking over the now blazing fire.

It is not easy to undress in a small tent without waking one's companion, and Cathcart, hardened and warm-blooded as he was in spite of his fifty odd years, did what Hank would have described as "considerably of his twilight" in the open. He noticed, during the process, that Punk had meanwhile gone back to his lean-to, and that Hank and Défago were at it hammer and tongs, or, rather, hammer and anvil, the little French Canadian being the anvil. It was all very like the conventional stage picture of Western melodrama: the fire lighting up their faces with patches of alternate red and black; Défago, in slouch hat and moccasins, in the part of the "badlands'" villain; Hank, open-faced and hatless, with that reckless fling of his shoulders, the honest and deceived hero; and old Punk, eavesdropping in the background, supplying the atmosphere of mystery. The doctor smiled as he noticed the details, but at the same time something deep within him—he hardly knew what—shrank a little, as though an almost imperceptible breath of warning had touched the surface of his soul and was gone again before he could seize it. Probably it was traceable to the "scared

expression" he had seen in the eyes of Défago; "probably"—for this hint of fugitive emotion otherwise escaped his usually so keen analysis. Défago, he was vaguely aware, might cause trouble somehow. ... He was not as steady a guide as Hank, for instance. ... Further than that he could not get.

He watched the men a moment longer before diving into the stuffy tent where Simpson already slept soundly. Hank, he saw, was swearing like a mad African in a New York nigger saloon; but it was the swearing of "affection." The ridiculous oaths flew freely now that the cause of their obstruction was asleep. Presently he put his arm almost tenderly upon his comrade's shoulder, and they moved off together into the shadows, where their tent stood faintly glimmering. Punk, too, a moment later followed their example and disappeared between his odorous blankets in the opposite direction.

Dr. Cathcart then likewise turned in, weariness and sleep still fighting in his mind with an obscure curiosity to know what it was that had scared Défago about the country up Fifty Island Water way—wondering, too, why Punk's presence had prevented the completion of what Hank had to say. Then sleep overtook him. He would know tomorrow. Hank would tell him the story while they trudged after the elusive moose.

Deep silence fell about the little camp, planted there so audaciously in the jaws of the wilderness. The lake gleamed like a sheet of black glass beneath the stars. The cold air pricked. In the draughts of night that poured their silent tide from the depths of the forest, with messages from distant ridges and from lakes just beginning to freeze, there lay already the faint, bleak odours of coming winter. White men, with their dull sense of scent, might never have divined them; the fragrance of the wood-fire would have concealed from them these almost electrical hints of moss and bank and hardening swamp a hundred miles away. Even Hank and Défago, subtly in league with the soul of the woods as they were, would probably have spread their delicate nostrils in vain ...

But an hour later, when all slept like the dead, old Punk crept from his blankets and went down to the shore of the lake like a shadow—silently, as only Indian blood can move. He raised his head and looked about him. The thick darkness rendered sight of small avail, but, like the animals, he possessed other senses that darkness could not mute. He listened—then sniffed the air. Motionless as a hemlock stem he stood there. After five minutes again he lifted his head and sniffed, and yet once again. A tingling of the wonderful nerves that betrayed itself by no outer sign ran through him as he tasted the keen air. Then, merging his figure into the surrounding blackness in a way that only wild men and animals understand, he turned, still moving like a shadow, and went stealthily back to his lean-to and his bed.

And soon after he slept, the change of wind he had divined stirred gently the reflection of the stars within the lake. Rising among the far ridges of

the country beyond Fifty Island Water, it came from the direction in which he had stared, and it passed over the sleeping camp with a faint and sighing murmur through the tops of the big trees that was almost too delicate to be audible. With it, down the desert paths of night, though too faint, too high even for the Indian's hair-like nerves, there passed a curious, thin odour, strangely disquieting, an odour of something that seemed unfamiliar—utterly unknown.

The French Canadian and the man of Indian blood each stirred uneasily in his sleep just about this time, though neither of them woke. Then the ghost of that unforgettably strange odour passed away and was lost among the leagues of tenantless forest beyond.

In the morning the camp was astir before the sun. There had been a light fall of snow during the night and the air was sharp. Punk had done his duty betimes, for the odours of coffee and fried bacon reached every tent. All were in good spirits.

"Wind's shifted!" cried Hank vigorously, watching Simpson and his guide already loading the small canoe. "It's across the lake—dead right for you fellers. And the snow'll make bully trails! If there's any moose mussing around up thar, they'll not get so much as a tail-end scent of you with the wind as it is. Good luck, Monsieur Défago!" he added facetiously, giving the name its French pronunciation for once. "*Bonne chance!*"

Défago returned the good wishes, apparently in the best of spirits, the silent mood gone. Before eight o'clock old Punk had the camp to himself, Cathcart and Hank were far along the trail that led westwards, while the canoe that carried Défago and Simpson, with silk tent and grub for two days, was already a dark speck bobbing on the bosom of the lake, going due east.

The wintry sharpness of the air was tempered now by a sun that topped the wooded ridges and blazed with a luxurious warmth upon the world of lake and forest below. Loons flew skimming through the sparkling spray that the wind lifted, divers shook their dripping heads to the sun, and as far as eye could reach rose the leagues of endless, crowding bush, desolate in its lonely sweep and grandeur, untrodden by foot of man, and stretching its mighty and unbroken carpet right up to the frozen shores of Hudson Bay.

Simpson, who saw it all for the first time as he paddled hard in the bow of the dancing canoe, was enchanted by its austere beauty. His heart drank in the sense of freedom and great spaces just as his lungs drank in the cool and perfumed wind. Behind him in the stern seat, singing fragments of his native chanties, Défago steered the craft of birchbark like a thing of life, answering cheerfully all his companion's questions. Both were gay and light-hearted. On such occasions men lose the superficial, worldly distinc-

tions; they become human beings working together for a common end. Simpson the employer and Défago the employed, among these primitive forces, were simply—two men, the "guider" and the "guided." Superior knowledge, of course, assumed control, and the younger man fell without a second thought into the quasisubordinate position. He never dreamed of objecting when Défago dropped the "Mr.", and addressed him as "Say, Simpson," or "Simpson, boss," which was invariably the case before they reached the farther shore after a stiff paddle of twelve miles against a head wind. He only laughed, and liked it; then ceased to notice it at all.

For this "divinity student" was a young man of parts and character, though as yet, of course, untravelled; and on this trip—the first time he had seen any country but his own and little Switzerland—the huge scale of things somewhat bewildered him. It was one thing, he realised, to hear about primeval forests, but quite another to see them. To dwell in them and seek acquaintance with their wild life was, again, an initiation that no intelligent man could undergo without a certain shifting of personal values hitherto held as permanent and sacred.

Simpson knew the first faint indication of this emotion when he held the new .303 rifle in his hands and looked along its pair of faultless, gleaming barrels. The three days' journey to their headquarters, by lake and portage, had carried the process a stage farther. Now that he was about to plunge beyond even the fringe of wilderness where they were camped into the virgin heart of uninhabited regions as vast as Europe itself, the true nature of the situation stole upon him with an effect of delight and awe that his imagination was fully capable of appreciating. It was himself and Défago against a multitude—at least, against a Titan!

The bleak splendours of these remote and lonely forests rather overwhelmed him with the sense of his own littleness. That stern quality of the tangled backwoods, which can only be described as merciless and terrible, rose out of these far blue woods swimming upon the horizon and revealed itself. He understood the silent warning. He realised his own utter helplessness. Only Défago, as a symbol of a distant civilisation where man was master, stood between him and a pitiless death by exhaustion and starvation.

It was thrilling to him, therefore, to watch Défago turn over the canoe upon the shore, pack the paddles carefully underneath, and then proceed to "blaze" the spruce stems for some distance on either side of an almost invisible trail, with the careless remark thrown in: "Say, Simpson, if anything happens to me, you'll find the canoe all correc' by these marks; then strike doo west into the sun to hit the home camp agin, see?"

It was the most natural thing in the world to say, and he said it without any noticeable inflexion of the voice; only it happened to express the youth's emotions at the moment with an utterance that was symbolic of the

situation and of his own helplessness as a factor in it. He was along with Défago in a primitive world: That was all. The canoe, another symbol of man's ascendancy, was now to be left behind. Those small yellow patches, made on the trees by the axe, were the only indications of its hiding-place.

Meanwhile, shouldering the packs between them, each man carrying his own rifle, they followed the slender trail over rocks and fallen trunks and across half-frozen swamps; skirting numerous lakes that fairly gemmed the forest, their borders fringed with mist; and towards five o'clock found themselves suddenly on the edge of the woods, looking out across a large sheet of water in front of them, dotted with pine-clad islands of all describable shapes and sizes.

"Fifty Island Water," announced Défago wearily. "And the sun jest goin' to dip his bald head into it!" he added with unconscious poetry; and immediately they set about pitching camp for the night.

In a very few minutes, under those skillful hands that never made a movement too much or a movement too little, the silk tent stood taut and cosy, the beds of balsam boughs ready laid, and a brisk cooking-fire burned with the minimum of smoke. While the young Scotsman cleaned the fish they had caught trolling behind the canoe, Défago "guessed" he would "jest as soon" take a turn through the bush for indications of moose. "*May* come across a trunk where they bin and rubbed horns," he said as he moved off, "or feedin' on the last of the maple leaves"—and he was gone.

His small figure melted away like a shadow in the dusk, while Simpson noted with a kind of admiration how easily the forest absorbed him into herself. A few steps, it seemed, and he was no longer visible.

Yet there was little underbrush hereabouts; the trees stood somewhat apart, well spaced; and in the clearings grew silver birch and maples, spear-like and slender, against the immense stems of spruce and hemlock. But for occasional prostrate monsters, and the boulders of grey rock that thrust uncouth shoulders here and there out of the ground, it might well have been a bit of park in the Old Country. Almost, one might have seen in it the hand of man. A little to the right, however, began the great burnt section, miles in extent, proclaiming its real character—*brulé*, as it is called, where the fires of the previous year had raged for weeks, and the blackened stumps now rose gaunt and ugly, bereft of branches, like gigantic match-heads stuck into the ground, savage and desolate beyond words. The perfume of charcoal and rain-soaked ashes still hung faintly about it.

The dusk rapidly deepened; the glades grew dark; the crackling of the fire and the wash of little waves along the rocky lake shore were the only sounds audible. The wind had dropped with the sun, and in all that vast world of branches nothing stirred. Any moment, it seemed, the woodland gods, who are to be worshipped in silence and loneliness, might sketch their

mighty and terrific outlines amongst the trees. In front, through doorways pillared by huge straight stems, lay the stretch of Fifty Island Water, a crescent-shaped lake some fifteen miles from tip to tip, and perhaps five miles across where they were camped. A sky of rose and saffron, more clear than any atmosphere Simpson had ever known, still dropped its pale streaming fires across the waves, where the islands—a hundred, surely, rather than fifty—floated like the fairy barques of some enchanted fleet. Fringed with pines, whose crests fingered most delicately the sky, they almost seemed to move upwards as the light faded—about to weigh anchor and navigate the pathways of the heavens instead of the currents of their native and desolate lake.

And strips of coloured cloud, like flaunting pennons, signalled their departure to the stars ....

The beauty of the scene was strangely uplifting. Simpson smoked the fish and burnt his fingers into the bargain in his efforts to enjoy it and at the same time tend the frying pan and the fire. Yet ever at the back of his thoughts lay that other aspect of the wilderness: the indifference to human life, the merciless spirit of desolation which took no note of man. The sense of his utter loneliness, now that even Défago had gone, came close as he looked about him and listened for the sound of his companion's returning footsteps.

There was pleasure in the sensation, yet with it a perfectly comprehensible alarm. And instinctively the thought stirred him: "What should I—*could* I do—if anything happened and he did not come back ...?"

They enjoyed their well earned supper, eating untold quantities of fish and drinking unmilked tea strong enough to kill men who had not covered thirty miles of hard "going", eating little on the way. And when it was over, they smoked and told stories round the blazing fire, laughing, stretching weary limbs, and discussing plans for the morrow. Défago was in excellent spirits, though disappointed at having no signs of moose to report. But it was dark and he had not gone far. The *brulé*, too, was bad. His clothes and hands were smeared with charcoal. Simpson, watching him, realised with renewed vividness their position—alone together in the wilderness.

"Défago," he said presently, "these woods, you know, are a bit too big to feel quite at home in—to feel comfortable in, I mean! ... Eh?" He merely gave expression to the mood of the moment; he was hardly prepared for the earnestness, the solemnity even, with which the guide took him up.

"You've hit it right, Simpson, boss," he replied, fixing his searching brown eyes on his face, "and that's the truth, sure. There's no end to 'em—no end at all." Then he added in a lowered tone as if to himself, "There's lots found out *that*, and gone plumb to pieces."

But the man's gravity of manner was not quite to the other's liking; it was a little too suggestive for this scenery and setting. He was sorry he had

broached the subject. He remembered suddenly how his uncle had told him that men were sometimes stricken with a strange fever of the wilderness, when the seduction of the uninhabited wastes caught them so fiercely that they went forth, half fascinated, half deluded, to their death. He had a shrewd idea that his companion held something in sympathy with that queer type. He led the conversation on to other topics, on to Hank and the doctor, for instance, and the natural rivalry as to who should get the first sight of moose.

"If they went doo west," observed Défago carelessly, "there's sixty miles between us now—with ole Punk at halfway house eatin' himself full to bustin' with fish and corfee." They laughed together over the picture. But the casual mention of those sixty miles again made Simpson realise the prodigious scale of this land where they hunted; sixty miles was a mere step, two hundred little more than a step. Stories of lost hunters rose persistently before his memory. The passion and mystery of homeless and wandering men, seduced by the beauty of great forests, swept his soul in a way too vivid to be quite pleasant. He wondered vaguely whether it was the mood of his companion that invited the unwelcome suggestion with such persistence.

"Sing us a song, Défago, if you're not too tired," he asked; "one of those old *voyageur* songs you sang the other night." He handed his tobacco pouch to the guide and then filled his own pipe, while the Canadian, nothing loth, sent his light voice across the lake in one of those plaintive, almost melancholy chanties with which lumbermen and trappers lessen the burden of their labour. There was an appealing and romantic flavour about it, something that recalled the atmosphere of the old pioneer days when Indians and wilderness were leagued together, battles frequent, and the Old Country farther off than it is today. The sound travelled pleasantly over the water, but the forest at their backs seemed to swallow it down with a single gulp that permitted neither echo nor resonance.

It was in the middle of the third verse that Simpson noticed something unusual—something that brought his thoughts back with a rush from faraway scenes. A curious change had come into the man's voice. Even before he knew what it was, uneasiness caught him, and looking up quickly he saw that Défago, though still singing, was peering about him into the bush, as though he heard or saw something. His voice grew fainter—dropped to a hush—then ceased altogether. The same instant, with a movement amazingly alert, he started to his feet and stood upright—*sniffing the air*. Like a dog scenting game, he drew the air into his nostrils in short, sharp breaths, turning quickly as he did so in all directions, and finally "pointing" down the lake shore eastwards. It was a performance unpleasantly suggestive and at the same time singularly dramatic. Simpson's heart fluttered disagreeably as he watched it.

"Lord, man! How you made me jump!" he exclaimed, on his feet beside him the same instant, and peering over his shoulder into the sea of darkness. "What's up? Are you frightened—?"

Even before the question was out of his mouth he knew it was foolish, for any man with a pair of eyes in his head could see that the Canadian had turned white down to his very gills. Not even sunburn and the glare of the fire could hide that.

The student felt himself trembling a little, weakish in the knees. "What's up?" he repeated quickly. "D'you smell moose? Or anything queer, anything—wrong?" He lowered his voice instinctively.

The forest pressed round him with its encircling wall; the nearer tree stems gleamed like bronze in the firelight; beyond that—blackness, and, so far as he could tell, a silence of death. Just behind them a passing puff of wind lifted a single leaf, looked at it, then laid it softly down again without disturbing the rest of the covey. It seemed as if a million invisible causes had combined just to produce that single visible effect. *Other* life pulsed about them—and was gone.

Défago turned abruptly; the livid hue of his face had turned to a dirty grey.

"I never said I heered—or smelt—nuthin'," he said slowly and emphatically, in an oddly altered voice that conveyed somehow a touch of defiance. "I was only—takin' a look around—so to speak. It's always a mistake to be too previous with yer questions." Then he added suddenly with obvious effort, in his more natural voice, "Have you got the matches, Boss Simpson?" and proceeded to light the pipe he had half filled just before he began to sing.

Without speaking another word, they sat down again by the fire, Défago changing his side so that he could face the direction the wind came from. For even a tenderfoot could tell that Défago changed his position in order to hear and smell—all there was to be heard and smelt. And, since he now faced the lake with his back to the trees, it was evidently nothing in the forest that had sent so strange and sudden a warning to his marvelously trained nerves.

"Guess now I don't feel like singing any," he explained presently of his own accord. "That song kinder brings back memories that's troublesome to me; I never oughter've begun it. It sets me on t' imagining things, see?"

Clearly the man was still fighting with some profoundly moving emotion. He wished to excuse himself in the eyes of the other. But the explanation, in that it was only part of the truth, was a lie, and he knew perfectly well that Simpson was not deceived by it. For nothing could explain away the livid terror that had dropped over his face while he stood there sniffing the air. And nothing—no amount of blazing fire, or chatting on ordinary

subjects—could make that camp exactly as it had been before. The shadow of an unknown horror, naked if unguessed, that had flashed for an instant in the face and gestures of the guide had also communicated itself, vaguely and therefore more potently, to his companion. The guide's visible efforts to dissemble the truth only made things worse. Moreover, to add to the younger man's uneasiness was the difficulty, nay, the impossibility he felt of asking questions, and also his complete ignorance as to the cause ... Indians, wild animals, forest fires—all these, he knew, were wholly out of the question. His imagination searched vigorously, but in vain ....

* * *

Yet, somehow or other, after another long spell of smoking, talking, and roasting themselves before the great fire, the shadow that had so suddenly invaded their peaceful camp began to lift. Perhaps Défago's efforts, or the return of his quiet and normal attitude, accomplished this; perhaps Simpson himself had exaggerated the affair out of all proportion to the truth; or possibly the vigorous air of the wilderness brought its own powers of healing. Whatever the cause, the feeling of immediate horror seemed to have passed away as mysteriously as it had come, for nothing occurred to feed it. Simpson began to feel that he had permitted himself the unreasoning terror of a child. He put it down partly to a certain subconscious excitement that this wild and immense scenery generated in his blood, partly to the spell of solitude, and partly to over-fatigue. The pallor of the guide's face was, of course, uncommonly hard to explain, yet it might have been due in some way to an effect of firelight, or his own imagination. ... He gave it the benefit of the doubt; he was Scotch.

When a somewhat unordinary emotion has disappeared, the mind always finds a dozen ways of explaining away its causes. ... Simpson lit a vast pipe and tried to laugh to himself. On getting home to Scotland it would make quite a good story. He did not realise that his laughter was a sign that terror still lurked in the recesses of his soul—that, in fact, it was merely one of the conventional signs by which a man, seriously alarmed, tries to persuade himself that he is *not* so.

Défago, however, heard that low laughter and looked up with surprise on his face. The two men stood, side by side, kicking the embers about before going to bed. It was ten o'clock—a late hour for hunters to be still awake.

"What's ticklin' yer?" he asked in his ordinary tone, yet gravely.

"I—I was thinking of our little toy woods at home, just at that moment," stammered Simpson, coming back to what really dominated his mind, and startled by the question, "and comparing them to—to all this," and he swept his arm round to indicate the bush.

A pause followed in which neither of them said anything.

"All the same, I wouldn't laugh about it, if I was you," Défago added, looking over Simpson's shoulder into the shadows. "There's places in there nobody won't never see into—nobody knows what lives in there either."

"Too big—too far off?" The suggestion in the guide's manner was immense and horrible.

Défago nodded. The expression on his face was dark. He, too, felt uneasy. The younger man understood that in a *hinterland* of this size there might well be depths of wood that would never in the life of the world be known or trodden. The thought was not exactly the sort he welcomed. In a loud voice, cheerfully, he suggested that it was time for bed. But the guide lingered, tinkering with the fire, arranging the stones needlessly, doing a dozen things that did not really need doing. Evidently there was something he wanted to say, yet found it difficult to "get at".

"Say, you, Boss Simpson," he began suddenly, as the last shower of sparks went up into the air, "you don't—smell nothing, do you—nothing pertickler, I mean?" The commonplace question, Simpson realised, veiled a dreadfully serious thought in his mind. A shiver ran down his back.

"Nothing but this burning wood," he replied firmly, kicking again at the embers. The sound of his own foot made him start.

"And all the evenin' you ain't smelt—nothing?" persisted the guide, peering at him through the gloom. "Nothing extrordiny, and different to anything else you ever smelt before?"

"No, no, man; nothing at all!" he replied aggressively, half angrily.

Défago's face cleared. "That's good!" he exclaimed, with evident relief. "That's good to hear."

"Have *you?*" asked Simpson sharply, and the same instant regretted the question.

The Canadian came closer in the darkness. He shook his head. "I guess not," he said, though without overwhelming conviction. "It must've been jest that song of mine that did it. It's the song they sing in lumber-camps and god-forsaken places like that, when they're skeered the Wendigo's somewheres around, doin' a bit of swift travellin'—"

"And what's the Wendigo, pray?" Simpson asked quickly, irritated because again he could not prevent that sudden shiver of the nerves. He knew that he was close upon the man's terror and the cause of it. Yet a rushing, passionate curiosity overcame his better judgment, *and* his fear.

Défago turned swiftly and looked at him as though he were suddenly about to shriek. His eyes shone, his mouth was wide open. Yet all he said, or whispered rather, for his voice sank very low, was, "It's nuthin' but what those lousy fellers believe when they've been hittin' the bottle too long—a sort of great animal that lives up yonder," he jerked his head northwards,

"quick as lightning in its tracks, an' bigger'n anything else in the bush, an' ain't supposed to be very good to look at—that's *all*!"

"A backwoods' superstition ...," began Simpson, moving hastily towards the tent in order to shake off the hand of the guide that clutched his arm. "Come, come, hurry up for God's sake, and get the lantern going! It's time we were in bed and asleep if we're to be up with the sun tomorrow ...."

The guide was close on his heels. "I'm coming," he answered out of the darkness, "I'm coming." And after a slight delay he appeared with the lantern and hung it from a nail in the front pole of the tent. The shadows of a hundred trees shifted their places quickly as he did so, and when he stumbled over the rope, diving swiftly inside, the whole tent trembled as though a gust of wind had struck it.

The two men lay down, without undressing, upon their beds of soft balsam boughs cunningly arranged. Inside, all was warm and cosy, but outside the world of crowding trees pressed close about them, marshalling their million shadows, and smothering the little tent that stood there like a wee white shell facing the ocean of tremendous forest.

Between the two lonely figures within, however, there pressed another shadow that was *not* a shadow from the night. It was the Shadow cast by the strange Fear, never wholly exorcised, that had leaped suddenly upon Défago in the middle of his singing. And Simpson, as he lay there, watching the darkness through the open flap of the tent, ready to plunge into the fragrant abyss of sleep, knew first that unique and profound stillness of a primeval forest when no wind stirs ... and when the night has weight and substance that enters into the soul to bind a veil about it. ... Then sleep took him ...

This it seemed to him, at least. Yet it was true that the lap of the water, just beyond the tent door, still beat time with his lessening pulses when he realised that he was lying with his eyes open and that another sound had recently introduced itself with softness between the splash and murmur of the little waves.

And, long before he understood what this sound was, it had stirred in him the centres of pity and alarm. He listened intently, though at first in vain, for the running blood beat all its drums too noisily in his ears. Did it come, he wondered, from the lake, or from the woods? ...

Then, suddenly, with a rush and a flutter of the heart, he knew that it was close beside him in the tent; and, when he turned over for better hearing, it focused itself unmistakably not two feet away. It was a sound of weeping: Défago, upon his bed of branches, was sobbing in the darkness as though his heart would break, the blankets evidently stuffed against his mouth to stifle it.

His first feeling, before he could think or reflect, was the rush of a poignant and searching tenderness. This intimate, human sound, heard

amid the desolation about them, woke pity. It was so incongruous, so pitifully incongruous—and so vain! Tears—in this vast and cruel wilderness: of what avail? He thought of a little child crying in mid-Atlantic. ... Then, of course, with fuller realisation, and the memory of what had gone before, came the descent of the terror upon him, and his blood ran cold.

"Défago," he whispered quickly, "what's the matter?" He tried to make his voice very gentle. "Are you in pain—unhappy ...?" There was no reply, but the sounds ceased abruptly. He stretched his hand out and touched him. The body did not stir.

"Are you awake?" for it occurred to him that the man was crying in his sleep. "Are you cold?" He noticed that his feet, which were uncovered, projected beyond the mouth of the tent. He spread an extra fold of his own blankets over them. The guide had slipped down in his bed, and the branches seemed to have been dragged with him. He was afraid to pull the body back again, for fear of waking him.

One or two tentative questions he ventured softly, but though he waited for several minutes there came no reply, nor any sign of movement. Presently he heard his regular and quiet breathing and, putting his hand again gently on the breast, felt the steady rise and fall beneath.

"Let me know if anything's wrong," he whispered, "or if I can do anything. Wake me at once if you feel—queer."

He hardly knew quite what it all meant. Défago, of course, had been crying in his sleep. Some dream or other had afflicted him. Yet never in his life would he forget that pitiful sound of sobbing, and the feeling that the whole awful wilderness of woods listened. ...

His own mind busied itself for a long time with the recent events, of which *this* took its mysterious place as one, and though his reason successfully argued away all unwelcome suggestions, a sensation of uneasiness remained, resisting ejection, very deep-seated—peculiar beyond ordinary.

But sleep, in the long run, proves greater than all emotions. His thoughts soon wandered again; he lay there, warm as toast, exceedingly weary; the night soothed and comforted, blunting the edges of memory and alarm. Half an hour later he was oblivious of everything in the outer world about him.

Yet sleep, in this case, was his great enemy, concealing all approaches, smothering the warning of his nerves.

As, sometimes in a nightmare, events crowd upon each other's heels, with a conviction of dreadfullest reality, yet some inconsistent detail accuses the whole display of incompleteness and disguise, so the events that now followed, though they actually happened, persuaded the mind somehow that the detail which could explain them had been overlooked in the confu-

sion, and that therefore they were but partly true, the rest delusion. At the back of the sleeper's mind something remains awake, ready to let slip the judgment, "All this is not *quite* real; when you wake up you'll understand."

Thus in a way it was with Simpson. The events, not wholly inexplicable or incredible in themselves, yet remain for the man who saw and heard them a sequence of separate facts of cold horror, because the little piece that might have made the puzzle clear lay concealed or overlooked.

So far as he can recall, it was a violent movement, running downwards through the tent towards the door, that first woke him and made him aware that his companion was sitting bolt upright beside him—quivering. Hours must have passed, for it was the pale gleam of dawn that revealed his outline against the canvas. This time the man was not crying; he was quaking like a leaf; the trembling he felt plainly through the blankets down the entire length of his own body. Défago had huddled down against him for protection, shrinking away from something that apparently concealed itself near the door-flaps of the little tent.

Simpson thereupon called out in a loud voice some questions or other—in the first bewilderment of waking he does not remember exactly what—and the man made no reply. The atmosphere and feeling of true nightmare lay horribly about him, making movement and speech both difficult. At first, indeed, he was not sure where he was—whether in one of the earlier camps, or at home in his bed at Aberdeen. The sense of confusion was very troubling.

Next—almost simultaneous with his waking, it seemed—the profound stillness of the dawn outside was shattered by a most uncommon sound. It came without warning, or audible approach; and it was unspeakably dreadful. It was a voice, Simpson declares, possibly a human voice; hoarse yet plaintive—a soft, roaring voice close outside the tent, overhead rather than upon the ground, of immense volume, while in some strange way most penetratingly and seductively sweet. It rang out, too, in three separate and distant notes or cries, that bore in some odd fashion a resemblance far-fetched yet recognisable, to the name of the guide: "*Dé-fa-go*!"

The student admits he is unable to describe it quite intelligently, for it was unlike any sound he had ever heard in his life, and combined a blending of such contrary qualities. "A sort of windy, crying voice," he calls it, "as of something lonely and untamed, wild and of abominable power. ..."

Even before it ceased dropping back into the great gulfs of silence, the guide beside him had sprung to his feet with an answering though unintelligible cry. He blundered against the tent-pole with violence, shaking the whole structure, spreading his arms out frantically for more room, and kicking his legs impetuously free of the clinging blankets. For a second, perhaps two, he stood upright by the door, his outline dark against the pallor of the

dawn; then, with a furious rushing speed, before his companion could move a hand to stop him, he shot with a plunge through the flaps of canvas—and was gone. And as he went—so astonishingly fast that the voice could actually be heard dying in the distance—he called aloud in tones of anguished terror that at the same time held something strangely like the frenzied exultation of delight: "Oh! oh! My feet of fire! My burning feet of fire! Oh! oh! This height and fiery speed!"

Then the distance quickly buried it, and the deep silence of very early morning descended upon the forest as before.

It had all come about with such rapidity that, but for the evidence of the empty bed beside him, Simpson could almost have believed it to have been the memory of a nightmare carried over from sleep. He still felt the warm pressure of that vanished body against his side; there lay the twisted blankets in a heap; the very tent yet trembled with the vehemence of the impetuous departure. The strange words rang in his ears, as though he still heard them in the distance—wild language of a suddenly stricken mind. Moreover, it was not only the senses of sight and hearing that reported uncommon things to his brain, for even while the man cried and ran, he had become aware that a strange perfume, faint yet pungent, pervaded the interior of the tent. And it was at this point, it seems, brought to himself by the consciousness that his nostrils were taking this distressing odour down into his throat, that he found his courage, sprang quickly to his feet—and went out.

The grey light of dawn that dropped, cold and glimmering, between the trees revealed the scene tolerably well. There stood the tent behind him, soaked with dew; the dark ashes of the fire, still warm; the lake, white beneath a coating of mist, the islands rising darkly out of it like objects packed in wool; and patches of snow beyond among the clearer spaces of the bush—everything cold, still, waiting for the sun. But nowhere a sign of the vanished guide—still, doubtless, flying at frantic speed through the frozen woods. There was not even the sound of disappearing footsteps, nor the echoes of the dying voice. He had gone—utterly.

There was nothing; nothing but the sense of his recent presence, so strongly left behind about the camp; *and*—this penetrating, all-pervading odour.

And even this was now rapidly disappearing in its turn. In spite of his exceeding mental perturbation, Simpson struggled hard to detect its nature, and define it, but the ascertaining of an elusive scent, not recognised subconsciously and at once, is a very subtle operation of the mind. And he failed. It was gone before he could properly seize or name it. Approximate description, even, seems to have been difficult, for it was unlike any smell he knew. Acrid rather, not unlike the odour of a lion, he thinks, yet softer and not wholly unpleasing, with something almost sweet in it that remind-

ed him of the scent of decaying garden leaves, earth, and the myriad, nameless perfumes that make up the odour of a big forest. Yet the "odour of lions" is the phrase with which he usually sums it all up.

Then—it was wholly gone, and he found himself standing by the ashes of the fire in a state of amazement and stupid terror that left him the helpless prey of anything that might choose to happen. Had a muskrat poked its pointed muzzle over a rock, or a squirrel scuttled in that instant down the bark of a tree, he would most likely have collapsed without more ado and fainted. For he felt about the whole affair the touch somewhere of a great Outer Horror—and his scattered powers had not as yet had time to collect themselves into a definite attitude of fighting self-control.

Nothing did happen, however. A great kiss of wind ran softly through the awakening forest, and a few maple leaves here and there rustled tremblingly to earth. The sky seemed to grow suddenly much lighter. Simpson felt the cool air upon his cheek and uncovered hand; realised that he was shivering with the cold; and, making a great effort, realised that he was called upon to take immediate steps to find and succour his vanished companion.

Make an effort, accordingly, he did, though an ill-calculated and futile one. With that wilderness of trees about him, the sheet of water cutting him off behind, and the horror of that wild cry in his blood, he did what any other inexperienced man would have done in similar bewilderment: He ran about, without any sense of direction, like a frantic child, and called loudly without ceasing the name of the guide.

"Défago! Défago! Défago!" he yelled, and the trees gave him back the name as often as he shouted, only a little softened—"Défago! Défago! Défago!"

He followed the trail that lay for a short distance across the patches of snow, and then lost it again where the trees grew too thickly for snow to lie. He shouted till he was hoarse, and till the sound of his own voice in all that unanswering and listening world began to frighten him. His confusion increased in direct ratio to the violence of his efforts. His distress became formidably acute, till at length his exertions defeated their own object, and from sheer exhaustion he headed back to the camp again. It remains a wonder that he ever found his way. It was with great difficulty, and only after numberless false clues, that he at last saw the white tent between the trees, and so reached safety.

Exhaustion then applied its own remedy, and he grew calmer. He made the fire and breakfasted. Hot coffee and bacon put a little sense and judgment into him again, and he realised that he had been behaving like a boy. He now made another and more successful attempt to face the situation collectedly, and, a nature naturally plucky coming to his assistance, he decided that he must first make as thorough a search as possible, failing

success in which he must find his way to the home camp as best he could and bring help.

And this is what he did. Taking food, matches, and rifle with him, and a small axe to blaze the trees against his return journey, he set forth. It was eight o'clock when he started, the sun shining over the tops of the trees in a sky without clouds. Pinned to a stake by the fire he left a note in case Défago returned while he was away.

This time, according to a careful plan, he took a new direction, intending to make a wide sweep that must sooner or later cut into indications of the guide's trail; and before he had gone a quarter of a mile he came across the tracks of a large animal in the snow, and beside it the light and smaller tracks of what were beyond question human feet—the feet of Défago. The relief he at once experienced was natural, though brief; for at first sight he saw in these tracks a simple explanation of the whole matter. These big marks had surely been left by a bull moose that, wind against it, had blundered upon the camp, and uttered its singular cry of warning and alarm the moment its mistake was apparent. Défago, in whom the hunting instinct was developed to the point of uncanny perfection, had scented the brute coming down the wind hours before. His excitement and disappearance were due, of course, to—to his ...

Then the impossible explanation at which he grasped faded, as common sense showed him mercilessly that none of this was true. No guide, much less a guide like Défago, could have acted in so irrational a way, going off even without his rifle! ... The whole affair demanded a far more complicated elucidation, when he remembered the details of it all—the cry of terror, the amazing language, the grey face of horror when his nostrils first caught the new odour; that muffled sobbing in the darkness; and—for this, too, now came back to him dimly—the man's original aversion for this particular bit of country. ...

Besides, now that he examined them more closely, these were not the tracks of a moose at all! Hank had explained to him the outline of a bull's hoofs, or a cow's or calf's, too, for that matter; he had drawn them clearly on a strip of birch bark. These were wholly different. They were big, round, ample, and with no pointed outline as of sharp hoofs. He wondered for a moment whether bear tracks were like that. There was no other animal he could think of, for caribou did not come so far south at this season, and, even if they did, would leave hoof-marks.

They were ominous signs—these mysterious writings left in the snow by the unknown creature that had lured a human being away from safety—and when he coupled them in his imagination with that haunting sound that had broken the stillness of the dawn, a momentary dizziness shook his mind, distressing him again beyond belief. He felt the *threatening* aspect of

it all. And, stooping down to examine the marks more closely, he caught a faint whiff of that sweet yet pungent odour that made him instantly straighten up again, fighting a sensation almost of nausea.

Then his memory played him another evil trick. He suddenly recalled those uncovered feet projecting beyond the edge of the tent, and the body's appearance of having been dragged towards the opening; the man's shrinking from something by the door when he woke later. The details now beat against his trembling mind with concerted attack. They seemed to gather in those deep spaces of the silent forest about him, where the host of trees stood waiting, listening, watching to see what he would do. The woods were closing round him.

With the persistence of true pluck, however, Simpson went forward, following the tracks as best he could, smothering these ugly emotions that sought to weaken his will. He blazed innumerable trees as he went, ever fearful of being unable to find the way back, and calling aloud at intervals of a few seconds the name of the guide. The dull tapping of the axe upon the massive trunks, and the unnatural accents of his own voice, became at length sounds that he even dreaded to make, dreaded to hear. They drew attention without ceasing to his presence and exact whereabouts, and if it were really the case that something was hunting himself down in the same way that he was hunting down another ...

With a strong effort, he crushed the thought out the instant it rose. It was the beginning , he realised, of a bewilderment utterly diabolical in kind that would speedily destroy him.

* * *

Although the snow was not continuous, lying merely in shallow flurries over the more open spaces, he found no difficulty in following the tracks for the first few miles. They were straight as a ruled line wherever the trees permitted. The stride soon began to increase in length, till it finally assumed proportions that seemed absolutely impossible for an ordinary animal to have made. Like huge flying leaps they became. One of these he measured, and though he knew that "stretch" of eighteen feet must be somehow wrong, he was at a complete loss to understand why he found no signs on the snow between the extreme points. What perplexed him even more, making him feel his vision had gone utterly awry, was that Défago's stride increased in the same manner, and finally covered the same incredible distances. It looked as if the great beast had lifted him with it and carried him across these astonishing intervals. Simpson, who was much longer in the limb, found that he could not encompass even half the stretch by taking a running jump.

The sight of these huge tracks, running side by side, silent evidence of a dreadful journey in which terror or madness had urged to impossible results, was profoundly moving. It shocked him in the secret depths of his soul. It was the most horrible thing his eyes had ever looked upon. He began to follow them mechanically, absentmindedly almost, ever peering over his shoulder to see if he, too, were being followed by something with a gigantic tread. ... And soon it came about that he no longer quite realised what it was they signified—these impressions left upon the snow by something nameless and untamed, always accompanied by the footmarks of the little French Canadian, his guide, his comrade, the man who had shared his tent a few hours before, chatting, laughing, even singing by his side ...

For a man of his years and inexperience, only a canny Scot, perhaps, grounded in common sense and established in logic, could have preserved even the measure of balance that this youth somehow or other did manage to preserve through the whole adventure. Otherwise, two things he presently noticed, while forging pluckily ahead, must have sent him headlong back to the comparative safety of his tent, instead of only making his hands close more tightly upon the rifle-stock, while his heart, trained for the Wee Kirk, sent a wordless prayer winging its way to Heaven. Both tracks, he saw, had undergone a change, and this change, so far as it concerned the footsteps of the man, was in some undecipherable manner—appalling.

It was in the bigger tracks he first noticed this, and for a long time he could not quite believe his eyes. Was it the blown leaves that produced odd effects of light and shade, or that the dry snow, drifting like finely ground rice about the edges, cast shadows and highlights? Or was it actually the fact that the great marks had become faintly coloured? For round about the deep, plunging holes of the animal there now appeared a mysterious, reddish tinge that was more like an effect of light than of anything that dyed the substance of the snow itself. Every mark had it, and had it increasingly—this indistinct fiery tinge that painted a new touch of ghastliness into the picture.

When, wholly unable to explain or credit it, he turned his attention to the other tracks to discover if they, too, bore similar witness, he noticed that these had meanwhile undergone a change that was infinitely worse, and charged with far more horrible suggestion. For, in the last hundred yards or so, he saw that they had grown gradually into the semblance of the parent tread. Imperceptibly the change had come about, yet unmistakably. It was hard to see where the change first began. The result, however, was beyond question. Smaller, neater, more cleanly modelled, they formed now an exact and careful duplicate of the larger tracks beside them. The feet that pro-

duced them had, therefore, also changed. And something in his mind reared up with loathing and with terror as he saw it.

Simpson, for the first time, hesitated; then, ashamed of his alarm and indecision, took a few hurried steps ahead; the next instant stopped dead in his tracks. Immediately in front of him all signs of the trail ceased; both tracks came to an abrupt end. On all sides, for a hundred yards or more, he searched in vain for the least indication of their continuance. There was—nothing.

The trees were very thick just there, big trees all of them: spruce, cedar, hemlock; there was no underbrush. He stood looking about him, all distraught, bereft of any power of judgment. Then he set to work to search again, and again, and yet again, but always with the same result: *nothing*. The feet that had printed the surface of the snow thus far had now, apparently, left the ground!

And it was in that moment of distress and confusion that the whip of terror laid its most nicely calculated lash about his heart. It dropped with deadly effect upon the sorest spot of all, completely unnerving him. He had been secretly dreading all the time that it would come—and come it did.

Far overhead, muted by great height and distance, strangely thinned and wailing, he heard the crying voice of Défago, the guide.

The sound dropped upon him out of that still, wintry sky with an effect of dismay and terror unsurpassed. The rifle fell to his feet. He stood motionless an instant, listening as it were with his whole body, then staggered back against the nearest tree for support, disorganised hopelessly in mind and spirit. To him, in that moment, it seemed the most shattering and dislocating experience he had ever known, so that his heart emptied itself of all feeling whatsoever as by a sudden draught.

"Oh! oh! This fiery height! Oh, my feet of fire! My burning feet of fire ...!" ran in far, beseeching accents of indescribable appeal, this voice of anguish down the sky. Once it called—then silence through all the listening wilderness of trees.

And Simpson, scarcely knowing what he did, presently found himself running wildly to and fro, searching, calling, tripping over roots and boulders, and flinging himself in a frenzy of undirected pursuit after the Caller. Behind the screen of memory and emotion with which experience veils events, he plunged, distracted and half-deranged, picking up false lights like a ship at sea, terror in his eyes and heart and soul. For the Panic of the Wilderness had called to him in that far voice—the Power of untamed Distance—the Enticement of the Desolation that destroys. He knew in that moment all the pains of someone hopelessly and irretrievably lost, suffering the lust and travail of a soul in the final Loneliness. A vision of Défago, eternally hunted, driven and pursued across the skyey vastness of those ancient forests fled like a flame across the dark ruin of his thoughts ....

It seemed ages before he could find anything in the chaos of his disorganised sensations to which he could anchor himself steady for a moment, and think ....

The cry was not repeated; his own hoarse calling brought no response; the inscrutable forces of the Wild had summoned their victim beyond recall—and held him fast.

* * *

Yet he searched and called, it seemed, for hours afterwards, for it was late in the afternoon when at length he decided to abandon a useless pursuit and return to his camp on the shores of Fifty Island Water. Even then he went with reluctance, that crying voice still echoing in his ears. With difficulty he found his rifle and the homeward trail. The concentration necessary to follow the badly blazed trees, and a biting hunger that gnawed, helped to keep his mind steady. Otherwise, he admits, the temporary aberration he suffered might have been prolonged to the point of positive disaster. Gradually the ballast shifted back again, and he regained something that approached his normal equilibrium.

But for all that the journey through the gathering dusk was miserably haunted. He heard innumerable following footsteps; voices that laughed and whispered; and saw figures crouching behind trees and boulders, making signs to one another for a concerted attack the moment he had passed. The creeping murmur of the wind made him start and listen. He went stealthily, trying to hide where possible, and making as little sound as he could. The shadows of the woods, hitherto protective or covering merely, had now become menacing, challenging; and the pageantry in his frightened mind masked a host of possibilities that were all the more ominous for being obscure. The presentiment of a nameless doom lurked ill-concealed behind every detail of what had happened.

It was really admirable how he emerged victor in the end; men of riper powers and experience might have come through the ordeal with less success. He had himself tolerably well in hand, all things considered, and his plan of action proved it. Sleep being absolutely out of the question, and travelling an unknown trail in the darkness equally impracticable, he sat up the whole of that night, rifle in hand, before a fire he never for a single moment allowed to die down. The severity of the haunted vigil marked his soul for life, but it was successfully accomplished; and with the very first signs of dawn he set forth upon the long return journey to the home camp to get help. As before, he left a written note to explain his absence, and to indicate where he had left a plentiful *cache* of food and matches—though he had no expectation that any human hands would find them!

How Simpson found his way alone by lake and forest might well make a story in itself, for to hear him tell it is to *know* the passionate loneliness of soul that a man can feel when the Wilderness holds him in the hollow of its illimitable hands—and laughs. It is also to admire his indomitable pluck.

He claims no skill, declaring that he followed the almost invisible trail mechanically, and without thinking. This, doubtless, is the truth. He relied upon the guiding of the unconscious mind, which is instinct. Perhaps, too, some sense of orientation, known to animals and primitive men, may have helped as well, for through all that tangled region he succeeded in reaching the exact spot where Défago had hidden the canoe nearly three days before with the remark, "Strike doo west across the lake into the sun to find the camp."

There was not much sun left to guide him, but he used his compass to the best of his ability, embarking in the frail craft for the last twelve miles of the journey with a sensation of immense relief that the forest was at last behind him. Fortunately, the water was calm; he took his line across the centre of the lake instead of coasting round the shores for another twenty miles. Fortunately, too, the other hunters were back. The light of their fires furnished a steering point without which he might have searched all night long for the actual position of the camp.

It was close to midnight all the same when his canoe grated on the sandy cove, and Hank, Punk, and his uncle, disturbed in their sleep by his cries, ran quickly down and helped a very exhausted and broken specimen of Scotch humanity over the rocks towards the dying fire.

The sudden entrance of his prosaic uncle into this world of wizardry and horror that had haunted him without interruption now for two days and two nights had the immediate effect of giving to the affair an entirely new aspect. The sound of that crisp "Hullo, my boy! And what's up *now*?" and the grasp of that dry and vigorous hand introduced another standard of judgment. A revulsion of feeling washed through him. He realised that he had let himself "go" rather badly. He even felt vaguely ashamed of himself. The native hardheadedness of his race reclaimed him.

This doubtless explains why he found it so hard to tell that group round the fire—everything. He told enough, however, for the immediate decision to be arrived at that a relief party must start at the earliest possible moment, and that Simpson, in order to guide it capably, must first have food and, above all, sleep. Dr. Cathcart, observing the lad's condition more shrewdly than his patient knew, gave him a very slight injection of morphine. For six hours he slept like the dead.

From the description carefully written out afterwards by this student of divinity, it appears that the account he gave to the astonished group omit-

ted sundry vital and important details. He declares that, with his uncle's wholesome, matter-of-fact countenance staring him in the face, he simply had not the courage to mention them. Thus all the search-party gathered, it would seem, was that Défago had suffered in the night an acute and inexplicable attack of mania, had imagined himself "called" by someone or something, and had plunged into the bush after it without food or rifle, where he must die a horrible and lingering death by cold and starvation unless he could be found and rescued in time. "In time", moreover, meant "at once."

In the course of the following day, however—they were off by seven, leaving Punk in charge, with instructions to have food and fire always ready—Simpson found it possible to tell his uncle a good deal more of the story's true inwardness, without divining that it was drawn out of him as a matter of fact by a very subtle form of cross-examination. By the time they reached the beginning of the trail, where the canoe was laid up against the return journey, he had mentioned how Défago had spoken vaguely of "something he called a 'Wendigo'"; how he had cried in his sleep; how he had imagined an unusual scent about the camp; and had betrayed other symptoms of mental excitement. He also admitted the bewildering effect of "that extraordinary odour" upon himself, "pungent and acrid like the odour of lions." By the time they were within an easy hour of Fifty Island Water he had let slip the further fact—a foolish avowal of his own hysterical condition, as he felt afterwards—that he had heard the vanished guide call "for help." He omitted the singular phrases used, for he simply could not bring himself to repeat the preposterous language. Also, while describing how the man's footsteps in the snow had gradually assumed an exact miniature likeness of the animal's plunging tracks, he left out the fact that they measured a *wholly* incredible distance. It seemed a question, nicely balanced between individual pride and honesty, what he should reveal and what suppress. He mentioned the fiery tinge in the snow, for instance, yet shrank from telling that body and bed had been partly dragged out of the tent. ...

With the net result that Dr. Cathcart, adroit psychologist that he fancied himself to be, had assured him clearly enough exactly where his mind, influenced by loneliness, bewilderment, and terror, had yielded to the strain and invited delusion. While praising his conduct, he managed at the same time to point out where, when, and how his mind had gone astray. He made his nephew think himself finer than he was by minimising the value of his evidence. Like many another materialist, that is, he lied cleverly on the basis of insufficient knowledge, *because* the knowledge supplied seemed to his own particular intelligence inadmissible.

"The spell of these terrible solitudes," he said, "cannot leave any mind untouched—any mind, that is, possessed of the higher imaginative qualities.

It has worked upon yours exactly as it worked upon my own when I was your age. The animal that haunted your camp was undoubtedly a moose, for the 'belling' of a moose may have, sometimes, a very peculiar quality of sound. The coloured appearance of the big tracks was obviously a defect of vision in your own eyes produced by excitement. The size and stretch of the tracks we shall prove when we come to them. But the hallucination of an audible voice, of course, is one of the commonest forms of delusion due to mental excitement—an excitement, my dear boy, perfectly excusable, and, let me add, wonderfully controlled by you under the circumstances. For the rest, I am bound to say, you have acted with splendid courage, for the terror of feeling oneself lost in this wilderness is nothing short of awful, and, had I been in your place, I don't for a moment believe I could have behaved with one quarter of your wisdom and decision. The only thing I find it uncommonly difficult to explain is—that damned odour."

"It made me feel sick, I assure you," declared his nephew, "positively dizzy!" His uncle's attitude of calm omniscience, merely because he knew more psychological formulae, made him slightly defiant. It was so easy to be wise in the explanation of an experience one has not personally witnessed. "A kind of desolate and terrible odour is the only way I can describe it," he concluded, glancing at the features of the quiet, unemotional man beside him.

"I can only marvel," was the reply, "that under the circumstances it did not seem to you even worse." The dry words, Simpson knew, hovered between the truth and his uncle's interpretation of "the truth."

* * *

And so at last they came to the little camp and found the tent still standing, the remains of the fire, and the piece of paper pinned to a stake beside—untouched. The *cache*, poorly contrived by inexperienced hands, however, had been discovered and opened—by muskrats, mink, and squirrel. The matches lay scattered about the opening, but the food had been taken to the last crumb.

"Well, fellers, he ain't here," exclaimed Hank loudly after his fashion, "and that's as sartain as the coal supply down below! But whar he's got to by this time is 'bout as onsartain as the trade in crowns in t'other place." The presence of a divinity student was no barrier to his language at such a time, though for the reader's sake it may be severely edited. "I propose," he added, "that we start out at once an' hunt for 'm like hell!"

The gloom of Défago's probable fate oppressed the whole party with a sense of dreadful gravity the moment they saw the familiar signs of recent occupancy. Especially the tent, with the bed of balsam branches still smoothed and flattened by the pressure of his body, seemed to bring his pres-

ence near to them. Simpson, feeling vaguely as if his word were somehow at stake, went about explaining particulars in a hushed tone. He was much calmer now, though over-wearied with the strain of his many journeys. His uncle's method of explaining—"explaining away", rather—the details still fresh in his haunted memory helped, too, to put ice upon his emotions.

"And that's the direction he ran off in," he said to his two companions, pointing in the direction where the guide had vanished that morning in the grey dawn. "Straight down there he ran like a deer, in between the birch and the hemlock ...."

Hank and Dr. Cathcart exchanged glances.

"And it was about two miles down there, in a straight line," continued the other, speaking with something of the former terror in his voice, "that I followed his trail to the place where—it stopped—dead!"

"And where you heered him callin' and caught the stench, an' all the rest of the wicked entertainment," cried Hank, with a volubility that betrayed his keen distress.

"And where your excitement overcame you to the point of producing illusions," added Dr. Cathcart under his breath, yet not so low that his nephew did not hear it.

* * *

It was early in the afternoon, for they had travelled quickly, and there was still a good two hours of daylight left. Dr. Cathcart and Hank lost no time in beginning the search, but Simpson was too exhausted to accompany them. They would follow the blazed marks on the trees, and, where possible, his footsteps. Meanwhile, the best thing he could do was to keep a good fire going, and rest.

But after something like three hours' search, the darkness already down, the two men returned to camp with nothing to report. Fresh snow had covered all signs, and though they had followed the blazed trees to the spot where Simpson had turned back, they had not discovered the smallest indications of a human being—or, for that matter, of an animal. There were no fresh tracks of any kind; the snow lay undisturbed.

It was difficult to know what was best to do, though in reality there was nothing more they *could* do. They might stay and search for weeks without much chance of success. The fresh snow had destroyed their only hope, and they gathered round the fire for supper, a gloomy and despondent party. The facts, indeed, were sad enough, for Défago had a wife at Rat Portage, and his earnings were the family's sole means of support.

Now that the whole truth in all its ugliness was out, it seemed useless to deal in further disguise or pretence. They talked openly of the facts and

probabilities. It was not the first time, even in the experience of Dr. Cathcart, that a man had yielded to the singular seduction of the Solitudes and gone out of his mind. Défago, moreover, was predisposed to something of the sort, for he already had the touch of melancholia in his blood, and his fibre was weakened by bouts of drinking that often lasted for weeks at a time. Something on this trip—one might never know precisely what—had sufficed to push him over the line, that was all. And he had gone, gone off into the great wilderness of trees and lakes to die by starvation and exhaustion. The chances against his finding camp were overwhelming; the delirium that was upon him would also doubtless have increased, and it was quite likely he might do violence to himself and so hasten his cruel fate. Even while they talked, indeed, the end had probably come. On the suggestion of Hank, his old pal, however, they proposed to wait a little longer and devote the whole of the following day, from dawn to darkness, to the most systematic search they could devise. They would divide the territory between them. They discussed their plan in great detail. All that men could do they would do.

And, meanwhile, they talked about the particular form in which the singular Panic of the Wilderness had made its attack upon the mind of the unfortunate guide. Hank, though familiar with the legend in its general outline, obviously did not welcome the turn the conversation had taken. He contributed little, though that little was illuminating. For he admitted that a story ran over all this section of country to the effect that several Indians had "seen the Wendigo" along the shores of Fifty Island Water in the "fall" of last year, and that this was the true reason of Défago's disinclination to hunt there. Hank doubtless felt that he had in a sense helped his old pal to death by overpersuading him. "When an Indian goes crazy," he explained, talking to himself more than to the others, it seemed, "it's always put that he's 'seen the Wendigo.' An' pore old Défago was superstitious down to his very heels ...!"

Then Simpson, feeling the atmosphere more sympathetic, told over again the full story of his astonishing tale; he left out no details this time; he mentioned his own sensations and gripping fears. He only omitted the strange language used.

"But Défago surely had already told you all these details of the Wendigo legend, my dear fellow," insisted the doctor. "I mean he had talked about it, and thus put into your mind the ideas which your own excitement afterwards developed?"

Whereupon Simpson again repeated the facts. Défago, he declared, had barely mentioned the beast. He, Simpson, knew nothing of the story, and, so far as he remembered, had never even read about it. Even the word was unfamiliar.

Of course he was telling the truth, and Dr. Cathcart was reluctantly compelled to admit the singular character of the whole affair. He did not do this in words so much as in manner, however. He kept his back against a good, stout tree; he poked the fire into a blaze the moment it showed signs of dying down; he was quicker than any of them to notice the least sound in the night about them—a fish jumping in the lake, a twig snapping in the bush, the dropping of occasional fragments of frozen snow from the branches overhead where the heat loosened them. His voice, too, changed a little in quality, becoming a shade less confident, lower also in tone. Fear, to put it plainly, hovered close about that little camp, and though all three would have been glad to speak of other matters, the only thing they seemed able to discuss was this—the source of their fear. They tried other subjects in vain; there was nothing to say about them. Hank was the most honest of the group; he said next to nothing. He never once, however, turned his back to the darkness. His face was always to the forest, and when wood was needed he didn't go farther than was necessary to get it.

A wall of silence wrapped them in, for the snow, though not thick, was sufficient to deaden any noise, and the frost held things pretty tightly besides. No sound but their voices and the soft roar of the flames made itself heard. Only, from time to time, something soft as the flutter of a pine-moth's wings went past them through the air. No one seemed anxious to go to bed. The hours slipped towards midnight.

"The legend is picturesque enough," observed the doctor after one of his long pauses, speaking to break it rather than because he had anything to say, "for the Wendigo is simply the Call of the Wild personified, which some natures hear to their own destruction."

"That's about it," Hank said presently. "An' there's no misunderstandin' when you hear it. It calls you by name right 'nough."

Another pause followed. Then Dr. Cathcart came back to the forbidden subject with a rush that made the others jump.

"The allegory *is* significant," he remarked, looking about him into the darkness, "for the Voice, they say, resembles all the minor sounds of the bush—wind, falling water, cries of animals, and so forth. And, once the victim hears *that*—he's off for good, of course! His most vulnerable points, moreover, are said to be the feet and the eyes; the feet, you see, for the lust of wandering, and the eyes for the lust of beauty. The poor beggar goes at such a dreadful speed that he bleeds beneath the eyes, and his feet burn."

Dr. Cathcart, as he spoke, continued to peer uneasily into the surrounding gloom. His voice sank to a hushed tone.

"The Wendigo," he added, "is said to burn his feet—owing to the friction, apparently caused by its tremendous velocity—till they drop off, and new ones form exactly like its own."

Simpson listened in horrified amazement; but it was the pallor on Hank's face that fascinated him most. He would willingly have stopped his ears and closed his eyes, had he dared.

"It don't always keep to the ground, neither," came in Hank's slow, heavy drawl, "for it goes so high that he thinks the stars have set him all a-fire. An' it'll take great thumpin' jumps sometimes, an' run along the tops of the trees, carrying its partner with it, an' then droppin' him jest as a fish-hawk'll drop a pickerel to kill it before eatin'. An' its food, of all the muck in the whole bush is—moss!" And he laughed a short, unnatural laugh. "It's a moss-eater, is the Wendigo," he added, looking up excitedly into the faces of his companions, "moss-eater," he repeated, with a string of the most outlandish oaths he could invent.

But Simpson now understood the true purpose of all this talk. What these two men, each strong and "experienced" in his own way, dreaded more than anything else was—silence. They were talking against time. They were also talking against darkness, against the invasion of panic, against the admission reflection might bring that they were in an enemy's country—against anything, in fact, rather than allow their inmost thoughts to assume control. He himself, already initiated by the awful vigil of terror, was beyond both of them in this respect. He had reached the stage where he was immune. But these two, the scoffing, analytical doctor and the honest, dogged backwoodsman, each sat trembling in the depths of his being.

Thus the hours passed; and thus, with lowered voices and a kind of taut inner resistance of spirit, this little group of humanity sat in the jaws of the Wilderness and talked foolishly of the terrible and haunting legend. It was an unequal contest, all things considered, for the Wilderness had already the advantage of first attack—and of a hostage. The fate of their comrade hung over them with a steadily increasing weight of oppression that finally became insupportable.

It was Hank, after a pause longer than the preceding ones that no one seemed able to break, who first let loose all this pent-up emotion in very unexpected fashion, by springing suddenly to his feet and letting out the most ear-shattering yell imaginable into the night. He could not contain himself any longer, it seemed. To make it carry even beyond an ordinary cry, he interrupted its rhythm by shaking the palm of his hand before his mouth.

"That's for Défago," he said, looking down at the other two with a queer, defiant laugh, "for it's my belief"—the sandwiched oaths may be omitted—"that my old partner's not far from us at this very minute."

There was a vehemence and recklessness about his performance that made Simpson, too, start to his feet in amazement, and betrayed even the doctor into letting the pipe slip from between his lips. Hank's face was ghastly, but Cathcart's showed sudden weakness—a loosening of all his fac-

ulties, as it were. Then a momentary anger blazed into his eyes, and he, too, though with deliberation born of habitual self-control, got upon his feet and faced the excited guide. For this was unpermissible, foolish, dangerous, and he meant to stop it in the bud.

What might have happened in the next minute or two one may speculate about, yet never definitely know, for in the instant of profound silence that followed Hank's roaring voice, and as though in answer to it, something went past through the darkness of the sky overhead at terrific speed—something of necessity very large, for it displaced much air, while down between the trees there fell a faint and windy cry of a human voice, calling in tones of indescribable anguish and appeal:

"Oh! oh! This fiery height! Oh my feet of fire! My burning feet of fire!"

White to the very edge of his shirt, Hank looked stupidly about him like a child. Dr. Cathcart uttered some kind of unintelligible cry, turning as he did so with an instinctive movement of blind terror towards the protection of the tent, then halted in the act as though frozen. Simpson, alone of the three, retained his presence of mind a little. His own horror was too deep to allow any immediate reaction. He had heard that cry before.

Turning to his stricken companions, he said almost calmly, "That's exactly the cry I heard—the very words he used!"

Then, lifting his face to the sky, he cried aloud, "Défago, Défago! Come down here to us! Come down—!"

And before there was time for anybody to take definite action one way or another there came the sound of something dropping heavily between the trees, striking the branches on the way down, and landing with a dreadful thud upon the frozen earth below. The crash and thunder of it was really terrific.

"That's him, s'help me the good Gawd!" came from Hank in a whispering cry half-choked, his hand going automatically towards the hunting-knife in his belt. "And he's coming! He's coming!" he added, with an irrational laugh of terror, as the sounds of heavy footsteps crunching over the snow became distinctly audible, approaching through the blackness towards the circle of light.

While the steps, with their stumbling motion, moved nearer and nearer upon them, the three men stood round that fire, motionless and dumb. Dr. Cathcart had the appearance as of a man suddenly withered; even his eyes did not move. Hank, suffering shockingly, seemed on the verge again of violent action, yet did nothing. He, too, was hewn of stone. Like stricken children they seemed. The picture was hideous. Meanwhile, their owner still invisible, the footsteps came closer, crunching the frozen snow. It was endless—too prolonged to be quite real—this measured and pitiless approach. It was accursed.

Then at length the darkness, having thus laboriously conceived, brought forth—a figure. It drew forward into the zone of uncertain light where fire and shadows mingled, not ten feet away; then halted, staring at them fixedly. The same instant it started forward again with spasmodic motion as of a thing moved by wires, and coming up closer to them, full into the glare of the fire, they perceived then that—it was a man; and apparently that this man was—Défago.

Something like a skin of horror almost perceptibly drew down in that moment over every face, and three pairs of eyes shone through it as though they saw across the frontiers of normal vision into the Unknown.

Défago advanced, his tread faltering and uncertain; he made his way straight up to them as a group first, then turned sharply and peered close into the face of Simpson. The sound of a voice issued from his lips:

"Here I am, Boss Simpson. I heered someone calling me." It was a faint, dried-up voice, made wheezy and breathless as by immense exertion. "I'm havin' a reg'lar hell-fire kind of a trip, I am." And he laughed, thrusting his head forward into the other's face.

That laugh started the machinery of the group of waxwork figures with the wax-white skins. Hank immediately sprang forward with a stream of oaths so far-fetched that Simpson did not recognise them as English at all, but thought he had lapsed into Indian or some other lingo. He only realised that Hank's presence, thrust thus between them, was welcome—uncommonly welcome. Dr. Cathcart, though more calmly and leisurely, advanced behind him, heavily stumbling.

Simpson seems hazy as to what was actually said and done in those next few seconds, for the eyes of that detestable and blasted visage peering at such close quarters into his own utterly bewildered his senses at first. He merely stood still. He said nothing. He had not the trained will of the older men that forced them into action in defiance of all emotional stress. He watched them moving as behind a glass that half destroyed their reality; it was dreamlike, perverted. Yet, through the torrent of Hank's meaningless phrases, he remembers hearing his uncle's tone of authority—hard and forced—saying several things about food and warmth, blankets, whisky and the rest ... and, further, that whiffs of that penetrating, unaccustomed odour, vile, yet sweetly bewildering, assailed his nostrils during all that followed.

It was no less a person than himself, however—less experienced and adroit than the others though he was—who gave instinctive utterance to the sentence that brought a measure of relief into the ghastly situation by expressing the doubt and thought in each one's heart.

"It *is*—YOU, isn't it, Défago?" he asked under his breath, horror breaking his speech.

And at once Cathcart burst out with the loud answer before the other had time to move his lips. "Of course it is! Of course it is! Only—can't you see—he's nearly dead with exhaustion, cold, and terror. Isn't *that* enough to change a man beyond all recognition?" It was said in order to convince himself as much as to convince the others. The overemphasis alone proved that. And continually, while he spoke and acted, he held a handkerchief to his nose. That odour pervaded the whole camp.

For the "Défago" who sat huddled by the big fire wrapped in blankets, drinking hot whisky, and holding food in wasted hands, was no more like the guide they had last seen alive than the picture of a man of sixty is like a daguerreotype of his early youth in the costume of another generation. Nothing really can describe that ghastly caricature, the parody, masquerading there in the firelight as Défago. From the ruins of the dark and awful memories he still retains, Simpson declares that the face was more animal than human, the features drawn about into wrong proportions, the skin loose and hanging, as though he had been subjected to extraordinary pressures and tensions. It made him think vaguely of those bladder-faces blown up by the hawkers on Ludgate Hill, that change their expression as they swell, and as they collapse emit a faint and wailing imitation of a voice. Both face and voice suggested some such abominable resemblance. But Cathcart long afterwards, seeking to describe the indescribable, asserts that thus might have looked a face and body that had been in air so rarefied that, the weight of atmosphere being removed, the entire structure threatened to fly asunder and become—*incoherent*.

It was Hank, though, all distraught and shaking with a tearing volume of emotion he could neither handle nor understand, who brought things to a head without much ado. He went off to a little distance from the fire, apparently so that the light should not dazzle him too much, and, shading his eyes for a moment with both hands, shouted in a loud voice that held anger and affection dreadfully mingled.

"You ain't Défaygo! You ain't Défaygo at all! I don't give a damn, but that ain't you, my ole pal of twenty years!" He glared upon the huddled figure as though he would destroy him with his eyes. "An' if it is I'll swab the floor of Hell with a wad of cotton-wool on a toothpick, s'help me the good Gawd!" he added, with a violent fling of horror and disgust.

It was impossible to silence him. He stood there shouting like one possessed, horrible to see, horrible to hear—*because it was the truth*. He repeated himself in fifty different ways, each more outlandish than the last. The woods rang with echoes. At one time it looked as if he meant to fling himself upon "the intruder", for his hand continually jerked towards the long hunting-knife in his belt.

But in the end he did nothing, and the whole tempest completed itself very nearly with tears. Hank's voice suddenly broke, he collapsed on the ground, and Cathcart somehow or other persuaded him at last to go into the tent and lie quiet. The remainder of the affair, indeed, was witnessed by him from behind the canvas, his white and terrified face peeping through the crack of the tent door-flap.

Then Dr. Cathcart, closely followed by his nephew, who so far had kept his courage better than all of them, went up with a determined air and stood opposite to the figure of Défago huddled over the fire. He looked him squarely in the face and spoke. At first his voice was firm.

"Défago, tell us what's happened—just a little, so that we can know how best to help you?" he asked in a tone of authority, almost of command. And at that point, it *was* command. At once afterwards, however, it changed in quality, for the figure turned up to him a face so piteous, so terrible and so little like humanity, that the doctor shrank back from him as from something spiritually unclean. Simpson watching close behind him says he got the impression of a mask that was on the verge of dropping off, and that underneath they would discover something black and diabolical revealed in utter nakedness. "Out with it, man, out with it!" Cathcart cried, terror running neck and neck with entreaty. "None of us can stand this much longer—!" It was the cry of instinct over reason.

Then "Défago", smiling *whitely*, answered in that thin and fading voice that already seemed passing over into a sound of quite another character.

"I seen that great Wendigo thing," he whispered, sniffing the air about him exactly like an animal. "I been with it too—"

Whether the poor devil would have said more, or whether Dr. Cathcart would have continued the impossible cross-examination, cannot be known, for at that moment the voice of Hank was heard yelling at the top of his shout from behind the canvas that concealed all but his terrified eyes. Such a howling was never heard.

"His feet! Oh, Gawd, his feet! Look at his great changed feet!"

Défago, shuffling where he sat, had moved in such a way that for the first time his legs were in full light and his feet were visible. Yet Simpson had no time, himself, to see properly what Hank had seen. And Hank has never seen fit to tell. That same instant, with a leap like that of a frightened tiger, Cathcart was upon him, bundling the folds of blanket about his legs with such speed that the young student caught little more than a passing glimpse of something dark and oddly massed where moccasined feet ought to have been, and saw even that but with uncertain vision.

Then, before the doctor had time to do more, or Simpson time even to think a question, much less ask it, Défago was standing upright in front of them, balancing with pain and difficulty, and upon his shapeless and twist-

ed visage an expression so dark and so malicious that it was, in the true sense, monstrous.

"Now you seen it too," he wheezed, "you seen my fiery, burning feet! And now—that is, unless you kin save me an' prevent—it's 'bout time for—"

His piteous and beseeching voice was interrupted by a sound that was like the roar of wind coming across the lake. The trees overhead shook their tangled branches. The blazing fire bent its flames as before a blast. And something swept with a terrific, rushing noise about the little camp and seemed to surround it entirely in a single moment of time. Défago shook the clinging blankets from his body, turned towards the woods behind, and with the same stumbling motion that had brought him—was gone: gone before anyone could move muscle to prevent him, gone with an amazing, blundering swiftness that left no time to act. The darkness positively swallowed him; and less than a dozen seconds later, above the roar of the swaying trees and the shout of the sudden wind, all three men, watching and listening with stricken hearts, heard a cry that seemed to drop down upon them from a great height of sky and distance—"Oh, oh! This fiery height! Oh, oh! My feet of fire! My burning feet of fire ...!"—then died away, into untold space and silence.

Dr. Cathcart—suddenly master of himself, and therefore of others—was just able to seize Hank violently by the arm as he tried to dash headlong into the bush.

"But I want ter know— you!" shrieked the guide. "I want ter see! That ain't him at all, but some—devil that's shunted into his place ...!"

Somehow or other—he admits he never quite knew how he accomplished it—he managed to keep him in the tent and pacify him. The doctor, apparently, had reached the stage where reaction had set in and allowed his own innate force to conquer. Certainly he "managed" Hank admirably. It was his nephew, however, hitherto so wonderfully controlled, who gave him most cause for anxiety, for the cumulative strain had now produced a condition of lachrymose hysteria which made it necessary to isolate him upon a bed of boughs and blankets so far removed from Hank as was possible under the circumstances.

And there he lay, as the watches of that haunted night passed over the lonely camp, crying startled sentences, and fragments of sentences, into the folds of his blankets. A quantity of gibberish about speed and height and fire mingled oddly with biblical memories of the classroom. "People with broken faces all on fire are coming at a most awful, awful pace towards the camp!" he would moan one minute; and the next would sit up and stare into the woods, intently listening, and whisper, "How terrible in the wilderness are—are the feet of them that ..." until his uncle came across to change the direction of his thoughts and comfort him.

The hysteria, fortunately, proved but temporary. Sleep cured him. Just as it cured Hank.

Till the first signs of daylight came, soon after five o'clock, Dr. Cathcart kept his vigil. His face was the colour of chalk and there were strange flushes beneath his eyes. An appalling terror of the soul battled with his will all through those silent hours. These were some of the outer signs. ...

At dawn he lit the fire himself, made breakfast, and woke the others, and by seven they were well on their way back to the home camp—three perplexed and afflicted men, but each in his own way having reduced his inner turmoil to a condition of more or less systematised order again.

They talked little, and then only of the most wholesome and common things, for their minds were charged with painful thoughts that clamoured for explanation, though no one dared refer to them. Hank, being nearest to primitive conditions, was the first to find himself, for he was also less complex. In Dr. Cathcart "civilisation" championed his forces against an attack singular enough. To this day, perhaps, he is not *quite* sure of certain things. Anyhow, he took longer to "find himself."

Simpson, the student of divinity, it was who arranged his conclusions probably with the best, though not most scientific, appearance of order. Out there, in the heart of unreclaimed wilderness, they had surely witnessed something crudely and essentially primitive. Something that had survived somehow the advance of humanity had emerged terrifically, betraying a scale of life monstrous and immature. He envisaged it rather as a glimpse into prehistoric ages, when superstitions, gigantic and uncouth, still oppressed the hearts of men; when the forces of nature were still untamed, the Powers that may have haunted a primeval universe not yet withdrawn. To this day he thinks of what he termed years later in a sermon "savage and formidable Potencies lurking behind the souls of men, not evil perhaps in themselves, yet instinctively hostile to humanity as it exists".

With his uncle he never discussed the matter in detail, for the barrier between the two types of minds made it difficult. Only once, years later, something led them to the frontier of the subject—of a single detail of the subject, rather.

"Can't you even tell me what—they were like?" he asked, and the reply, though conceived in wisdom, was not encouraging.

"It is far better you should not try to know, or to find out."

"Well—that odour ...?" persisted the nephew. "What do you make of that?"

Dr. Cathcart looked at him and raised his eyebrows.

"Odours," he replied, "are not so easy as sounds and sights of telepathic communication. I make as much, or as little, probably, as you do yourself."

He was not quite as glib as usual with his explanations. That was all.

* * *

At the fall of day, cold, exhausted, famished, the party came to the end of the long portage and dragged themselves into a camp that at first seemed empty. Fire there was none, and no Punk came forward to welcome them. The emotional capacity of all three was too overspent to recognise either surprise or annoyance; but the cry of spontaneous affection that burst from the lips of Hank, as he rushed ahead of them towards the fireplace, came probably as a warning that the end of the amazing affair was not quite yet. Both Cathcart and his nephew confessed afterwards that when they saw him kneel down in his excitement and embrace something that reclined, gently moving, beside the extinguished ashes, they felt in their very bones that this "something" would prove to be Défago—the true Défago returned.

And so, indeed, it was.

It is soon told. Exhausted to the point of emaciation, the French Canadian—what was left of him, that is—fumbled among the ashes, trying to make a fire. His body crouched there, the weak fingers obeying feebly the instinctive habit of a lifetime with twigs and matches. But there was no longer any mind to direct the simple operation. The mind had fled beyond recall. With it, too, had fled memory. Not only recent events, but all previous life was a blank.

This time it was the real man, though incredibly and horribly shrunken. On his face was no expression of any kind whatever—fear, welcome, or recognition. He did not seem to know who it was that embraced him, or who it was that fed, warmed, and spoke to him the words of comfort and relief. Forlorn and broken beyond all reach of human aid, the little man did meekly as he was bidden. The "something" that had constituted him "individual" had vanished for ever.

In some ways it was more terribly moving than anything they had yet seen—that idiot smile as he drew wads of coarse moss from his swollen cheeks and told them that he was "a damned moss-eater"; the continued vomiting of even the simplest food; and, worst of all, the piteous and childish voice of complaint in which he told them that his feet pained him—"burn like fire"—which was natural enough when Dr. Cathcart examined them and found that both were dreadfully frozen. Beneath the eyes there were faint indications of recent bleeding.

The details of how he had survived the prolonged exposure, of where he had been, or of how he had covered the great distance from one camp to the other, including an immense detour of the lake on foot, since he had no canoe—all this remains unknown. His memory had vanished completely. And before the end of the winter whose beginning witnessed this strange occurrence, Défago, bereft of mind, memory, and soul, had gone with it. He

lingered only a few weeks. And what Punk was able to contribute to the story throws no further light upon it. He was cleaning fish by the lakeshore about five o'clock in the evening—an hour, that is, before the search party returned—when he saw the shadow of the guide picking its way weakly into camp. In advance of him, he declares, came the faint whiff of a certain singular odour.

The same instant old Punk started for home. He covered the entire journey of three days as only Indian blood could have covered it. The terror of the whole race drove him. He knew what it all meant. Défago had "seen the Wendigo."

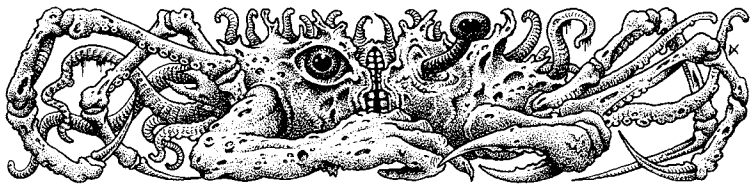
About "The Thing from Outside"

Mythos theologian Richard L. Tierney (*The Scroll of Thoth: Simon of Gitta and the Great Old Ones*, *The Winds of Zarr*) has pointed out that, besides Derleth's manifest fascination with Blackwood's rendition of the Wendigo legend, the story may not have been the only source of inspiration for Derleth's Ithaqua. Derleth may also have had independent access to the legends. Tierney once visited a five-pointed, star-shaped island, called (guess what?) Star Island in the middle of Cass Lake in Bemidji, Minnesota. On the island there lay a smaller body of water called Windigo Lake (Tierney to Robert M. Price, August 16, 1987)! Can it be that the Elder Gods imprisoned Ithaqua in the lake and set it inside an isle shaped like the Elder Sign to keep him there? It's hard not to think so!

> As for Star Island and Windigo Lake, I don't know whether Derleth ever visited or even heard of them. Actually, there are several Windigo Lakes in the northern states; I know of one in Western Wisconsin and a couple in Canada. That's because the Windigo is an actual Chippewa legend. I once talked to a Chippewa fellow on the Nett Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota who told me of hearing Windigo tales from his grandmother when he was a kid. (Tierney to Robert M. Price, August 13, 1987)

Derleth was such a lover of Wisconsin regional lore that it is hard to imagine he would not have known of Wendigo/Windigo legends associated with the state.

Another source indicated by Tierney is George Allan England's story "The Thing from Outside", which appeared first in the Ziff-Davis magazine *Science and Invention* in 1923 (volume 10, #2). We know Derleth thought highly of it, because he reprinted it in his anthology *Strange Ports of Call* (Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948; the paperback is an abridgment and lacks the story).



The Thing from Outside

by George Allen England

They sat about their campfire, that little party of Americans retreating southward from Hudson Bay before the oncoming menace of the great cold. Sat there, stolid under the awe of the North, under the uneasiness that the day's trek had laid upon their souls. The three men smoked. The two women huddled close to each other. Fire-glow picked their faces from the gloom of night among the dwarf firs. A splashing murmur told of the Albany River's haste to escape from the wilderness, and reach the Bay.

"I don't see what there was in a mere circular print on a rock ledge to make our guides desert," said Professor Thorburn. His voice was as dry as his whole personality. "Most extraordinary!"

"*They* knew what it was, all right," answered Jandron, geologist of the party. "So do I." He rubbed his cropped mustache. His eyes glinted grayly. "I've seen prints like that before. That was on the Labrador. And I've seen things happen, where they were."

"Something surely happened to our guides, before they'd got a mile into the bush," put in the professor's wife; while Vivian, her sister, gazed into the fire that revealed her as a beauty, not to be spoiled even by a tam and a rough-knit sweater. "Men don't shoot wildly, and scream like that, unless—"

"They're all three dead now, anyhow," put in Jandron. "So they're out of harm's way. While we—well, we're two hundred and fifty wicked miles from the C.P.R. rails."

"Forget it, Jandy!" said Marr, the journalist. "We're just suffering from an attack of nerves, that's all. Give me a fill of 'baccy. Thanks. We'll all be better in the morning. Ho-hum! Now, speaking of spooks and such—"

He launched into an account of how he had once exposed a fraudulent spiritualist, thus proving—to his own satisfaction—that nothing existed beyond the scope of mankind's everyday life. But nobody gave him much heed. And silence fell upon the little night-encampment in the wilds; a silence that was ominous.

Pale, cold stars watched down from spaces infinitely far beyond man's trivial world.

Next day, stopping for chow on a ledge miles upstream, Jandron discovered another of the prints. He cautiously summoned the other two men. They examined the print, while the womenfolk were busy by the fire. A harmless thing the markings seemed: only a ring about four inches in diameter, a kind of cup-shaped depression with a raised center. A sort of glaze coated it, as if the granite had been fused by heat.

Jandron knelt, a well knit figure in bright mackinaw and canvas leggings, and with a shaking finger explored the smooth curve of the print in the rock. His brows contracted as he studied it.

"We'd better get along out of this as quick as we can," said he in an unnatural voice. "You've got your wife to protect, Thorburn, and I—well, I've got Vivian. And—"

"You have?" nipped in Marr. The light of an evil jealousy gleamed in his heavy-lidded look. "What you need is an alienist."

"Really, Jandron," the professor admonished, "you mustn't let your imagination run away with you."

"I suppose it's imagination that keeps this print cold!" the geologist retorted. His breath made faint, swirling coils of vapor above it.

"Nothing but a pot-hole," judged Thorburn, bending his spare, angular body to examine the print. The professor's vitality all seemed centered in his big-bulged skull that sheltered a marvelous thinking machine. Now he put his lean hand to the base of his brain, rubbing the back of his head as if it ached. Then, under what seemed some powerful compulsion, he ran his bony finger around the print in the rock.

"By Jove, but it is cold!" he admitted. "And looks as if it had been stamped right out of the stone. Extraordinary!"

"Dissolved out, you mean," corrected the geologist. "By cold."

The journalist laughed mockingly.

"Wait till I write this up!" he sneered. "'Noted Geologist Declares Frigid Ghost Dissolves Granite!'"

Jandron ignored him. He fetched a little water from the river and poured it into the print.

"Ice!" ejaculated the professor. "Solid ice!"

"Frozen in a second," added Jandron, while Marr frankly stared. "And it'll never melt, either. I tell you, I've seen some of these rings before; and every time, horrible things have happened. Incredible things! Something burned this ring out of the stone—burned it out with the cold of interstellar space. Something that can impart cold as a permanent quality of matter. Something that can kill matter, and totally remove it."

"Of course that's all sheer poppycock," the journalist tried to laugh, but his brain felt numb.

"This something, this Thing," continued Jandron, "is a Thing that can't be killed by bullets. It's what caught our guides on the barrens, as they ran away—poor fools!"

A shadow fell across the print in the rock. Mrs. Thorburn had come up, was standing there. She had overheard a little of what Jandron had been saying.

"Nonsense!" she tried to exclaim, but she was shivering so she could hardly speak.

That night, after a long afternoon of paddling and portaging—laboring against inhibitions like those in a nightmare—they camped on shelving rocks that slanted to the river.

"After all," said the professor, when supper was done, "we mustn't get into a panic. I know extraordinary things are reported from the wilderness, and more than one man has come out raving. But we, by Jove!, with our superior brains—we aren't going to let Nature play us any tricks!"

"And of course," added his wife, her arm about Vivian, "everything in the universe *is* a natural force. There's really no supernatural at all."

"Admitted," Jandron replied. "But how about things outside the universe?"

"And they call you a scientist!" gibed Marr; but the professor leaned forward, his brows knit.

"Hm!" he grunted. A little silence fell.

"You don't mean, really," asked Vivian, "that you think there's life and intelligence—Outside?"

Jandron looked at the girl. Her beauty, haloed with ruddy gold from the firelight, was a pain to him as he answered.

"Yes, I do. And dangerous life, too. I know what I've seen in the North Country. I know what I've seen!"

Silence again, save for the crepitation of the flames, the fall of an ember, the murmur of the current. Darkness narrowed the wilderness to just that circle of flickering light ringed by the forest and the river, brooded over by the pale stars.

"Of course you can't expect a scientific man to take you seriously," commented the professor.

"I know what I've seen! I tell you there's Something entirely outside man's knowledge."

"Poor fellow!" scoffed the journalist; but even as he spoke his hand pressed his forehead.

"There are Things at work," Jandron affirmed, with a dogged persistence. He lighted his pipe with a blazing twig. Its flame revealed his face

drawn, lined. "Things. Things that reckon with us no more than we do with ants. Less, perhaps."

The flame of the twig died. Night stood closer, watching.

"Suppose there are?" the girl asked. "What's that got to do with these prints in the rock?"

"They," answered Jandron, "are marks left by one of those Things. Footprints, maybe. That Thing is near us, here and now!"

Marr's laugh broke a long stillness.

"And you," he exclaimed, "with an A.M. and a B.S. to write after your name."

"If you knew more," retorted Jandron, "you'd know a devilish sight less. It's only ignorance that's cock-sure."

"But," dogmatized the professor, "no scientist of any standing has ever admitted any outside interference with this planet."

"No, and for thousands of years nobody ever admitted that the world was round, either. What I've seen, I know."

"Well, what have you seen?" asked Mrs. Thorburn, shivering.

"You'll excuse me, please, for not going into that just now."

"You mean," the professor demanded, dryly, "if the—hm!—this suppositious Thing wants to—?"

"It'll do any infernal thing it takes a fancy to, yes! If It happens to want us—"

"But what could Things like that want of us? Why should They come here at all?"

"Oh, for various things. For inanimate objects, at times, and then again for living beings. They've come here lots of times, I tell you," Jandron asserted with strange irritation, "and got what They wanted, and then gone away to—Somewhere. If one of Them happens to want us, for any reason, It will take us, that's all. If It doesn't want us, It will ignore us, as we'd ignore gorillas in Africa if we were looking for gold. But if it was gorilla fur we wanted, that would be different for the gorillas, wouldn't it?"

"What in the world," asked Vivian, "could a—well, a Thing from Outside want of *us*?"

"What do men want, say, of guinea pigs? Men experiment with 'em, of course. Superior beings use inferior, for their own ends. To assume that man is the supreme product of evolution is gross self-conceit. Might not some superior Thing want to experiment with human beings, what?"

"But how?" demanded Marr.

"The human brain is the most highly organized form of matter known to this planet. Suppose, now—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the professor. "All hands to the sleeping bags, and no more of this. I've got a wretched headache. Let's anchor in Blanket Bay!"

He, and both the women, turned in. Jandron and Marr sat a while longer by the fire. They kept plenty of wood piled on it, too, for an unnatural chill transfixed the night-air. The fire burned strangely blue, with greenish flicks of flame.

At length, after vast acerbities of disagreement, the geologist and the newspaperman sought their sleeping bags. The fire was a comfort. Not that a fire could avail a pin's weight against a Thing from interstellar space, but subjectively it was a comfort. The instincts of a million years, centering around protection by fire, cannot be obliterated.

After a time—worn out by a day of nerve strain and of battling with swift currents, of flight from Something invisible, intangible—they all slept.

The deeps of space, star-sprinkled, hung above them with vastness immeasurable, cold beyond all understanding of the human mind.

Jandron woke first, in a red dawn.

He blinked at the fire as he crawled from his sleeping bag. The fire was dead, and yet it had not burned out. Much wood remained unconsumed, charred over, as if some gigantic extinguisher had in the night been lowered over it.

"Hmmm!" growled Jandron. He glanced about him on the ledge. "Prints, too. I might have known!"

He aroused Marr. Despite all the journalist's mocking hostility, Jandron felt more in common with this man of his own age than with the professor, who was close to sixty.

"Look here, now!" said he. "It has been all around here. See? It put out our fire—maybe the fire annoyed It, some way—and It walked round us, everywhere." His gray eyes smoldered. "I guess, by gad, you've got to admit facts now!"

The journalist could only shiver and stare.

"Lord, what a head I've got on me, this morning!" he chattered. He rubbed his forehead with a shaking hand, and started for the river. Most of his assurance had vanished. He looked badly done up.

"Well, what say?" demanded Jandron. "See these fresh prints?"

"Damn the prints!" retorted Marr, and fell to grumbling some unintelligible thing. He washed unsteadily, and remained crouching at the river's lip, inert, numbed.

Jandron, despite a gnawing at the base of his brain, carefully examined the ledge. He found prints scattered everywhere, and some even on the river bottom near the shore. Wherever water had collected in the prints on the

rock, it had frozen hard. Each print in the river-bed, too, was white with ice. Ice that the rushing current could not melt.

"Well, by gad!" he exclaimed. He lighted his pipe and tried to think. Horribly afraid—yes, he felt horribly afraid, but determined. Presently, as a little power of concentration came back, he noticed that all the prints were in straight lines, each mark about two feet from the next.

"It was observing us while we slept," said Jandron.

"What nonsense are you talking, eh?" demanded Marr. His dark, heavy face sagged. "Fire, now, and grub!"

He got up and shuffled unsteadily away from the river. Then he stopped with a jerk, staring.

"Look! Look a' that ax!" he gulped, pointing.

Jandron picked up the ax, by the handle, taking good care not to touch the steel. The blade was white-furred with frost. And deep into it, punching out part of the edge, one of the prints was stamped.

"This metal," said he, "is clean gone. It's been absorbed. The Thing doesn't recognize any difference in materials. Water and steel and rock are all the same to It."

"You're crazy!" snarled the journalist. "How could a Thing travel on one leg, hopping along, making marks like that?"

"It could roll, if it was disk-shaped. And—"

A cry from the professor turned them. Thorburn was stumbling toward them, hands out and tremulous.

"My wife—!" he choked.

Vivian was kneeling beside her sister, frightened, dazed.

"Something's happened!" stammered the professor. "Here—come here—!"

Mrs. Thorburn was beyond any power of theirs to help. She was still breathing, but her respirations were stertorous, and a complete paralysis had stricken her. Her eyes, half-open and expressionless, showed pupils startlingly dilated. No resources of the party's drug kit produced the slightest effect on the woman.

The next half-hour was a confused panic—breaking camp, getting Mrs. Thorburn into a canoe, and leaving that accursed place, with a furious energy of terror that could no longer reason. Upstream, ever up against the swirl of the current the party fought, driven by horror. With no thought of food or drink, paying no heed to landmarks, lashed forward only by the mad desire to be gone, the three men and the girl flung every ounce of their energy into the paddles. Their panting breath mingled with the sound of swirling eddies. A mist-blurred sun brooded over the northern wilds. Unheeded, hosts of black flies sang high-pitched keenings all about the fugitives. On either hand the forest waited, watched.

Only after two hours of sweating toil had brought exhaustion did they stop, in the shelter of a cove where black waters circled, foam-flecked. There they found the professor's wife was dead.

Nothing remained to do but bury her. At first Thorburn would not hear of it. Like a madman he insisted that through all hazards he would fetch the body out. But no—impossible. So, after a terrible time, he yielded.

In spite of her grief, Vivian was admirable. She understood what must be done. It was her voice that said the prayers, her hand that—lacking flowers—laid the fir boughs on the cairn. The professor was dazed past doing anything, saying anything.

Toward mid-afternoon, the party landed again, many miles upriver. Necessity forced them to eat. Fire would not burn. Every time they lighted it, it smoldered and went out with a heavy, greasy smoke. The fugitives ate cold food and drank water, then shoved off in two canoes and once more fled.

In the third canoe, hauled to the edge of the forest, lay all the rock specimens, data and curios, scientific instruments. The party kept only Marr's diary, a compass, supplies, firearms, and medicine kit.

"We can find the things we've left—sometime," said Jandron, noting the place well. "Sometime—after It has gone."

"And bring the body out," added Thorburn. Tears, for the first time, wet his eyes. Vivian said nothing. Marr tried to light his pipe. He seemed to forget that nothing, not even tobacco, would burn now.

Vivian and Jandron occupied one canoe. The other carried the professor and Marr. Thus the power of the two canoes was about the same. They kept well together, upstream.

The fugitives paddled and portaged with a dumb, desperate energy. Toward evening they struck into what they believed to be the Mamattawan. A mile up this, as the blurred sun faded beyond a wilderness of ominous silence, they camped. Here they made determined efforts to kindle fire. Not even alcohol from the drug kit would start it. Cold, they nibbled a little food; cold, they huddled into their sleeping bags, there to lie with darkness leaden on their fear. After a long time, up over a world void of all sound save the river flow, slid an amber moon notched by the ragged tops of the conifers. Even the wail of a timber wolf would have come as welcome relief; but no wolf howled.

Silence and night enfolded them. And everywhere they felt that *It* was watching.

Foolishly enough, as a man will do foolish things in a crisis, Jandron laid his revolver outside his sleeping bag, in easy reach. His thought—blurred by a strange, drawing headache—was: "If It touches Vivian, I'll shoot!"

He realized the complete absurdity of trying to shoot a visitant from interstellar space; from the fourth dimension, maybe. But Jandron's ideas

seemed tangled. Nothing would come right. He lay there, absorbed in a kind of waking nightmare. Now and then, rising on an elbow, he hearkened; all in vain. Nothing so much as stirred.

His thoughts drifted to better days, when all had been health, sanity, optimism; when nothing except jealousy of Marr, as concerned Vivian, had troubled him. Days when the sizzle of the frying pan over friendly coals had made friendly wilderness music; when the wind and the northern stars, the whir of the reel, the whispering vortex of the paddle in clear water had all been things of joy. Yes, and when a certain happy moment had, through some word or look of the girl, seemed to promise his heart's desire. But now—

"Damn it, I'll save her, anyhow!" he swore with savage intensity, knowing all the while that what was to be, would be, immitigably. Do ants, by any waving of antennae, stay the down-crushing foot of man?

Next morning, and the next, no sign of the Thing appeared. Hope revived that possibly It might have flitted away elsewhere; back, perhaps, to outer space. Many were the miles the urging paddles spurned behind. The fugitives calculated that a week more would bring them to the railroad. Fire burned again. Hot food and drink helped, wonderfully. But where were the fish?

"Most extraordinary," all at once said the professor, at noon-day camp. He had become quite rational again. "Do you realize, Jandron, we've seen no traces of life in some time?"

The geologist nodded. Only too clearly he had noted just that, but he had been keeping still about it.

"That's so, too!" chimed in Marr, enjoying the smoke that some incomprehensible turn of events was letting him have. "Not a muskrat or beaver. Not even a squirrel or bird."

"Not so much as a gnat or black fly!" the professor added. Jandron suddenly realized that he would have welcomed even those.

That afternoon, Marr fell into a suddenly vile temper. He mumbled curses against the guides, the current, the portages, everything. The professor seemed more cheerful. Vivian complained of an oppressive headache. Jandron gave her the last of the aspirin tablets, and, as he gave them, took her hand in his.

"I'll see you through, anyhow," said he. "I don't count, now. Nobody counts, only you!"

She gave him a long, silent look. He saw the sudden glint of tears in her eyes; felt the pressure of her hand, and knew they two had never been so near each other as in that moment under the shadow of the Unknown.

Next day—or it may have been two days later, for none of them could be quite sure about the passage of time—they came to a deserted lumber camp. Even more than two days might have passed, because now their

bacon was all gone, and only coffee, tobacco, beef-cubes, and pilot-bread remained. The lack of fish and game had cut alarmingly into the duffelbag. That day—whatever day it may have been—all four of them suffered terribly from headaches of an odd, ring-shaped kind, as if something circular were being pressed down about their heads. The professor said it was the sun that made his head ache. Vivian laid it to the wind and the gleam of the swift water, while Marr claimed it was the heat. Jandron wondered at all this, inasmuch as he plainly saw that the river had almost stopped flowing, and the day had become still and overcast.

They dragged their canoes upon a rotting stage of fir poles and explored the lumber camp, a mournful place set back in an old "slash", now partly overgrown with scrub poplar, maple, and birch. The log buildings, covered with tarpaper partly torn from the pole roofs, were of the usual North Country type. Obviously the place had not been used for years. Even the landing stage where once logs had been rolled into the stream had sagged to decay.

"I don't quite get the idea of this," Marr exclaimed. "Where did the logs go to? Downstream, of course. But that would take 'em to Hudson Bay, and there's no market for spruce timber or pulpwood at Hudson Bay." He pointed down the current.

"You're entirely mistaken," put in the professor. "Any fool could see this river runs the other way. A log thrown in here would go down toward the St. Lawrence!"

"But then," asked the girl, "why can't we drift back to civilization?"

The professor retorted: "Just what we have been doing, all along! Extraordinary, that I have to explain the obvious!" He walked away in a huff.

"I don't know but he's right, at that," half-admitted the journalist. "I've been thinking almost the same thing, myself, the past day or two—that is, ever since the sun shifted."

"What do you mean, shifted?" from Jandron.

"You haven't noticed it?"

"But there's been no sun at all for the last two days!"

"Hanged if I'll waste time arguing with a lunatic!" Marr growled. He vouchsafed no explanation of what he meant by the sun's having "shifted", but wandered off, grumbling.

"What are we going to do?" the girl appealed to Jandron. The sight of her solemn, frightened eyes, of her palm-outward hands and (at last) her very feminine fear, constricted Jandron's heart.

"We're going through, you and I," he answered simply. "We've got to save them from themselves, you and I have."

Their hands met again, and for a moment held. Despite the dead calm, a fir tip at the edge of the clearing suddenly flicked aside, shriveled as if frozen. But neither of them saw it.

The fugitives, badly spent, established themselves in the "barroom" or sleeping shack of the camp. They wanted to feel a roof over them again, if only a broken one. The traces of men comforted them—a couple of broken peavies, a pair of snowshoes with the thongs all gnawed off, a cracked bit of mirror, a yellowed almanac dated 1899.

Jandron called the professor's attention to this almanac, but the professor thrust it aside.

"What do I want of a Canadian census report?" he demanded, and fell to counting the bunks, over and over again. The big bulge of his forehead, that housed the massive brain of his, was oozing sweat. Marr cursed what he claimed was sunshine through the holes in the roof, though Jandron could see none; claimed the sunshine made his head ache.

"But it's not a bad place," he added. "We can make a blaze in that fireplace and be comfy. I don't like that window, though."

"What window?" asked Jandron. "Where?"

Marr laughed, and ignored him. Jandron turned to Vivian, who had sunk down on the "deacon seat" and was staring at the stove.

"*Is* there a window here?" he demanded.

"Don't ask me," she whispered. "I—I don't know."

With a very thriving fear in his heart, Jandron peered at her a moment. He fell to muttering: "I'm Wallace Jandron. Wallace Jandron, 37 Ware Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I'm quite sane. And I'm going to stay so. I'm going to save her! I know perfectly well what I'm doing. And I'm sane. Quite, quite sane!"

After a time of confused and purposeless wrangling, they got a fire going and made coffee. This, and cube bouillon with hardtack, helped considerably. The camp helped, too. A house, even a poor and broken one, is a wonderful barrier against a Thing from—Outside.

Presently darkness folded down. The men smoked, thankful that tobacco still held out. Vivian lay in a bunk that Jandron had piled with spruce boughs for her, and seemed to sleep. The professor fretted like a child over the blisters his paddle had made upon his hands. Marr laughed, now and then; though what he might be laughing at was not apparent.

Suddenly he broke out: "After all, what should It want of us?"

"Our brains, of course," the professor answered, sharply.

"That lets Jandron out," the journalist mocked.

"But," added the professor, "I can't imagine a Thing callously destroying human beings. And yet—"

He stopped short, with surging memories of his dead wife.

"What was it," Jandron asked, "that destroyed all those people in Valladolid, Spain, that time so many of 'em died in a few minutes after having been touched by an invisible Something that left a slight red mark on each? The newspapers were full of it."

"Piffle!" yawned Marr.

"I tell you," insisted Jandron, "there are forms of life as superior to us as we are to ants. We can't see 'em. No ant ever saw a man. And did any ant ever form the least conception of a man? These Things have left thousands of traces, all over the world. If I had my reference books—"

"Tell that to the marines!"

"Charles Fort, the greatest authority in the world on unexplained phenomena," persisted Jandron, "gives innumerable cases of happenings that science can't explain, in his *Book of the Damned*. He claims this Earth was once a No-Man's Land where all kinds of Things explored and colonized and fought for possession. And he says that now everybody's warned off, except the Owners. I happen to remember a few sentences of his: 'In the past, inhabitants of a host of worlds have dropped here, hopped here, wafted, sailed, flown, motored, walked here; have come singly, have come in enormous numbers; have visited for hunting, trading, mining. They have been unable to stay here, have made colonies here, have been lost here.'"

"Poor fish, to believe that!" mocked the journalist, while the professor blinked and rubbed his bulging forehead.

"I do believe it!" insisted Jandron. "The world is covered with relics of dead civilizations that have mysteriously vanished, leaving nothing but their temples and monuments."

"Rubbish!"

"How about Easter Island? How about all the gigantic works there and in a thousand other places—Peru, Yucatán, and so on—which certainly no primitive race ever built?"

"That's thousands of years ago," said Marr, "and I'm sleepy. For heaven's sake, can it!"

"Oh, all right. But how to explain things, then!"

"What the devil could one of those Things want of our brains?" suddenly put in the professor. "After all, what?"

"Well, what do we want of lower forms of life? Sometimes food. Again, some product or other. Or just information. Maybe It is just experimenting with us, the way we poke an anthill. There's always this to remember, that the human brain tissue is the most highly organized form of matter in this world."

"Yes," admitted the Professor, "but what—?"

"It might want brain tissue for food, for experimental purposes, for lubricant—how do I know?"

Jandron fancied he was still explaining things, but all at once he found himself waking up in one of the bunks. He felt terribly cold, stiff, sore. A sift of snow lay here and there on the camp floor, where it had fallen through holes in the roof.

"Vivian!" he croaked hoarsely. "Thorburn! Marr!"

Nobody answered. There was nobody to answer. Jandron crawled with immense pain out of his bunk, and blinked round with bleary eyes. All of a sudden he saw the professor, and gulped.

The professor was lying stiff and straight in another bunk, on his back. His waxen face made a mask of horror. The open, staring eyes, with pupils immensely dilated, sent Jandron shuddering back. A livid ring marked the forehead that now sagged inward as if empty.

"Vivian!" croaked Jandron, staggering away from the body. He fumbled to the bunk where the girl had lain. The bunk was quite deserted.

On the stove, in which lay half-charred wood—wood smothered out as if by some noxious gas—still stood the coffee pot. The liquid in it was frozen solid. Of Vivian and the journalist, no trace remained.

Along one of the sagging beams that supported the roof, Jandron's horror-blasted gaze perceived a straight line of frosted prints, ring-shaped, bitten deep.

"Vivian! Vivian!"

No answer.

Shaking, sick, gray, half-blind with a horror not of this world, Jandron peered slowly round. The duffelbag and supplies were gone. Nothing was left but that coffee pot and the revolver at Jandron's hip.

Jandron turned then. A-stare, his skull feeling empty as a burst drum, he crept lamely to the door and out—out into the snow.

Snow. It came slanting down. From a gray sky it steadily filtered. The trees showed no leaf. Birches, poplars, rock maples all stood naked. Only the conifers drooped sickly green. In a little shallow across the river snow lay white on thin ice.

Ice? Snow? Rapt with terror, Jandron stared. Why, then, he must have been unconscious three or four weeks? But how—?

Suddenly, all along the upper branches of trees that edged the clearing, puffs of snow flicked down. The geologist shuffled after two half-obliterated sets of footprints that wavered toward the landing.

His body was leaden. He wheezed as he reached the river. The light, dim as it was, hurt his eyes. He blinked in a confusion that could just perceive one canoe was gone. He pressed a hand to his head, where an iron band seemed screwed up tight, tighter.

"Vivian! Marr! Haalloooo!"

Not even an echo. Silence clamped the world; silence, and a cold that gnawed. Everything had gone a sinister gray.

After a certain time—though time now possessed neither reality nor duration—Jandron dragged himself back to the camp and stumbled in. Heedless of the staring corpse he crumpled down by the stove and tried to think, but his brain had been emptied of power. Everything blended to a gray blur. Snow kept slithering in through the roof.

"Well, why don't you come and get me, Thing?" suddenly snarled Jandron. "Here I am. Damn you, come and get me!"

Voices. Suddenly he heard voices. Yes, somebody was outside, there. Singularly aggrieved, he got up and limped to the door. He squinted out into the gray; saw two figures down by the landing. With numb indifference he recognized the girl and Marr.

"Why should they bother me again?" he nebulously wondered. "Can't they go away and leave me alone?" He felt peevish irritation.

Then, a modicum of reason returning, he sensed that they were arguing. Vivian, beside a canoe freshly dragged from thin ice, was pointing; Marr was gesticulating. All at once Marr snarled, turned from her, plodded with bent back toward the camp.

"But listen!" she called, her rough-knit sweater all powdered with snow. "That's the way!" She gestured downstream.

"I'm not going either way!" Marr retorted. "I'm going to stay right here!" He came on, bareheaded. Snow grayed his stubble of beard, but on his head it melted as it fell, as if some fever there had raised the brain-stuff to improbable temperatures. "I'm going to stay right here, all summer." His heavy lids sagged. Puffy and evil, his lips showed a glint of teeth. "Let me alone!"

Vivian lagged after him, kicking up the ash-like show. With indifference, Jandron watched them. Trivial human creatures!

Suddenly Marr saw him in the doorway and stopped short. He drew his gun; he aimed at Jandron.

"You get out!" he mouthed. "Why in— can't you stay dead?"

"Put that gun down, you idiot!" Jandron managed to retort.

The girl stopped and seemed trying to understand. "We can get away yet, if we all stick together."

"Are you going to get out and leave me alone?" demanded the journalist, holding his gun steadily enough.

Jandron, wholly indifferent, watched the muzzle. Vague curiosity possessed him. Just what, he wondered, did it feel like to be shot?

Marr pulled the trigger.

Snap!

The cartridge missed fire. Not even powder would burn.

Marr laughed, horribly, and shambled forward.

"Serves him right!" he mouthed. "He'd better not come back again!"

Jandron understood that Marr had seen him fall. Still he felt himself standing there, alive. He shuffled away from the door. No matter whether he was alive or dead, there was always Vivian to be saved.

The journalist came to the door, paused, looked down, grunted, and passed into the camp. He shut the door. Jandron heard the rotten wooden bar of the latch drop. From within echoed a laugh, monstrous in its brutality.

Then, quivering, the geologist felt a touch on his arm.

"Why did you desert us like that?" he heard Vivian's reproach. "Why?"

He turned, hardly able to see her at all.

"Listen," he said, thickly. "I'll admit anything. It's all right. But just forget it, for now. We've got to get out of here. The professor is dead, in there, and Marr's gone mad and barricaded himself in there. So there's no use staying. There's a chance for us yet. Come along!"

He took her by the arm and tried to draw her toward the river, but she held back. The hate in her face sickened him. He shook in the grip of a mighty chill.

"Go, with—you?" she demanded.

"Yes, by God!" he retorted, in a swift blaze of anger, "or I'll kill you where you stand. It shan't get you, anyhow!"

Swiftly piercing, a greater cold smote to his inner marrows. A long row of the cup-shaped prints had just appeared in the snow beside the camp. And from these marks wafted a faint, bluish vapor of unthinkable cold.

"What are you staring at?" the girl demanded.

"Those prints! In the snow, there—see?" He pointed a shaking finger.

"How can there be snow at this season?"

He could have wept for the pity of her, the love of her. On her red tam, her tangle of rebel hair, her sweater, the snow came steadily drifting; yet there she stood before him and prated of summer. Jandron heaved himself out of a very slough of down-dragging lassitudes. He whipped himself into action.

"Summer, winter—no matter!" he flung at her. "You're coming along with me!" He seized her arm with the brutality of desperation that must hurt to save. And murder, too, lay in his soul. He knew that he would strangle her with his naked hands, if need were, before he would ever leave her there, for *It* to work Its horrible will upon.

"You come with me," he mouthed, "or by the Almighty—!"

Marr's scream in the camp whirled him toward the door. That scream rose higher, higher, ever more and more piercing, just like the screams of the runaway Indian guides in what now appeared the infinitely long ago. It seemed to last hours; and always it rose, rose, as if being wrung out of a human body by some kind of agony not conceivable in this world. Higher, higher—

Then it stopped.

Jandron hurled himself against the plank door. The bar smashed; the door shivered inward.

With a cry, Jandron recoiled. He covered his eyes with a hand that quivered, claw-like.

"Go away, Vivian! Don't come here—don't look—"

He stumbled away, babbling.

Out of the door crept something like a man. A queer, broken, bent-over thing; a thing crippled, shrunken, and flabby, that whined.

This thing—yes, it was still Marr—crouched down at one side, quivering, whimpering. It moved its hands as a crushed ant moves its antennae, jerkily, without significance.

All at once Jandron no longer felt afraid. He walked quite steadily to Marr, who was breathing in little gasps. From the camp issued an odor unlike anything terrestrial. A thin, grayish grease covered the sill.

Jandron caught hold of the crumpling journalist's arm. Marr's eyes leered, filmed, unseeing. He gave the impression of a creature whose back has been broken, whose whole essence and energy have been wrenched asunder, yet in which life somehow clings, palpitant. A creature vivisected.

Away through the snow Jandron dragged him. Marr made no resistance; just let himself be led, whining a little, palsied, rickety, shattered. The girl, her face whitely cold as the snow that fell on it, came after.

Thus they reached the landing at the river.

"Come now, let's get away!" Jandron made effort to articulate. Marr said nothing. But when Jandron tried to bundle him into a canoe, something in the journalist revived with swift, mad hatefulness. That something lashed him into a spasm of wiry, incredibly venomous resistance. Slavers of blood and foam streaked Marr's lips. He made horrid noises, like an animal. He howled dismally, and bit, clawed, writhed, and groveled! He tried to sink his teeth into Jandron's leg. He fought appallingly, as men must have fought in the inconceivably remote days even before the Stone Age. And Vivian helped him. Her fury was a tiger-cat's.

Between the pair of them, they almost did him in. They almost dragged Jandron down—and themselves, too—into the black river that ran swiftly sucking under the ice. Not till Jandron had quite flung off all vague notions and restraints of gallantry, not till he struck from the shoulder—to kill, if need were—did he best them.

He beat the pair of them unconscious, trussed them hand and foot with the painters of the canoes, rolled them into the larger canoe, and shoved off.

After that, the blankness of a measureless oblivion descended.

Only from what he was told, weeks after, in the Royal Victoria Hospital at Montreal, did Jandron ever learn how and when a field squad of

Dominion Foresters had found them drifting in Lake Moosawamkeag. And that knowledge filtered slowly into his brain during a period inchoate as Iceland fogs. That Marr was dead and the girl alive—that much, at all events, was solid. He could hold to that; he could climb back, with that, to the real world again.

Jandron climbed back, came back. Time healed him, as it healed the girl. After a long, long while, they had speech together. Cautiously he sounded her wells of memory. He saw that she recalled nothing. So he told her white lies about capsized canoes and the sad death—in realistically described rapids—of all the party except herself and him.

Vivian believed. Fate, Jandron knew, was being very kind to both of them.

But Vivian could never understand in the least why her husband, not very long after marriage, asked her not to wear a wedding ring or any ring whatever.

"Men are so queer!" covers a multitude of psychic agonies.

Life, for Jandron—life, softened by Vivian—knit itself up into some reasonable semblance of a normal pattern. But when, at lengthening intervals, memories even now awake—memories crawling amid the slime of cosmic mysteries that it is madness to approach—or when at certain times Jandron sees a ring of any sort, his heart chills with a cold that reeks of the horrors of Infinity.

And from shadows past the boundaries of our universe seem to beckon
Things that, God grant, can never till the end of time be known on Earth.

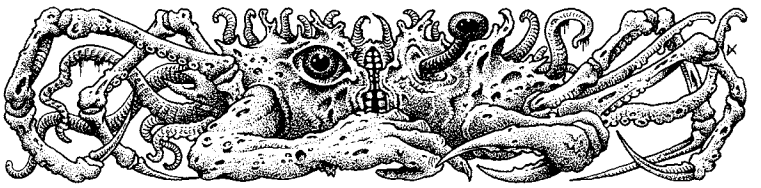
About "The Thing That Walked on the Wind"

August Derleth wrote many of his Cthulhu Mythos tales in some haste, and the results are evident not so much stylistically as they are conceptually. He did not allow himself sufficient time to work the bugs out. For instance, though he makes Hastur a winged air elemental, he also depicts him as a tentacled leviathan under the surface of the Lake of Hali! In the same way, Ithaqua, though the elemental of the wind and the Arctic snows, is depicted with webbed toes! Derleth just couldn't resist giving every monster he created a touch of the Innsmouth look!

Though this story explicitly identifies Ithaqua with Blackwood's Wendigo, thus a North American Indian demon, it also makes the Central Asian hinterlands of Leng his point of origin. Presumably the idea here was to associate Ithaqua with the Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas. Again, Derleth could not bring himself to choose between coherent mythemes. As a result each of his entities is a smorgasbord of associations he would eventually separate out and distribute in more natural combinations.

A much more natural linkage of Ithaqua with the Lovecraft myth system suggests itself. HPL made a surprising number of sidelong references to savage "Inutos" (the Eskimos' own name for themselves) and "Eskimo diabolists", as well as vanished polar civilizations. He even, in his Revision tales, coined two Arctic devil-gods, Rhan-Tegoth and Gnoph-keh, ancient devil-totem of the Inutos. Would not Ithaqua fit more naturally here, perhaps as a lingering god of vanished Lomar?

This story originally appeared in *Strange Tales* for January 1933. Whatever criticisms we may make of it, Derleth was quite proud of it. In a June 15, 1934, letter to Robert H. Barlow, Derleth commented, "Of all my pieces, only 'The Thing That Walked on the Wind' is worthwhile adding to the mythology [i.e., the Mythos]." Of course, this was before he had written the vast bulk of them, so the judgment must not be taken out of context.



The Thing That Walked on the Wind

by August Derleth

Statement of John Dalhousie, division chief of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, issued from temporary quarters at Navissa Camp, Manitoba, 10/31/31:

This is my final word regarding the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Constable Robert Norris from Navissa Camp last March 7th, and the discovery of his body on the 17th of this month in a snow bank four miles north of here.

My attitude in the matter will be clearly seen by the time the end of this statement is read. For the assistance of those to whom this matter is not so familiar, I want to chronicle briefly the facts leading up to it. On the 27th of February last, Robert Norris sent me the appended report, which apparently solved the now-famed Stillwater mystery, a report which, for reasons that will be obvious, could not be released. On the 7th of the following month, Robert Norris vanished without leaving a trace. On the 17th of this October, his body was found deep in a snow bank four miles north of here.

Those are the known facts. I append herewith the last report made to me by Robert Norris:

"Navissa Camp, 27 February 1931: In view of the extreme difficulty of the task which lies before me in writing to you what I know of the mystery at Stillwater, I take the liberty of copying for you in shortest possible form, the account which appeared in the *Navissa Daily* under the date of 27 February 1930, exactly a year ago at this writing:

> Navissa Camp, February 27: An as-yet unverified story regarding the town of Stillwater on the Olassie trail thirty miles above Nelson has come to the editors of the *Daily*.
>
> It is said that no single inhabitant can be found in the village, and that travelers coming through the district

> can find no signs of anyone having left it. The village was last visited on the night of February 25th, just prior to the storm of that date. On that night all was as usual, according to all reports. Since then, nothing has been seen of the inhabitants.

"You will remember this case at once as the unsolved mystery which caused us so much trouble, and which earned us so much undeserved criticism. Something happened here last night which throws a faint light on the Stillwater mystery, affording us some vague clues, but clues of such nature that they can help us not at all, especially so far as staving off press criticism is concerned. But let me tell this from the beginning, just as it happened, and you will be able to see for yourself.

"I had put up with Dr. Jamison, in whose house at the northern end of the village I had been staying for years whenever I stopped over in Navissa Camp. I came to the camp in early evening, and had hardly got settled when the thing happened.

"I had stepped outside for a moment. It was not cold, nor yet particularly warm. A wind was blowing, yet the sky was clear. As I stood there, the wind seemed to rise, and abruptly it grew strikingly cold. I looked up into the sky, and saw that many of the stars had been blotted out. Then a black spot came hurtling down at me, and I ran back toward the house. Before I could reach it, however, I found my path blocked; before me, the figure of a man fell gently into the snow banks. I stopped, but before I could go to him, another form fell with equal softness on the other side of me. And, lastly, a third form came down; but this form did not come gently—it was thrown to the earth with great force.

"You can imagine my amazement. For a moment, I confess that I did not know just what to do. In that brief space of my hesitation, the sudden wind went down and the sharp cold gave place to the comparative mildness of the early evening. Then I ran to the closest form, and ascertained at once that the man was still living, and was apparently unhurt. The second, also a man, was likewise unhurt. But the third body was that of a woman; she was stone cold—her skin to the touch was icy to an astounding degree—and she had the appearance of having been dead for a long time.

"I called Dr. Jamison, and together we managed to get the three into the house. The two men we put to bed immediately, and for the woman we called the coroner, the only other doctor in Navissa Camp. We also had to summon other help, and Dr. Jamison called in two nurses. A quick examination proved that the men were, as I had conjectured, very little hurt. The same examination disclosed another astonishing point—the identification of these two men.

"You will remember that at about the time of the Stillwater case, on the night of the 25th of February, in fact, two men had left Nelson for Stillwater, and had vanished as mysteriously as the inhabitants of that town. These two men had given their names in Nelson as Allison Wentworth and James Macdonald; identification papers found on the bodies of these strange visitors from above proved conclusively that at least two of the men who were supposed to have been in Stillwater at the time the mysterious tragedy occurred had returned, for our visitors were none other than Wentworth and Macdonald. You can easily visualize with what anticipation I looked for a solution to the Stillwater mystery from these two men when once they regained consciousness.

"I resolved, in consequence, to keep a bedside watch. The doctors told me that Wentworth showed the best signs of coming out of his unconscious delirium first, and I took my place at his side, one of the nurses ready to take down anything Wentworth might say. Shortly after I had taken my position there, the body of the girl was identified by a resident of Navissa Camp who had already heard of her and had come to look at the body. The girl was Irene Masitte, the only daughter of the Masitte who ran the tavern at Stillwater. This indicated conclusively that the two men had been in Stillwater at the time of the inexplicable tragedy which swept its inhabitants off the face of the earth, and very probably were in the tavern at the moment the tragedy occurred, perhaps talking with this girl. So I thought at the moment.

"Naturally, I was deeply perplexed as to where the men and the girl might have come from, and also as to why the men were practically unhurt and the girl dead, dead for a great length of time, said Dr. Jamison, perhaps preserved by the cold. And, why and how did the men come gently to the earth, and why was the girl literally dashed to the ground? But all these puzzling questions were for the time being shoved into the background, so eager was I to get at the mystery which surrounded the Stillwater case.

"As I have already written, I had taken my place beside the bed of Wentworth, and listened eagerly for any hint he might drop in his delirium, for as he became warmed, he began to talk a great deal, though not always intelligibly. Some sentences and phrases could be made out, and these the nurse took down in shorthand. I copy a few of the sentences I heard as we bent over the bed:

"'Death-Walker ... God of the Winds, you who walk on the wind ... *adoramus te ... adoramus te ... adoramus te. ...* Destroy these faithless ones, you who walk with death, you who pass above the earth, you who have vanquished the sky. ... Light gleams from the mosques of Baghdad... stars are born in the Sahara... Lhassa, lost Lhassa, worship, worship, worship the Lord of the Winds.'

"These enigmatic words were followed by a deep and profound silence, during which the man's breathing struck me as highly irregular. Dr. Jamison, who was there, noticed it also, commenting on it as a bad sign, though there was no intimation as to what might have brought on this sudden irregularity unless it were some unconscious excitement. The delirious jumble meanwhile continued, even more puzzling than before.

"'Wind-Walker, disperse the fogs over England ... *adoramus te*. ... It is too late to escape ... Lord of the Winds. ... Fly, fly or he will come. ... Sacrifice, sacrifice ... a sacrifice must be, yes, must be made. ... chosen one, Irene. ... Oh, Wind-Walker, sweep over Italy when the olive trees blossom ... and the cedars of Lebanon, blue in the wind ... cold-swept Russian steppes, over wolf-infested Siberia ... onward to Africa, Africa. ... Blackwood has written of these things ... and there are others ... the old ones, elementals ... and back to Leng, lost Leng, hidden Leng, whence sprung Wind-Walker ... and others. ...'

"Dr. Jamison was much interested in the mention of 'elementals', and since he appeared to know something of them, I asked him to explain. It seems that there still exists an age-old belief that there are elemental spirits—of fire, water, air, and earth—all-powerful spirits subject to no one, spirits actually worshiped in some parts of the world. His excitement I thought rather exaggerated, and I shot questions at him.

"It is very difficult for me to chronicle what came out finally in answer to all my questions. It is something that had been kept carefully away from us, though how it could have been is puzzling to me. Even I hesitated at first to believe Dr. Jamison, though he appears to have known it for some time, and assures me that a number of people could tell odd stories if they wanted to. I remember that several anonymous reports of a highly suggestive nature were turned in to us, but I hardly dared suspect what lay behind them at the time.

"It seems that the inhabitants of Stillwater to a body performed a curious worship—not of any god we know, but of something they called an air elemental! A large thing, I am told, vaguely like a man, yet infinitely unlike him. Details are very distorted and unreliable. It is said to have been an air elemental, but there are weird hints of something of incredible age, that rose out of hidden fastness in the far north, from a frozen and impenetrable plateau up there. Of this I can venture nothing. Dr. Jamison mentions a 'Plateau of Leng', of which I have never heard save in the incoherent babblings of Wentworth. But what is most horrible, most unbelievable in the mystery of this strange communal worship, is the suggestion that the people of Stillwater *made human sacrifices to their strange god!*

"There are queer stories of some gigantic thing that these people summoned to their deeply hidden forest altars, and still weirder tales of some-

thing seen against the sky in the glare of huge pine fires burning near Stillwater by travelers on the Olassie trail. How much credence it is advisable to give these stories you must decide for yourself, for I am, frankly, in view of later developments which I will chronicle in their order, unable to give any opinion. Dr. Jamison, whom I regard as a man of great intelligence, assures me that the elemental stories are sincerely believed hereabouts, and admitted to my surprise that he himself was unwilling to condemn belief without adequate knowledge. This was, in effect, admitting that he himself might believe in them.

"The man Wentworth suddenly became conscious, and I turned from Dr. Jamison. He asked, naturally, where he was, and he was told. He did not seem surprised. He then asked what year this was, and when we told him expressed only an irritated surprise. He murmured something about, 'An even year, then,' and aroused our interest the more.

"'And Macdonald?' he asked then.

"'Here,' we answered.

"'How did we come?' he asked.

"'You fell from the sky.'

"'Unhurt?' He puzzled over this for a moment. Then he said, 'He put us down, then.'

"'There was a girl with you,' said Dr. Jamison.

"'She was dead,' he answered in a tired voice. Then he turned his strangely burning eyes on me and asked, 'You saw Him? You saw the thing that walked on the wind? ... Then He will return for you, for none can see Him and escape.'

"We waited a few moments, thinking to give him time to become more fully conscious, but, alas, he lapsed into a semiconscious state. It was then that Dr. Jamison, after another examination, announced that the man was dying. This was naturally a great shock to me, and this shock was emphasized when Dr. Jamison added that the man Macdonald would in all probability die without ever gaining consciousness. The doctor could not guess at the cause of death, beyond referring vaguely to an assumption that perhaps these men had become so inured to cold that they could no longer stand warmth.

"At first I could not guess the significance of this statement, but it came to me suddenly that Dr. Jamison was simply accepting the notion, which had occurred to all of us, that these two men had spent the year just passed above the earth, perhaps in a region so cold that warmth would now affect them in the same manner as extreme cold.

"Despite Wentworth's semiconscious state, I questioned him, and, surprisingly enough, got a rather jumbled story, which I have pieced together as well as I could from the notes the nurse took and from my own memory.

"It appears that these two men, Wentworth and Macdonald, had got into Stillwater quite late, owing to a sudden storm which had come up and put them off the trail for a short time. They were eyed with distinct disfavor at the tavern, but insisted on remaining for the night, which the tavern-keeper, Masitte, did not seem to like. But he gave them a room, requesting them to remain in it, and to keep away from the window. To this they agreed, despite the fact that they regarded the landlord's proposal as somewhat out of the ordinary.

"They had hardly come into the room when the innkeeper's daughter, this girl, Irene, came in, and asked them to get her away from the town quickly. She had been chosen, she said, to be sacrificed to Ithaqua, the wind-walking elemental which the Stillwater people are said to have worshiped, and she had decided that she would flee rather than die for a pagan god, of whose existence even she was not too sure.

"Yet the girl's fear must have been convincing enough to impress the two men into going away with her. The inhabitants had recently, it seems, been working against the thing they had worshiped, and its anger had been felt. Because that night was the night of sacrifice, strangers were frowned upon. According to suggestions Wentworth made, he discovered that the Stillwater people had great altars in the pine forests nearby, and that they worshiped the thing they called variously Death-Walker or Wind-Walker at these altars. (Though you can imagine my skeptical view of this entire matter, this *does* seem to tie up with the stories of giant fires which Dr. Jamison mentioned travelers on the Olassie trail as having seen.)

"There was also some very incoherent mumbling about the thing itself, vague and horrible thoughts which seemed to obsess Wentworth, something about the towering height of the thing seen against the sky in the hellish glow of the nocturnal fires.

"Exactly what happened, I hardly dare venture to guess at. Out of Wentworth's incoherent and troubled speech, there came out one positive statement, the substance of which was simply that the three of them, Wentworth, Macdonald, and the girl, *did* flee the sacrificial fires and the village, and had been caught on the Olassie trail on the way to Nelson by the thing, which had picked them up and carried them along.

"After this statement, Wentworth became steadily more and more incoherent. He babbled a horrible story of this thing that swooped down after them as they fled in terror along the Olassie trail, and he blurted out, too, some terrible details of the mystery at Stillwater. From what I can make out, the thing that walked on the wind must have avenged itself on the villagers not only for their previous coldness toward it, but also because of the flight of Irene Masitte, who had been chosen for the sacrifice. At any rate, between hysterical wails and shuddering adulations of the thing, there emerged from

Wentworth's distorted speech a graphic and terrible picture of a giant monstrosity that came into the village from the forest, sweeping the people into the sky, seeking them out, one by one.

"I don't know how much of this I should chronicle for you, since I can understand what your attitude must be. Could it have been some animal, do you think? Some prehistoric animal which had lain hidden for years in the depths of the pine forest near Stillwater, that perhaps had been preserved alive by the cold and revived again by the warmth of the giant fires to become the god of the mad Stillwater people? This seems to me the only other logical explanation, but there still remain so many things not yet accounted for that I think it would be much better to leave the Stillwater mystery among the unsolved cases.

"Macdonald died this morning at 10:07. Wentworth had not spoken since dawn, but he resumed shortly after Macdonald's death, repeating again the same vague sentences which we first heard from him. His incoherent murmurings leave us no alternative in regard to where he spent the past year. He seems to believe that he was carried along by this wind thing, this air elemental. Though it is fairly certain that neither of the missing men was anywhere reported throughout the past year, this story may be simply the product of an overburdened mind, a mind suffering from a great shock. And the seemingly vast knowledge of the hidden places of the earth, as well as the known, may have been derived from books.

"I say *may* have been derived, because in view of Wentworth's suggestive, almost convincing, murmurings it becomes only a tentative possibility. I know of no book which chronicles the mystic rites at the Lamasery in Tibet, which tells of the secret ceremonies of the Lhassa monks. Nor do I know of any book which reveals the hidden life of the African Impi, nor of any pamphlet or monograph even so much as hinting at the forbidden and accursed designs of the Tcho-Tcho people of Burma, nor of anything ever written which suggests that there are strange hybrid men living under the snow and ice of Antarctica, that there exists today a lost kingdom of the sea, accursed R'lyeh, where slumbering Cthulhu, deep in the earth beneath the sea, is waiting to rise and destroy the world. Nor have I ever heard of the shunned and forbidden Plateau of Leng, where the Ancient Ones once ruled.

"Please do not think I exaggerate. I have never heard of these things before, yet Wentworth speaks as if he had been there, even hinting that these mysterious people have fed him. Of Lhassa I have heard vague hints, and of course I do remember having once seen a cinema containing what the producer called 'shots of Africa's vanishing Impi.' But of the other things, I know nothing. And if I can assume anything from the shuddering horror in Wentworth's semiconscious voice as he spoke of these hidden things, I do not want to know anything.

"There was a constant reference, too, in Wentworth's mutterings to a Blackwood, by whom he evidently meant the writer Algernon Blackwood, a man who spent some time here in Canada, says Dr. Jamison. The doctor gave me one of this man's books, pointing out to me several strange stories of air elementals, stories remarkably similar in character to the curious Stillwater mystery, yet nothing so paradoxically definite and vague. I can refer you to these stories if you do not already know them.

"The doctor also gave me several old magazines in which are stories by an American, a certain H. P. Lovecraft, which have to do with Cthulhu, with the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh and the forbidden Plateau of Leng. Perhaps these are the sources of Wentworth's apparently authentic information, yet in none of these stories appears any of the horrific details of which Wentworth speaks so familiarly.

"Wentworth died at 3:21 this afternoon. An hour before, he passed into a coma from which he did not emerge again. Dr. Jamison and the coroner seemed to think that the exposure to warmth had killed the two men, Jamison telling me candidly that a year with the Wind-Walker had so inured the men to cold that warmth like ours affected them as extreme cold would affect us normal men.

"You must understand that Dr. Jamison was entirely serious. Yet, his medical report read that the two men and the girl had died from exposure to the cold. In explanation he said, 'I may think what I please, Norris, and I may believe what I please—but I dare not write it.' Then, after a pause, he said, 'And if you are wise, you will withhold the names of these people from the general public because questions are certain to arise once they become known, and how are you people going to explain their coming to us from the sky, and where they spent the year since the Stillwater mystery? And finally, how are you going to react against the storm of criticism which will fall on you once more when the Stillwater case is reopened with such strangely unbelievable facts as we have gathered here from the lips of a dying man?'

"I think Dr. Jamison is right. I have no opinion to offer, absolutely none, and I am making this report only because it is my duty as an officer to do so, and I am making it only to you. Perhaps it had better be destroyed, rather than kept in our files from which it might at some future time be resurrected by a careless official or an inquiring newspaper man.

"As I have already told you, any opinion that I have to offer would be worthless. But, in closing, I want to point out two things to you. I want to refer you first to the report of Peter Herrick, in charge of the investigation at Stillwater last year, under date of 3 March, 1930. I quote from the report which I have at hand:

> On the Olassie trail, about three miles below Stillwater, we came upon the meandering tracks of three people. An

> examination of the tracks seemed to indicate that there were two men and one woman. A dog sled had been left behind along the trail, and for some inexplicable reason these three people had started running along the trail toward Nelson, evidently away from Stillwater. The tracks halted abruptly, and there was no trace of where they might have gone. Since there had been no snow since the night of the Stillwater mystery, this is doubly puzzling; it is as if the three people had been lifted off the earth.
>
> Another puzzling factor is the appearance, far off to one side of this point in the trail, in a line with the wandering footsteps of the three travelers, of a huge imprint, closely resembling the foot of a man—but certainly a giant—which appears to have been made by an unbelievably large thing, and the foot, though like that of a man, must have been webbed!

"To this I want to add some information of my own. I remember that last night, when I threw that startled glance into the sky and saw that the stars had been blotted out, I thought that the 'cloud' which had obscured the sky looked curiously like the outline of a great man. And I remember, too, that where the top of the 'cloud' must have been, where the head of the thing should have been, there were two gleaming stars, visible despite the shadow, two gleaming stars, burning bright—*like eyes!*

"One more thing. This afternoon, a half mile behind Dr. Jamison's house, I came upon a deep depression in the now. I did not need a second glance to tell me what it was. A half mile on the other side of the house there is another imprint like this; I am only thankful that the sun is rapidly distorting the outlines, for I am only too willing to believe that I have imagined them. *For they are the imprints of gigantic feet, and the feet must have been webbed!*"

Thus ends Robert Norris's strange report. Because he had carried it for some time with him, I did not receive the report until after I had learned of his disappearance. The report was posted to me on the 6th of March. Under the date of March 5th, Norris has scrawled a final brief and terrible message in a hand which is barely legible:

"5 March—Something is pursuing me! Not a night has passed since the occurrence at Navissa Camp to give me any rest. Always I have felt strange, horrible, yet invisible eyes looking down at me from above. And I remember Wentworth saying that none could live who had seen the thing that walked on the wind, and I cannot forget the sight of it against the sky, and its burning eyes looking down like stars in the haunted night! It is waiting."

It was this brief paragraph which caused our official physician to declare that Robert Norris had lost his mind, and had wandered away to some hidden place from which he emerged months later only to die in the snow.

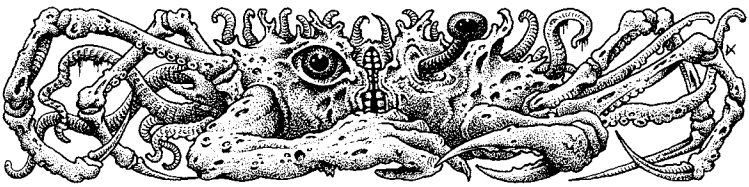
I want to add only a few words of my own. Robert Norris did not lose his mind. Furthermore, Robert Norris was one of the most thorough, the keenest men under my orders, and even during the terrible months he spent in far places, I am sure he did not lose possession of his senses. I grant our physician only one thing: Robert Norris *had* gone away to some hidden place for those months. But that hidden place was not in Canada, no, nor in North America, whatever our physician may think.

I arrived at Navissa Camp by plane within ten hours of the discovery of Robert Norris's body. As I flew over the spot where the body was found, I saw far away, on either side, deep depressions in the snow. I have no doubt what they were. It was I, too, who searched Norris's clothes, and found in his pockets the mementoes he had brought with him from the hidden places where he had been: the gold plaque, depicting in miniature a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in weird designs, the plaque which Dr. Spencer of Quebec University affirms must have come from some place incredibly old, yet is excellently preserved; and the incredible geological fragment which, confined in any walled place, gives off the growing hum and roar of winds far, far beyond the rim of the known universe!

About "The Snow-Thing"

I have decided to return to August Derleth's original title for this story, which was eventually published as "Ithaqua". A direct sequel to "The Thing That Walked on the Wind", it appeared in *Strange Stories* for February 1941, fully eight years later. It was a safe bet no one would have remembered the original well enough to think the two stories too much alike. Derleth had submitted it to *Weird Tales*, but editor Farnsworth Wright was not overly pleased with it, not even after Derleth made some revisions: "'The Snow-Thing' . . . seems somewhat disconnected, and rather a hodgepodge of allusions to various deities of the Lovecraft (et al.) mythology" (June 20, 1934).

"The Snow-Thing"/"Ithaqua" begins both to delineate and to confuse the mythology of Ithaqua. For one thing, Derleth has now subordinated him as son and servant of Hastur, whom I guess he decided he liked better. For another, he now seems to have differentiated Ithaqua as the god of the icy silence from the Wind-Walker. Not that this is a criticism! Lovecraft, too, made inconsistent references to his own mythic creations, so as to create the impression of a genuine ancient myth cycle, that is, a set of myths that run in parallel variants, not a single, systematized myth.



The Snow-Thing

by August Derleth

It was a Chinese philosopher who said long ago that the truth, no matter how obvious and simple, was always incredible, because of such complexity had become the social life of man that the truth became increasingly impossible to state. No reference to the strange affair of the Snow-Thing, Ithaqua, is more fitting, and no comment more calculated to preface a final consideration of the facts.

In the spring of 1933 there pushed into the public prints various obscure paragraphs, most of them very muddled, concerning such apparently unrelated matters as the queer beliefs of certain Indian tribe remnants, the apparent incompetence of Constable James French of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, the disappearance of one Henry Lucas, and finally the vanishing of Constable French. There was also a brief uproar in the press regarding a certain statement released by John Dalhousie, division chief of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, from temporary quarters at Cold Harbor, Manitoba, on the eleventh of May, following some public criticism of Constable French and the general handling of the Lucas case. And finally, by means of a strange grapevine system of communication, apparently not by word of mouth, since no one was ever heard to speak of it, there was a certain incredible story of a Snow-Thing, the story of a strange god of the great white silence, the vast land where snow lies for long months beneath a limitless, cold sky.

And yet these apparently unconnected phenomena to which the press referred with ever-increasing scorn were closely bound together by a sinister connection. That there are some things better unknown, that, indeed, there are certain hideous, forbidden things, Constable French discovered, and, after him, John Dalhousie, and on the eleventh of May, he wrote:

> *I am writing much against my wish in reply to harsh and unjustified criticism directed against me in the matter of the Lucas investigation. I am being especially harassed by the press because this case still remains unsolved and, with wholly unac-*

countable bitterness, it is being pointed out that Henry Lucas could not have walked from his house and vanished, despite the fixed and indisputable evidence that this is what Lucas did.

The facts, for those who come upon this statement without previous knowledge of the disappearance and the subsequent investigation by Royal Northwest Mounted Police Constable James French, are briefly these: On the night of the 21st of February last, during a light snowstorm, Henry Lucas walked out of his cabin on the northern edge of the village of Cold Harbor and was not seen again. A neighbor saw Lucas going toward the old Olassie trail near Lucas' cabin, but did not see him subsequently; this was the last time Lucas was seen alive. Two days later, a brother-in-law, Randy Margate, reported Lucas's disappearance, and Constable French was sent at once to inquire into the matter.

The constable's report reached my office two weeks later. Let me say at once that, despite public belief to the contrary, the Lucas mystery was solved.

But its solution was so outré, so unbelievable, so horrible, that this department felt it must not be given to the public. To that decision we have held until today, when it has become apparent that our solution, however strange, must be released to stem the flood of criticism directed at this department.

I append herewith the last report of Constable James French:

"Cold Harbor, 3 March, 1933:

"Sir: I have hardly the courage to write this to you, for I must write something my nature rebels against, something my intelligence tells me cannot, must not, be—and yet, great God, *is*! Yes, it was as we were told—Lucas walked out of his house and vanished: but we had not dreamed of the reason for his going, nor that something lurked in the forest, *waiting*. . . .

"I got here on the twenty-fifth of February and proceeded at once to the Lucas cabin, where I met and spoke to Margate. He, however, had nothing to tell me, having come in from a neighboring village, found his brother-in-law missing, and reported the matter to us. Shortly after I saw him, he left for his own home in Navissa Camp. I went then to the neighbor who had last seen him. This man seemed very unwilling to talk, and I had difficulty in understanding him, since he is apparently very largely Indian, certainly a descendant of the old tribes still so plentiful around here. He showed me the place where he had last seen Lucas, and indicated that the vanished man's footprints had abruptly stopped. He said this rather excit-

edly; then, suddenly looking toward the forest across the open space, said somewhat lamely that of course the snow had filled in the other tracks. But the place indicated was windswept, where little snow stayed. Indeed, in some places the footprints of Lucas could still be seen, and beyond the place from which he supposedly disappeared there are none of his, though there are footprints of Margate and one or two others.

"In the light of subsequent discoveries, this is a highly significant fact. *Lucas certainly did not walk beyond this spot, and he certainly did not return to his cabin.* He disappeared from this spot as completely as if he had never existed.

"I tried then, and I have tried since then, to explain to myself how Lucas could have vanished without leaving some trace, but there has been no explanation save the one I will presently chronicle, unbelievable as it is. But before I come to that, I must present certain evidence which seems to me important.

"You will remember that twice last year the itinerant priest, Father Brisbois, reported disappearances of Indian children from Cold Harbor. In each case we were informed that the child had turned up before we could investigate. I had not been here a day before finding out that these missing children had never turned up, that, indeed, there had been strange vanishings from Cold Harbor which had never been reported to us, that apparently the disappearance of Lucas was but one in a chain. Lucas, however, appears to have been the first white man to vanish.

"There were several singular discoveries which I quickly made, and these left me with anything but a favorable impression; I felt at once that it was not a *right* sort of case. These facts seem to rank in importance:

"1) Lucas was pretty generally disliked. He had repeatedly cheated the Indians and, while intoxicated, had once tried to interfere in some matter apparently pertaining to religion. I consider this as motive, and it may yet be so—but not so obviously as I had first thought.

"2) The chiefly Indian population of Cold Harbor is either very reluctant to talk or refuses to talk at all. Some of them are downright afraid, some are sullen, and some are defiant and even warning. One Medicine Three-Hat, when questioned, said: 'Look, there are some things you are not to know. Of them is Ithaqua, whom no man may look upon without worship. Only to see him is death, like frost in the deep night.' No elucidation of this statement could be gained. However, it has since taken on much significance, as you will see.

"3) There is a curious ancient worship here. Of this, more below.

"Frequent hints of some connection between great bonfires in the pine forest skirted by the old Olassie trail, sudden, inexplicable snowstorms, and the vanishings, put me at least upon the thread of discovery tying up to the old worship of these Indians. I had thought at first that the villagers' guard-

ed references to the forest and the snow were but the expression of the natural fear of the elements common to people in isolated countries. Apparently, however, I erred grievously in this, for, on the second day after my arrival, Father Brisbois came into Cold Harbor, and he, seeing me at one of his brief services, sent an altar boy to tell me he would like to see me. I saw him after the services.

"He had assumed that I was looking into the disappearances he had reported to us, and expressed considerable surprise when he learned that the lost children had been reported found by their parents.

"'Then they suspected my intentions,' he said in explanation. 'And prevented an investigation. But, of course, you know that the children never did turn up?'

"I said that I knew it, and went on to urge him to tell us all he might know about the mysterious vanishings. His attitude, however, surprised me.

"'I can't tell you, because you wouldn't believe me,' he said. 'But tell me, have you been in the forest? Down along the old Olassie trail, for instance?' And, at my negative, went on, 'then go into the woods and see if you can find the altars. When you find them, come back and tell me what you make of them. I'll stay in Cold Harbor for two days or so.'

"That was all he would tell me. I saw then that there was something to be discovered in the forest and though the afternoon was on the wane, I set out along the old Olassie trail and cut into the woods, though not without carefully estimating the hours of daylight yet remaining. I went deeper and deeper—it is all virgin woods there, with some very ancient trees—and finally I came upon a trail through the snow. Since there had been a rather clever attempt made to disguise this trail, I felt I had hit upon something.

"I followed it and had no difficulty finding what Father Brisbois meant by the altars. They were peculiar circles of stone, around which the snow appeared to be all tramped down. That was my first impression, but when I got up next to the circles of stone I saw that the snow was like glass, smooth, but not slippery, and not apparently only from *human* footprints. Inside the circles, however, the snow was soft as down.

"These circles were quite large, fully seventy feet in diameter, and were crudely put together of some strange kind of frosted stone: or a white, glazed rock with which I am totally unfamiliar. When I put out a hand to touch one of these rocks, I was severely shocked by what was apparently an electrical discharge of some kind: add to this the fact that the stone is certainly of great age and incredibly cold, and you may conceive of the amazement with which I viewed this strange place of worship.

"There were three circles, not very far removed from each other. Having examined them from the outside, I entered the first circle and found, as I have pointed out before, that the snow was exceedingly soft.

Here there were very distinct footprints. I think I must have looked at them in mild interest for some minutes before their significance began to dawn upon me. Then I dropped to my knees and examined them carefully.

"The evidence before my eyes was plain. The footprints were made by a man wearing shoes, certainly a white man, for the Indians hereabouts do not wear shoes, and the prints were the same as those made on the open space by Henry Lucas when he vanished. On the face of it, I felt I could work on the hypothesis that these prints had been made by Lucas.

"But the most extraordinary thing about the footprints was that they gave evidence that the man who had made them had neither walked into the circle nor walked out of it. The point of entry—or, rather, the beginning of the line of prints—lay not far from where I stood; here was partly snow-covered evidence that he had been *thrown* or *dropped* into the circle. He had then risen and begun to walk around toward the circle's only entrance, but at this entrance his footprints hesitated, then turned back. He walked faster and faster, then he began to run, and abruptly his footprints stopped entirely, cut off toward the middle of the circle. There was no mistake about it, for, while the receding footprints were slightly snow-covered, the light snowfall had apparently stopped coincident with the cessation of the footprints.

"As I was examining these curious prints, I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. I scanned the forest covertly, but nothing came into my line of vision. Nevertheless, the feeling of being under observation persisted, and a mounting uneasiness took possession of me, so that I felt a definite sense of danger within this strange and silent circle of stone deep in the hushed woods. Presently I emerged from the circular altar and went toward the forest in some apprehension.

"Then suddenly I came upon the site of great fires, and I remembered the half-hinted suggestions put forth by some of the natives of Cold Harbor. The fact that Lucas's footprints were within the stone circle certainly linked the fires to his disappearance, and, as I have pointed out, snow was obviously falling at the time Lucas stood within the stones. I remembered then, too, that there had occasionally been rumors of fires seen in the deep woods along the Olassie trail when that trail was still in use a few years ago. I examined the ashes, though, owing to encroaching darkness, I could not be as careful as I wished. Apparently only pine boughs had been burned.

"I now saw that not only was darkness closing down, but that the sky had clouded, and flakes of snow were already beginning to sift down through the trees. Here, then, was another point in evidence—the sudden oncoming of a snowstorm, when but a few moments before, the sky had been devoid of clouds. One by one those queer hints were taking tangible form before my eyes.

"All this time, I was still certain that someone was observing my every movement; so I calculated my movements in such a way that I might surprise anyone in the woods. The fires had been burned behind the altars, and as I turned, I faced the stone circles. Now, as I say, it was getting dark, and snow was falling—but I saw something. It was like a sudden cloud of snow hanging over the altars, like a huge shapeless mass of thickly packed snow—not just a swirl of flakes, though snowflakes did seem to encircle it. And it did not have a white color, but rather a blue-green tint shading away into purple. This may have been the effect of the dusk which was rapidly invading the forest. I want to make clear to you the fact that I was not then conscious of anything strange, being fully aware of the weird light changes sometimes affecting one's vision at dusk.

"But, as I went forward, past the altars, I looked around. And then I saw that the upper half of that weird entity moved independently of the lower! As I stood looking up into the darkness, the thing began to fade away, just as if dissolving into the falling snow, until at last there was nothing there. Then I became frightened, with the fear that the thing that encompassed me was all around me in the falling snow. For the first time in my life I was afraid of the woods and the night and the silent snow. I turned and ran, but not before I saw!—*Where the snow image had been, a pair of bright green eyes were suspended like stars in the space above the circular altars!*

"I am not ashamed to confess that I ran as if a pack of wolves bayed at my heels. I still thank whatever powers there are for guiding my mad flight to the comparative safety of the Olassie trail, where it was still quite light, and where for the first time I paused. I looked back toward the woods, but there was nothing to be seen for the snow, now falling thickly.

"I was still afraid, and I half imagined that I heard whispering among the snowflakes, a hellish whispering urging me to return to the altars. So strong it was, so clear, that for one awful moment I stood wavering on the trail, almost ready to run and plunge again into the ominous darkness of the forest. Then I broke the spell that held me and ran on down the trail toward Cold Harbor.

"I went directly to the house of Dr. Telfer, where Father Brisbois was staying. The priest was frankly alarmed at what he described as my 'wild and horror-struck appearance,' and Dr. Telfer wanted to give me a sedative, which I declined.

"I told them at once what I had seen. From the expression on his face I gathered that what I was saying was neither exactly unexpected nor new to the priest. The doctor, however, made it rather plain from his comments that he considered me the victim of illusory phenomena common enough at twilight. But Father Brisbois disagreed. In fact, the priest hinted that I had but penetrated a veil always present but seldom seen, that what I had seen

was no illusion but indeed a tangible proof of a ghastly other world of which most human beings, mercifully, know and suspect nothing.

"He asked me whether I had noticed that the Indians came from very old stock, probably Asiatic in origin. I admitted that I had noticed this. Then he said something about worship of gods old before man was born into the world.

"I asked him what he meant by *old gods*.

"These are his words: 'There are deep, underground channels of knowledge that have seeped down to us from beings far removed from humanity. There is, for instance, the ghastly and suggestive account of Hastur the Unspeakable and his loathly spawn.'

"I protested that he had reference only to legend.

"He replied, 'Yes, but don't forget that there exists no legend which is not firmly rooted to something, even if that something existed in a long, long forgotten past beyond memory of man—malign Hastur, who called to his aid the spirits of the elements and subdued them to his will, those elementary forces which are still worshipped in far out-of-the-way places in this world—the Wind-Walker, and Ithaqua, god of the great white silence, the one god of whom no totems bear sign. After all, have we not our own Biblical legend of the struggle between elemental Good and Evil as personified by our deity and the forces of Satan in the pre-dawn era of our earth?'

"I wanted to protest, I wanted violently to say that what he hinted was impossible, but I could not. The memory of what I had seen hanging above the stone circles deep in the forest beyond Cold Harbor prevented me from speaking. This and the knowledge that one old Indian had mentioned to me a name that the priest had now spoken—*Ithaqua*.

"Seeing the trend of his words, I said, 'Do you mean that the Indians hereabouts worship this thing called Ithaqua, offering up their children as human sacrifices? Then how to explain Lucas's vanishing? And who or what, actually, is Ithaqua?'

"'I mean just that, yes. That's the only theory explaining the loss of the children. As to Lucas: he was extremely unpopular, steadily cheating the Indians, and at one time got himself mixed up with them at the forest's edge; that was but a few days prior to his disappearance. As to Ithaqua and who or what he is—I am not capable of answering. There is a belief that none but worshippers dare look upon him; to do so means death. What was it you saw above the altars? What observed you there? Ithaqua? Is he the spirit of water or of wind, or is he truly a god of this great white silence, the thing of snow, a manifestation of which you saw?

"'But human sacrifice, good God!' I exclaimed, and then, 'Tell me, has none of these children ever been discovered?'

"'I buried three of them,' said the priest thoughtfully. 'They were found in the snow not far from here, found encased in beautiful shrouds of snow soft as down, and their bodies were colder than ice, even though two of them still lived when found, only to die shortly after.'

"I did not know what to say. If I had been told this before going into the forest, I would frankly have scoffed at it, as Father Brisbois foresaw. But I saw something in that forest, and it was nothing human, nothing even remotely human. I am not saying, understand, that I saw what Father Brisbois meant by his 'god of the great white silence', what the Indians call *Ithaqua*, no, but I *did* see something.

"At this point someone came to the house with the astounding announcement that Lucas's body had just been found, and the doctor was needed to examine it. The three of us immediately followed the Indian who had brought this message to a place not very far from the fur-trading post, where a large crowd of natives stood around what seemed at first to be a very large and gleaming snowball.

"But it was not a snowball.

"It was the body of Henry Lucas, cold as the stones in the circle I had touched, and the body was wrapped in a cloak of spun snow. I write *spun*, because it *was* spun. It was like an ineffably lovely gauze, brilliantly white with a subtle suggestion of green and blue, and it was like pulling away brittle, stiffened gauze when we tore the snow covering from the body.

"It was not until this wrapping had been torn away that we discovered Henry Lucas was not dead! Dr. Telfer could hardly credit his own senses, though there had been two previous cases similar to this. The body was cold, so cold we could hardly bear touching it, yet there was a faint beating of the heart, sluggish and barely perceptible, but it was there, and in the warmth of Telfer's house the breath came, and the heart's beating became firmer.

"'It's impossible,' said the doctor, 'but it's happening. Yet he's dying, sure as I'm standing here.'

"'Hope that he may become conscious,' said the priest.

"But the doctor shook his head. 'Never.'

"And then Lucas began to talk, like a man in delirium. First it was an indistinguishable sound, a low monotone like a far-away, uneven humming. Then words began to come, slowly, few and far between, and finally phrases and sentences. Both the priest and I jotted them down, and compared notes later. This is a sample of what Lucas said:

"'Oh, soft, lovely snow . . . Ithaqua, take Thou my body, let the snow-god carry me, let the great god of the white silence take me to the foot of that greater . . . . Hastur, Hastur, adoramus te, adoramus te . . . . How soft the snow, how drowsy the winds, how sweet with the smell of locust blossoms from the south! Oh, Ithaqua, on to Hastur . . . .'

"There was much more of this, and most of it meaningless. It may be an important point to make that there is definite knowledge that Lucas had no training in Latin. I hesitate to comment on the strange coincidence of Lucas's mentioning Hastur so shortly after Father Brisbois mentioned this ancient being.

"Later in Lucas's wanderings, we managed to piece together a story, the story of his disappearance. Apparently he had been drawn from his cabin that night into the snowstorm by the sound of unearthly music combined with an urgent whispering which seemed to come from just beyond the cabin. He opened the door and looked out and, seeing nothing, had then gone out into the snow. I should venture to guess that he had been hypnotized—though that seems far-fetched. He was set upon by 'something from above'—his own words, which he later qualified by saying of it that it was a wind with 'snow in it.' By this he was carried away, and he knew no more until he found himself dropped into the circle of stones in the forest. Then he was aware of great fires burning in the woods, and of the Indians before the altars, many of them flattened out in the snow, worshipping. And above him, he saw what he spoke of as 'a cloud of green and purple smoke with eyes'—could it have been the same thing I saw above the altars? And, as he watched, this thing began to move, to come lower. He heard music again, and then he began to feel the cold. He ran toward the entrance, which stood open, but he could not pass through—it was as if some great invisible hand held him away from outside. Then he became frightened, and he ran madly around and around and around, and finally he cut across the circle. And then he was lifted from the earth. It was as if he were in a cloud of soft, whispering snow. He heard music again, and chanting, and then, terribly, far in the background, a ghastly ululation. Then he lost consciousness.

"After that, his story is by no means clear. We can gather that he was taken somewhere—either far underground or far above the earth. From some of the phrases he let drop, we might suspect that he had been on another planet, were this not absolutely impossible. He mentioned Hastur almost incessantly, and occasionally said something about other gods called Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Lloigor, and others, mumbled queer, disjointed phrases about the blasted land of the Tcho-Tcho people. And he spoke as if this were a punishment he had incurred. His words made Father Brisbois very uneasy, and several times I am sure that the good priest was praying to himself.

"He died about three hours after being found, without gaining consciousness, though the doctor said that his state was normal, except for the persistent cold and his being apparently unaware of us and the room.

"I hesitate to offer any solution beyond giving you these facts. After all, these things speak more clearly than any words. Since there is no means of identifying any of the Indians present at those hellish services in the woods,

there can be no prosecution of any kind. But that something fatal happened to Lucas in those stone circles—probably as a result of his brush and interference with the Indian worshippers—remains indisputable. How he was taken there, and how he was transported to the place where his body was finally found, is explainable only if we accept his terrible story.

"I suggest that in the circumstances we would be quite justified in destroying those altars and issuing stern warnings to the Indians of Cold Harbor and the surrounding country. I have ascertained that dynamite is obtainable in the village, and I propose to go out and dynamite those hellish altars as soon as I have the proper authority from you to do so.

"Later: I have just learned that there are a great number of Indians making off into the woods. Apparently there is to be another meeting to worship at those altars, and, despite my strange feeling of being observed—as from the sky—my duty is clear. I shall follow as soon as I dispatch this."

That is the complete text of Constable French's final report to me. It reached my office on the fifth of March, and on that day I wired instructions to him to proceed with the dynamiting, and also to arrest any native suspected of being a member of the group who worshipped at those strange altars.

Following this, I was forced to leave headquarters for a considerable time, and when I returned, I found the letter from Dr. Telfer telling me that Constable French had disappeared before receiving my telegram. I later ascertained that his disappearance took place on the night he dispatched his report to me, on the night that the Indians worshipped at the altars near the Olassie trail.

I sent Constable Robert Considine to Cold Harbor immediately, and I myself followed within twenty-four hours. My first business was to carry out myself those instructions I had wired to French, and, I went into the woods and dynamited those altars. Then I devoted myself to finding some trace of French, but there was absolutely nothing to find. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

But it was not the earth that had swallowed him up. On the night of the seventh of May, during a violent blizzard, Constable French's body was found. It was lodged in a deep snow bank not far from Dr. Telfer's house. All evidence showed that it had been dropped from a great height, and the body was wrapped in layer after layer of brittle snow, like spun gauze!

"Death from exposure to cold!" What ironic, empty words those are! How little they tell of the colossal evil lurking beyond the veil! I know what Constable French feared, what he more than suspected.

For all that night, and all last night, I saw from my window in Dr. Telfer's house, a huge, shapeless mass of snow bulking high into the sky, a huge sentient mass surmounted by two inscrutable, ineffably cold green eyes!

There are even now rumors that Indians are gathering again for another meeting at the site of those accursed altars. That shall not and must not happen, and if they persist, they must be forcibly removed from the village and scattered throughout the provinces. I am going now to break up their hellish worship.

But, as the world now knows, John Dalhousie did not carry out his plan. For on that night he vanished, only to be found three nights later as Constable French and Henry Lucas were found before him—wrapped in ineffably beautiful snow, like spun gauze, scintillating and gleaming in the wan moonlight, like those others who had suffered the vengeance of Ithaqua, the Snow-Thing, the god of the great white silence.

The department scattered the Indians throughout the provinces, and all persons were forbidden to enter the forest bordering the unused Olassie trail. But somewhere in the forest night, sometime they may gather again, murmur and bow low, offer their children and their enemies as sacrifices to the elemental object of their worship, and cry out to him as Lucas cried, "Ithaqua, take Thou my body . . . Ithaqua . . . ."

About "Beyond the Threshold"

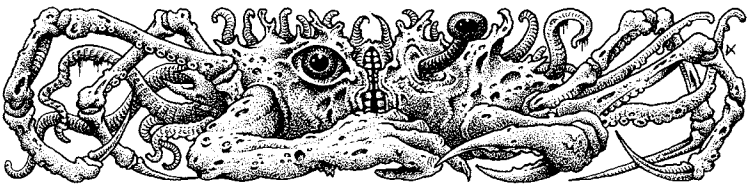
If you weren't a reader of both of *Weird Tales*'s competitors *Strange Tales* and *Strange Stories*, you might not have been able to follow the *dramatis personae* in "Beyond the Threshold", since both previous Ithaqua tales appeared in the rival magazines. "Beyond the Threshold" debuted in *Weird Tales* (September 1941).

Another reference would be even more obscure unless the reader were a confirmed Derleth fan. This story supplies a snippet of Ithaquan liturgy, apparently in the language of R'lyeh (as if all Mythos cultists speak it!). After a row of familiar *Iä!*s, we have a series of *Ai!*s. What are these? One might be forgiven for supposing they are merely ritual reversals of the more familiar bacchantic cry, but they are not. They are a tip of the hat to an earlier pair of stories ("Riders in the Sky", *Weird Tales*, May 1928; "The Vengeance of Ai", *Strange Stories*, April 1939) by Derleth and Mark Schorer in which an ancient Babylonian goddess named Ai figures. You may find these tales included in *Celaeno Fragments: Tales of the Derleth Mythos*, forthcoming from Chaosium.

When the narrator of "Beyond the Threshold" leaves his home in Arkham, Massachusetts, and heads for Wisconsin, we are seeing a symbol of the passing of the Mythos torch from Lovecraft the New Englander to Derleth the Wisconsin native. Unfortunately, the break between New England and Wisconsin was not quite clean. Derleth again shows his inability to kick free of the Innsmouth business. There is altogether too much of it in a story that turns out to be about Ithaqua. We almost get the impression that he decided to reroute the story half-way through—as he may have! The same incoherent choppiness mars "The Return of Hastur" and *The Lurker at the Threshold*, where two thirds of the way through Derleth rudely drops Ossadogowah and replaces him with Yog-Sothoth!

"Beyond the Threshold" is a prime example of a peculiar kind of intertextuality Derleth's stories share with Lovecraft's. Obviously any Cthulhu Mythos fiction by any author will presuppose some Lovecraft stories. So it is no surprise that this one presupposes, e.g., "The Shadow over Innsmouth." What is surprising, even startling, even shocking, is the fact that Derleth's characters mention "The Shadow over Innsmouth" by name and even read it in the Arkham House Lovecraft omnibus *The Outsider and Others*! If we fear Lovecraft stretched the veil a bit too thin by mentioning the Atlantean high priest Klarkash-Ton, what are we to think of this? Why not just mention the fictive events of 1928 in Innsmouth and leave Lovecraft's name out of it? It has the inevitable effect of just destroying any chance of the reader willfully suspending disbelief!

Why commit such sabotage against reader response? Because Derleth wanted to sell a few books! He had founded Arkham House only a year before to preserve Lovecraft in hard cover, and *The Outsider* was moving pretty slowly. He mentioned it alongside Alhazred's *Necronomicon* as a source of elder lore to whet reader appetite. If the *Weird Tales* reader couldn't find a copy of the *Necronomicon* at any price, he could certainly find a copy of *The Outsider and Others* for a reasonable $5.00!



Beyond the Threshold

by August Derleth

I.

The story is really my grandfather's.

In a manner of speaking, however, it belongs to the entire family, and beyond them, to the world; and there is no longer any reason for suppressing the singularly terrible details of what happened in that lonely house deep in the forest places of northern Wisconsin.

The roots of the story go back into the mists of early time, far beyond the beginnings of the Alwyn family line, but of this I knew nothing at the time of my visit to Wisconsin in response to my cousin's letter about our grandfather's strange decline in health. Josiah Alwyn had always seemed somehow immortal to me even as a small child, and he had not appeared to change throughout the years between: a barrel-chested old man, with a heavy, full face, decorated with a closely clipped moustache and a small beard to soften the hard lines of his square jaw. His eyes were dark, not overlarge, and his brows were shaggy; he wore his hair long, so that his head had a leonine appearance. Though I saw little of him when I was very young, still he left an indelible impression on me in the brief visits he paid when he stopped at the ancestral country home near Arkham, in Massachusetts—those short calls he made on his way to and from remote corners of the world: Tibet, Mongolia, the Arctic regions, and certain little-known islands in the Pacific.

I had not seen him for years when the letter came from my cousin Frolin, who lived with him in the old house Grandfather owned in the heart of the forest and lake country of northern Wisconsin.

> I wish you could uproot yourself from Massachusetts long enough to come out here. A great deal of water has passed under various bridges, and the wind has blown about many changes since last you were here. Frankly, I think it most urgent that you come. In present circumstances, I don't know to whom to turn, Grandfather being not himself, and I need someone who can be trusted.

There was nothing obviously urgent about the letter, and yet there was a queer constraint, there was something between lines that stood out invisibly, intangibly, to make possible only one answer to Frolin's letter—something in his phrase about the wind, something in the way he had written *Grandfather being not himself,* something in the need he had expressed for *someone who can be trusted.*

I could easily enough take leave of absence from my position as assistant librarian at Miskatonic University in Arkham and go west that September; so I went. I went, harassed by an almost uncanny conviction that the need for haste was great: from Boston by plane to Chicago, and from there by train to the village of Harmon, deep in the forest country of Wisconsin—a place of great natural beauty, not far from the shores of Lake Michigan, so that it was possible on days of wind and weather to hear the water's sound.

Frolin met me at the station. My cousin was in his late thirties then, but he had the look of someone ten years younger, with hot, intense brown eyes, and a soft, sensitive mouth that belied his inner hardness. He was singularly sober, though he had always alternated between gravity and a kind of infectious wildness—"the Irish in him," as Grandfather had once said. I met his eyes when I shook his hand, probing for some clue to his withheld distress, but I saw only that he was indeed troubled, for his eyes betrayed him, even as the roiled waters of a pond reveal disturbance below, though the surface may be as glass.

"What is it?" I asked, when I sat at his side in the coupe, riding into the country of the tall pines. "Is the old man abed?"

He shook his head. "Oh, no, nothing like that, Tony." He shot me a queer, restrained glance. "You'll see. You wait and see."

"What is it then?" I pressed him. "Your letter had the damnedest sound."

"I hoped it would," he said gravely.

"And yet there was nothing I could put my finger on," I admitted. "But it was there, nevertheless."

He smiled. "Yes, I knew you'd understand. I tell you, it's been difficult—extremely difficult. I thought of you a good many times before I sat down and wrote that letter, believe me!"

"But if he's not ill ...? I thought you said he wasn't himself."

"Yes, yes, so I did. You wait now, Tony, don't be so impatient; you'll see for yourself. It's his mind, I think."

"His mind!" I felt a distinct wave of regret and shock at the suggestion that Grandfather's mind had given way; the thought that the magnificent brain had retreated from sanity was intolerable, and I was loath to entertain it. "Surely not!" I cried. "Frolin—what the devil is it?"

He turned his troubled eyes on me once more. "I don't know. But I think it's something terrible. If it were only Grandfather. But there's the music—and then there are all the other things: the sounds and smells and—" He caught my amazed stare and turned away, almost with physical effort pausing in his talk. "But I'm forgetting. Don't ask me anything more. Just wait. You'll see for yourself." He laughed shortly, a forced laugh. "Perhaps it's not the old man who's losing his mind. I've thought of that sometimes, too—with reason."

I said nothing more, but there was beginning to mushroom up inside me now a kind of tense fear, and for some time I sat at his side, thinking only of Frolin and old Josiah Alwyn living together in that old house, unaware of the towering pines all around, and the wind's sound, and the fragrant pungence of leaf-fire smoke riding the wind out of the northwest. Evening came early to this country caught in the dark pines, and, though afterglow still lingered in the west, fanning upward in a great wave of saffron and amethyst, darkness already possessed the forest through which we rode. Out of the darkness came the cries of great horned owls and their lesser cousins the screech owls, making an eerie magic in the stillness broken otherwise only by the wind's voice and the noise of the car passing over the comparatively little-used road to the Alwyn house.

"We're almost there," said Frolin.

The lights of the car passed over a jagged pine, lightning-struck years ago, and standing still with two gaunt limbs arched like gnarled arms toward the road: an old landmark to which Frolin's words called my attention, since he knew I would remember it as but half a mile from the house.

"If Grandfather should ask," he said then, "I'd rather you said nothing about my sending for you. I don't know that he'd like it. You can tell him you were in the midwest and came up for a visit."

I was curious anew, but forebore to press Frolin further. "He does know I'm coming, then?"

"Yes. I said I had word from you and was going down to meet your train."

I could understand that if the old man thought Frolin had sent for me about his health, he would be annoyed and perhaps angry; and yet more than this was implied in Frolin's request, more than just the simple salving of Grandfather's pride. Once more that odd, intangible alarm rose up within me, that sudden, inexplicable feeling of fear.

The house looked forth suddenly in a clearing among the pines. It had been built by an uncle of Grandfather's in Wisconsin's pioneering days, back in the 1850's: by one of the sea-faring Alwyns of Innsmouth, that strange, dark town on the Massachusetts coast. It was an unusually unattractive structure, snug against the hillside like a crusty old woman in fur-

belows. It defied many architectural standards without, however, seeming ever fully free of most of the superficial facets of architecture circa 1850, making for the most grotesque and pompous appearance of structures of that day. It suffered a wide verandah, one side of which led directly into the stables where, in former days, horses, surreys, and buggies had been kept, and where now two cars were housed—the only corner of the building which gave any evidence at all of having been remodeled since it was built. The house rose two and one half stories above a cellar floor; presumably, for darkness made it impossible to ascertain, it was still painted the same hideous brown; and, judging by what light shone forth from the curtained windows, Grandfather had not yet taken the trouble to install electricity, a contingency for which I had come well prepared by carrying a flashlight and an electric candle, with extra batteries for both.

Frolin drove into the garage, left the car and, carrying some of my baggage, led the way down the verandah to the front door, a large, thick-paneled oak piece, decorated with a ridiculously large iron knocker. The hall was dark, save for a partly open door at the far end, out of which came a faint light which was yet enough to illumine spectrally the broad stairs leading to the upper floor.

"I'll take you to your room first," said Frolin, leading the way up the stairs, surefooted with habitual walking there. "There's a flashlight on the newel post at the landing," he added. "If you need it. You know the old man."

I found the light and lit it, making only enough delay so that when I caught up with Frolin he was standing at the door of my room, which, I noticed, was almost directly over the front entrance and thus faced west, as did the house itself.

"He's forbidden us to use any of the rooms east of the hall up here," said Frolin, fixing me with his eyes, as much as to say: You see how queer he's got! He waited for me to say something, but since I did not, he went on. "So I have the room next to yours, and Hough is on the other side of me, in the southwest corner. Right now, as you might have noticed, Hough's getting something to eat."

"And Grandfather?"

"Very likely in his study. You'll remember that room."

I did indeed remember that curious windowless room, built under explicit directions by Great-uncle Leander, a room that occupied the majority of the rear of the house, the entire northwest corner and all the west width save for a small corner at the southwest, where the kitchen was, the kitchen from which a light had streamed into the lower hall at our entrance. The study had been pushed partway back into the hill slope, so that the east wall could not have windows, but there was no reason save Uncle Leander's eccentricity for the windowless north wall. Squarely in the center of the east

wall, indeed, built into the wall, was an enormous painting, reaching from the floor to the ceiling and occupying a width of over six feet. If this painting, apparently executed by some unknown friend of Uncle Leander's, if not by my great-uncle himself, had had about it any mark of genius or even of unusual talent, this display might have been overlooked, but it did not; it was a perfectly prosaic representation of a north country scene, showing a hillside, with a rocky cave opening out into the center of the picture, a scarcely defined path leading to the cave, an impressionistic beast which was evidently meant to resemble a bear, once common in this country, walking toward it, and overhead something that looked like an unhappy cloud lost among the pines rising darkly all around. This dubious work of art completely and absolutely dominated the study, despite the shelves of books that occupied almost every available niche in what remained of the walls in that room, despite the absurd collection of oddities strewn everywhere—bits of curiously carven stone and wood, strange mementoes of Great-uncle's seafaring life. The study had all the lifelessness of a museum and yet, oddly, it responded to my grandfather like something alive, even the painting on the wall seeming to take on an added freshness whenever he entered.

"I don't think anyone who ever stepped into that room could forget it," I said with a grim smile.

"He spends most of his time there. Hardly goes out at all, and I suppose, with winter coming on, he'll come out only for his meals. He's moved his bed in, too."

I shuddered. "I can't imagine sleeping in that room."

"No, nor I. But you know, he's working on something, and I sincerely believe his mind has been affected."

"Another book on his travels, perhaps?"

He shook his head. "No, a translation, I think. Something different. He found some old papers of Leander's one day, and ever since then he seems to have got progressively worse." He raised his eyebrows and shrugged. "Come on. Hough will have supper ready by this time, and you'll see for yourself."

Frolin's cryptic remarks had led me to expect an emaciated old man. After all, Grandfather was in his early seventies, and even he could not be expected to live forever. But he had not changed physically at all, as far as I could see. There he sat at his supper table—still the same hardy old man, his moustache and beard not yet white, but only iron gray, and still with plenty of black in them; his face was no less heavy, his color no less ruddy. At the moment of my entrance he was eating heartily from the drumstick of a turkey. Seeing me, he raised his eyebrows a little, took the drumstick from his lips, and greeted me with no more excitement than if I had been away from him for but half an hour.

"You're looking well," he said.

"And you," I said. "An old war horse."

He grinned. "My boy, I'm on the trail of something new—some unexplored country apart from Africa, Asia, and the Arctic regions."

I flashed a glance at Frolin. Clearly, this was news to him; whatever hints Grandfather might have dropped of his activities, they had not included this.

He asked then about my trip west, and the rest of the supper hour was taken up with small talk of other relatives. I observed that the old man returned insistently to long-forgotten relatives in Innsmouth: What had become of them? Had I ever seen them? What did they look like? Since I knew practically nothing of the relatives in Innsmouth, and had the firm conviction that all had died in a strange catastrophe which had washed many inhabitants of that shunned city out to sea, I was not helpful. But the tenor of these innocuous questions puzzled me no little. In my capacity as librarian at Miskatonic University, I had heard strange and disturbing hints of the business in Innsmouth, I knew something of the appearance of federal men there, and stories of foreign agents had never had about them that essential ring of truth which made a plausible explanation for the terrible events which had taken place in that city. He wanted to know at last whether I had ever seen pictures of them, and when I said I had not, he was quite patently disappointed.

"Do you know," he said dejectedly, "there does not exist even a likeness of Uncle Leander, but the oldtimers around Harmon told me years ago that he was a very homely man, that he looked like something that had been thrown up by the sea, as he was, and one old woman said a curious thing: that he reminded her of a *frog.*" Abruptly, he seemed more animated, and began to talk a little faster. "Do you have any conception of what that means, my boy? But no, you wouldn't have. It's too much to expect ...."

He sat for a while in silence, drinking his coffee, drumming on the table with his fingers and staring into space with a curiously preoccupied air until suddenly he rose and left the room, inviting us to come to the study when we had finished.

"What do you make of that?" asked Frolin, when the sound of the study door closing came to us.

"Curious," I said. "But I see nothing abnormal there, Frolin. I'm afraid—"

He smiled grimly. "Wait. Don't judge yet; you've been here scarcely two hours."

We went to the study after supper, leaving the dishes to Hough and his wife, who had served my grandfather for twenty years in this house. The study was unchanged, save for the addition of the old double bed, pushed up against the wall which separated the room from the kitchen. Grandfather was clearly waiting for us, or rather for me, and, if I had had

occasion to think cousin Frolin cryptic, there is no word adequate to describe my grandfather's subsequent conversation.

"Have you ever heard of the Wendigo?" he asked.

I admitted that I had come upon it among other north country Indian legends: the belief in a monstrous, supernatural being, horrible to look upon, the haunter of the great forest silences.

He wanted to know whether I had ever thought of there being a possible connection between this legend of the Wendigo and the air elementals, and, upon my replying in the affirmative, he expressed a curiosity about how I had come to know the Indian legend in the first place, taking pains to explain that the Wendigo had nothing whatever to do with his question.

"In my capacity as a librarian, I have occasion to run across a good many out-of-the-way things," I answered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, reaching for a book next to his chair. "Then doubtless you may be familiar with this volume."

I looked at the heavy black-bound volume whose title was stamped only on its backbone in goldleaf: *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft.

I nodded. "This book is on our shelves."

"You've read it, then?"

"Oh, yes. Most interesting."

"Then you'll have read what he has to say about Innsmouth in his strange story, 'The Shadow over Innsmouth.' What do you make of that?"

I reflected hurriedly, thinking back to the story, and presently it came to me: a fantastic tale of horrible sea-beings, spawn of Cthulhu, beast of primordial origin, living deep in the sea.

"The man had a good imagination," I said.

"Had! Is he dead, then?"

"Yes, two years ago."

"Alas! I had thought to learn from him ...."

"But, surely, this fiction—" I began.

He stopped me. "Since you have offered no explanation of what took place in Innsmouth, how can you be so sure that his narrative is fiction?"

I admitted that I could not, but it seemed that the old man had already lost interest. Now he drew forth a bulky envelope bearing many of the familiar three-cent 1869 stamps so dear to collectors, and from this took out various papers, which, he said, Uncle Leander had left with instructions for their consignment to the flames. His wish, however, had not been carried out, explained Grandfather, and he had come into possession of them. He handed a few sheets to me and requested my opinion of them, watching me shrewdly all the while.

The sheets were obviously from a long letter, written in a crabbed hand, and with some of the most awkward sentences imaginable. Moreover,

many of the sentences did not seem to me to make sense, and the sheet at which I looked longest was filled with allusions strange to me. My eyes caught words like *Ithaqua*, *Lloigor*, *Hastur*; it was not until I handed the sheets back to my grandfather that it occurred to me that I had seen those words elsewhere, not too long ago. But I said nothing. I explained that I could not help feeling that uncle Leander wrote with needless obfuscation.

Grandfather chuckled. "I should have thought that the first thing which would have occurred to you would have been similar to my own reaction, but no, you failed me! Surely it's obvious that the whole business is in a code!"

"Of course! That would explain the awkwardness of his lines."

My grandfather smirked. "A fairly simple code, but adequate—entirely adequate. I have not yet finished with it." He tapped the envelope with one index finger. "It seems to concern this house, and there is in it a repeated warning that one must be careful, and not pass beyond the threshold, for fear of dire consequences. My boy, I've crossed and recrossed every threshold in this house scores of times, and there have been no consequences. So therefore, somewhere there must exist a threshold I have not yet crossed."

I could not help smiling at his animation. "If Uncle Leander's mind was wandering, you've been off on a pretty chase," I said.

Abruptly Grandfather's well known impatience boiled to the surface. With one hand he swept my uncle's papers away; with the other he dismissed us both, and it was plain to see that Frolin and I had on the instant ceased to exist for him.

We rose, made our excuses, and left the room.

In the half-dark of the hall beyond, Frolin looked at me, saying nothing, only permitting his hot eyes to dwell upon mine for a long minute before he turned and led the way upstairs, where we parted, each to go to his own room for the night.

II.

The nocturnal activity of the subconscious mind has always been of deep interest to me, since it has seemed to me that unlimited opportunities are opened up before every alert individual. I have repeatedly gone to bed with some problem vexing me, only to find it solved, insofar as I am capable of solving it, upon waking. Of those other, more devious activities of the night mind, I have less knowledge. I know that I retired that night with the question of where I had encountered my Uncle Leander's strange words before strong and foremost in mind, and I know that I went to sleep at last with that question unanswered.

Yet, when I awoke in the darkness some hours later, I knew at once that I had seen those words, those strange proper names, in the book by H. P.

Lovecraft which I had read at Miskatonic and it was only secondarily that I was aware of someone tapping at my door and calling out in a hushed voice.

"It's Frolin. Are you awake? I'm coming in."

I got up, slipped on my dressing gown, and lit my electric candle. By this time Frolin was in the room, his thin body trembling a little, possibly from the cold, for the September night air flowing in through my window was no longer of summer.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He came over to me, a strange light in his eyes, and put a hand on my arm. "Can't you hear it?" he asked. "God, perhaps it *is* my mind—"

"No, wait!" I exclaimed.

From somewhere outside, it seemed, came the sound of weirdly beautiful music: flutes, I thought.

"Grandfather's at the radio," I said. "Does he often listen so late?"

The expression on his face halted my words. "I own the only radio in the house. It's in my room, and it's not playing. The battery's run down, in any case. Besides, did you ever hear *such* music on the radio?"

I listened with renewed interest. The music seemed strangely muffled, and yet it came through. I observed also that it had no definite direction; while before it had seemed to come from outside, it now seemed to come from underneath the house—a curious, chant-like playing of reeds and pipes.

"A flute orchestra," I said.

"Or Pan pipes," said Frolin.

"They don't play them any more," I said absently.

"Not on the radio," answered Frolin.

I looked at him sharply; he returned my gaze as steadily. It occurred to me that his unnatural gravity had a reason for being, whether or not he wished to put that reason into words. I caught hold of his arm.

"Frolin—what is it? I can tell you're alarmed."

He swallowed hard. "Tony, that music doesn't come from anything in the house. It's from outside."

"But who would be outside?" I demanded.

"Nothing—no one human."

It had come at last. Almost with relief I faced this issue I had been afraid to admit to myself must be faced. *Nothing—no one human.*

"Then—what agency?" I asked.

"I think Grandfather knows," he said. "Come with me, Tony. Leave the light; we can make our way in the dark."

Out in the hall, I was stopped once more by his hand tense on my arm. "Do you notice?" he whispered sibilantly. "Do you notice this, too?"

"The smell," I said. The vague, elusive smell of water, of fish and frogs and the inhabitants of watery places.

"And now!" he said.

Quite suddenly the smell of water was gone, and instead came a swift frostiness, flowing through the hall as if something alive, the indefinable fragrance of snow, the crisp moistness of snowy air.

"Do you wonder I've been concerned?" asked Frolin.

Giving me no time to reply, he led the way downstairs to the door of Grandfather's study, beneath which there shone yet a fine line of yellow light. I was conscious in every step of our descent to the floor below that the music was growing louder, if no more understandable, and now, before the study door, it was apparent that the music emanated from within, and that the strange variety of odors came, too, from that study. The darkness seemed alive with menace, charged with an impending, ominous terror, which enclosed us as in a shell, so that Frolin trembled at my side.

Impulsively I raised my arm and knocked on the door.

There was no answer from within, but on the instant of my knock, the music stopped, the strange odors vanished from the air!

"You shouldn't have done that!" whispered Frolin. "If he—"

I tried the door. It yielded to my pressure, and I opened it.

I do not know what I expected to see there in the study, but certainly not what I did see. No single aspect of the room had changed, save that Grandfather had gone to bed, and now sat there with his eyes closed and a little smile on his lips, some of his work open before him on the bed, and the lamp burning. I stood for an instant staring, not daring to believe my eyes, incredible before the prosaic scene I looked upon. Whence then had come the music I had heard? And the odors and fragrances in the air? Confusion took possession of my thoughts, and I was about to withdraw, disturbed by the repose of my grandfather's features, when he spoke.

"Come in, then," he said, without opening his eyes. "So you heard the music, too? I had begun to wonder why no one else heard it. Mongolian, I think. Three nights ago, it was clearly Indian—north country again, Canada and Alaska. I believe there are places where Ithaqua is still worshiped. Yes, yes—and a week ago, notes I last heard played in Tibet, in forbidden Lhassa years ago, decades ago."

"Who made it?" I cried. "Where did it come from?"

He opened his eyes and regarded us standing there. "It came from here, I think," he said, placing the flat of one hand on the manuscript before him, the sheets written by my great-uncle. "And Leander's friends made it. Music of the spheres, my boy—do you credit your senses?"

"I heard it. So did Frolin."

"And what can Hough be thinking?" mused Grandfather. He sighed. "I have nearly got it, I think. It only remains to determine with which of them Leander communicated."

"Which?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

He closed his eyes and the smile came briefly back to his lips. "I thought at first it was Cthulhu; Leander was, after all, a sea-faring man. But now—I wonder if it might not be one of the creatures of air: Lloigor, perhaps—or Ithaqua, whom I believe certain of the Indians call the Wendigo. There is a legend that Ithaqua carries his victims with him in the far spaces above the earth—but I am forgetting myself again, my mind wanders." His eyes flashed open, and I found him regarding us with a peculiarly aloof stare. "It's late," he said. "I need sleep."

"What in God's name was he talking about?" asked Frolin in the hall.

"Come along," I said.

But, back in my room once more, with Frolin waiting expectantly to hear what I had to say, I did not know how to begin. How would I tell him about the weird knowledge hidden in the forbidden texts at Miskatonic University—the dread *Book of Eibon,* the obscure *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* the terrible *R'lyeh Text,* and, most shunned of all, the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred? How could I say to him with any conviction at all the things that crowded into my mind as a result of hearing my grandfather's strange words, the memories that boiled up from deep within—of powerful Ancient Ones, elder beings of unbelievable evil, old gods who once inhabited the Rarth and all the universe as we know it now, and perhaps far more—old gods of ancient good, and forces of ancient evil, of whom the latter were now in leash, and yet ever breaking forth, becoming manifest briefly, horribly to the world of men. Their terrible names came back now, if before this hour my clue to remembrance had not been made strong enough, had been refused in the fastnesses of my inherent prejudices—Cthulhu, potent leader of the forces of the waters of earth; Yog-Sothoth and Tsathoggua, dwellers in the depths of earth; Lloigor, Hastur, and Ithaqua, the Snow-Thing and Wind-Walker, who were the elementals of air. It was of these beings that Grandfather had spoken; and the inference he had made was too plain to be disregarded, or even to be subject to any other interpretation—that my Great-uncle Leander, whose home, after all, had once been in the shunned and now deserted city of Innsmouth, had had traffic with at least one of these beings. And there was a further inference that he had not made, but only hinted at in something he had said earlier in the evening—that there was somewhere in the house a threshold, beyond which a man dared not walk: and what danger could lurk beyond that threshold but the path back into time, the way back to that hideous communication with the elder beings my Uncle Leander had had!

Yet, somehow, the full import of Grandfather's words had not dawned upon me. Though he had said so much, there was far more he had left unsaid, and I could not blame myself later for not fully realizing that

Grandfather's activities were clearly bent toward discovering that hidden threshold of which Uncle Leander had so cryptically written—*and crossing it!* In the confusion of thought to which I had now come in my preoccupation with the ancient mythology of Cthulhu, Ithaqua, and the elder gods, I did not follow the obvious indications to that logical conclusion, possibly because I feared instinctively to go so far.

I turned to Frolin and explained to him as clearly as I could. He listened attentively, asking a few pointed questions from time to time, and, though he paled slightly at certain details I could not refrain from mentioning, he did not seem to be as incredulous as I might have thought. This in itself was evidence of the fact that there was still more to be discovered about my grandfather's activities and the occurrences in the house, though I did not immediately realize this. However, I was shortly to discover more of the underlying reason for Frolin's ready acceptance of my necessarily sketchy outline.

In the middle of a question, he ceased talking abruptly, and there came into his eyes an expression indicating that his attention had passed from me, from the room to somewhere beyond; he sat in an attitude of listening, and, impelled by his own actions, I, too, strained to hear what he heard.

Only the wind's voice in the trees, rising now a little, I thought. A storm coming.

"Do you hear it?" he said in a shaky whisper.

"No," I said quietly. "Only the wind."

"Yes, yes—the wind. I wrote you, remember. Listen."

"Now, come, Frolin, take hold of yourself. It's only the wind."

He gave me a pitying glance, and, going to the window, beckoned me after him. I followed, coming to his side. Without a word, he pointed into the darkness pressing close to the house. It took me a moment to accustom myself to the night, but presently I was able to see the line of trees struck sharply against the starswept heavens. Then, instantly, I understood.

Though the sound of the wind roared and thundered about the house, nothing whatever disturbed the trees before my eyes—not a leaf, not a treetop, not a twig swayed by so much as a hair's breadth!

"Good God!" I exclaimed, and fell back, away from the pane, as if to shut the sight from my eyes.

"Now, you see," he said, stepping back from the window, also. "I have heard all this before."

He stood quietly, as if waiting, and I, too, waited. The sound of the wind continued unabated; it had by this time reached a frightful intensity, so that it seemed as if the old house must be torn from the hillside and hurled into the valley below. Indeed, a faint trembling made itself manifest even as I thought this: a strange tremor, as if the house were *shuddering,* and the pictures on the walls made a slight, almost *stealthy* movement, almost

imperceptible, and yet quite unmistakably visible. I glanced at Frolin, but his features were not disquieted; he continued to stand, listening and waiting, so that it was patent that the end of this singular manifestation was not yet. The wind's sound was now a terrible, demoniac howling, and it was accompanied by notes of music, which must have been audible for some time, but which were so perfectly blended with the wind's voice that I was not at first aware of them. The music was similar to that which had gone before, as of pipes and occasionally stringed instruments, but was now much wilder, sounding with a terrifying abandon, with a character of unmentionable evil about it. At the same time, two further manifestations occurred. The first was the sound as of someone walking, some great being whose footsteps seemed to flow into the room from the heart of the wind itself; certainly they did not originate in the house, though there was about them the unmistakable swelling which betokened their approach to the house. The second was the sudden change in the temperature.

The night outside was warm for September in upstate Wisconsin, and the house, too, had been reasonably comfortable. Now, abruptly, coincident with the approaching footsteps, the temperature began to drop rapidly, so that in a little while the air in the room was cold, and both Frolin and I had to put on more clothing in order to keep comfortable. Still this did not seem to be the height of the manifestations for which Frolin so obviously waited; he continued to stand, saying nothing, though his eyes, meeting mine from time to time, were eloquent enough to speak his mind. How long we stood there, listening to those frightening sounds from outside, before the end came, I do not know.

But suddenly Frolin caught my arm, and in a hoarse whisper cried, "There! There they are! Listen!"

The tempo of the weird music had changed abruptly to diminuendo from its previous wild crescendo. There came into it now a strain of almost unbearable sweetness, with a little of melancholy to it, music as lovely as previously it had been evil; and yet the note of terror was not completely absent. At the same time, there was apparent the sound of voices, raised in a kind of swelling chant, rising from the back of the house somewhere—as if from the study.

"Great God in Heaven!" I cried, seizing Frolin. "What is it now?"

"It's Grandfather's doing," he said. "Whether he knows it or not, that thing comes and sings to him." He shook his head and closed his eyes tightly for an instant before saying bitterly in a low, intense voice, "If only that accursed paper of Leander's had been burned as it ought to have been!"

"You can almost make out the words," I said, listening intently.

There *were* words—but not words I had ever heard before: a kind of horrible, primeval mouthing, as if some bestial creature with but half a

tongue ululated syllables of meaningless horror. I went over and opened the door; immediately the voices seemed clearer, so that it was evident that what I had mistaken for many voices was but one, which could nevertheless convey the illusion of many. Words—or perhaps I had better write *sounds*, bestial sounds—rose from below, a kind of awe-inspiring ululation:

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm. Iä! Ugh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Shub-Niggurath! Ithaqua naflfhtagn!"

Incredibly, the wind's voice rose to howl even more terribly, so that I thought at any moment the house would be hurled into the void, and Frolin and myself torn from its rooms, and the breath sucked from our helpless bodies. In the confusion of fear and wonder that held me, I thought at that instant of Grandfather in the study below and, beckoning Frolin, I ran from the room to the stairs, determined, despite my ghastly fright, to put myself between the old man and whatever menaced him. I ran to his door and flung myself upon it—and once more, as before, all manifestations stopped; as if by the flick of a switch, silence fell like a pall of darkness upon the house, a silence that was momentarily even more terrible.

The door gave, and once more I faced Grandfather.

He was sitting still as we had left him but a short time before, though now his eyes were open, his head was cocked a little to one side, and his gaze was fixed upon the overlarge painting on the east wall.

"In God's name!" I cried. "What was that?"

"I hope to find out before long," he answered with great dignity and gravity.

His utter lack of fear quieted my own alarm to some degree, and I came a little further into the room, Frolin following. I leaned over his bed, striving to fix his attention upon me, but he continued to gaze at the painting with singular intensity.

"What are you doing?" I demanded. "Whatever it is, there's danger in it."

"An explorer like your grandfather would hardly be content if there were not, my boy," he replied crisply, matter-of-factly.

I knew it was true.

"I would rather die with my boots on than here in this bed," he went on. "As for what we heard—I don't know how much of it *you* heard—that's something for the moment not yet explicable. But I would call to your attention the strange action of the wind."

"There was no wind," I said. "I looked."

"Yes, yes," he said a little impatiently. "True enough. And yet the wind's sound was there, and all the voices of the wind—just as I had heard it singing in Mongolia, in the great snowy spaces, over the shunned and hidden Plateau of Leng where the Tcho-Tcho people worship strange ancient gods." He turned to face me suddenly, and I thought his eyes feverish. "I did

tell you, didn't I, about the worship of Ithaqua, sometimes called Wind-Walker, and by some, surely, the Wendigo, by certain Indians in upper Manitoba, and of their beliefs that the Wind-Walker takes human sacrifices and carries them over the far places of the Earth before leaving them behind, dead at last? Oh, there are stories, my boy, odd legends—and something more." He leaned toward me now with a fierce intensity. "I have myself seen things—things found on a body dropped from the air—just that—things that could not possibly have been got in Manitoba, things belonging to Leng, to the Pacific Isles." He brushed me away with one arm, and an expression of disgust crossed his face. "You don't believe me. You think I'm wandering. Go on then, go back to your little sleep, and wait for your last through the eternal misery of monotonous day after day!"

"No! Say it now. I'm in no mood to go."

"I will talk to you in the morning," he said tiredly, leaning back.

With that I had to be content; he was adamant, and could not be moved. I bade him good-night once more and retreated into the hall with Frolin, who stood there shaking his head slowly, forbiddingly.

"Every time a little worse," he whispered. "Every time the wind blows a little louder, the cold comes more intensely, the voices and the music more clearly—and the sound of those terrible footsteps!"

He turned away and began to retrace the way upstairs, and, after a moment of hesitation, I followed.

In the morning my grandfather looked his usual picture of good health. At the moment of my entrance into the dining room, he was speaking to Hough, evidently in answer to a request, for the old servant stood respectfully bowed, while he heard Grandfather tell him that he and Mrs. Hough might indeed take a week off, beginning today, if it was necessary for Mrs. Hough's health that she go to Wausau to consult a specialist. Frolin met my eyes with a grim smile; his color had faded a little, leaving him pale and sleepless-looking, but he ate heartily enough. His smile, and the brief indicative glance of his eyes toward Hough's retreating back, said clearly that this necessity which had come upon Hough and his wife was their way of fighting the manifestations which had so disturbed my own first night in the house.

"Well, my boy," said Grandfather quite cheerfully, "you're not looking nearly as haggard as you did last night. I confess, I felt for you. I daresay also you aren't nearly so skeptical as you were."

He chuckled, as if this were a subject for joking. I could not, unfortunately, feel the same way about it. I sat down and began to eat a little, glancing at him from time to time, waiting for him to begin his explanation of the strange events of the previous night. Since it became evident shortly

that he did not intend to explain, I was impelled to ask for an explanation, and did so with as much dignity as possible.

"I'm sorry if you've been disturbed," he said. "The fact of the matter is that that threshold of which Leander wrote must be in that study somewhere, and I felt quite certain I was onto it last night, before you burst into my room the second time. Furthermore, it seems undisputable that at least one member of the family has had traffic with one of those beings—Leander, obviously."

Frolin leaned forward. "Do you believe in them?"

Grandfather smiled unpleasantly. "It must be obvious that, whatever my abilities, the disturbance you heard last night could hardly have been caused by me."

"Yes, of course," agreed Frolin. "But some other agency—"

"No, no—it remains to be determined only which one. The water smells are the sign of the spawn of Cthulhu, but the winds might be Lloigor or Ithaqua or Hastur. But the stars aren't right for Hastur," he went on. "So we are left with the other two. There they are, then, or one of them, just across that threshold. I want to know what lies beyond that threshold, if I can find it."

It seemed incredible that my grandfather should be talking so unconcernedly about these ancient beings; his prosaic air was in itself almost as alarming as had been the night's occurrences. The temporary feeling of security I had had at the sight of him eating breakfast was washed away; I began to be conscious again of that slowly growing fear I had known on my way to the house last evening, and I regretted having pushed my inquiry.

If Grandfather were aware of anything of this, he made no sign. He went on talking much in the manner of a lecturer pursuing a scientific inquiry for the benefit of an audience before him. It was obvious, he said, that a connection existed between the happenings at Innsmouth and Leander Alwyn's nonhuman contact *outside*. Did Leander leave Innsmouth originally because of the cult of Cthulhu that existed there, because he, too, was becoming afflicted with that curious facial change which overtook so many of the inhabitants of accursed Innsmouth?—those strange batrachian lineaments which horrified the federal investigators who came to inquire into the Innsmouth affair? Perhaps this was so. In any event, leaving the Cthulhu cult behind, he had made his way into the wilds of Wisconsin and somehow he had established contact with another of the elder beings, Lloigor or Ithaqua—all, to be noted, elemental forces of evil. Leander Alwyn was apparently a wicked man.

"If there is any truth to this," I cried, "then surely Leander's warning ought to be observed. Give up this mad hope of finding the threshold of which he writes!"

Grandfather gazed at me for a moment with speculative mildness; but it was plain to see that he was not actually concerning himself with my outburst. "Now I've embarked upon this exploration, I mean to keep to it. After all, Leander died a natural death."

"But, following your own theory, he had traffic with these—these things," I said. "You have none. You're daring to venture out into unknown space—it comes to that—without regard for what horrors might lie there."

"When I went into Mongolia, I encountered horrors, too. I never thought to escape Leng with my life." He paused reflectively, and then rose slowly. "No, I mean to discover Leander's threshold. And tonight, no matter what you hear, try not to interrupt me. It would be a pity, if after so long a time, I am still further delayed by your impetuosity."

"And, having discovered the threshold," I cried, "what then?"

"I'm not sure I'll want to cross it."

"The choice may not be yours."

He looked at me for a moment in silence, smiled gently, and left the room.

III.

Of the events of that catastrophic night, I find it difficult even at this late date to write, so vividly do they return to mind, despite the prosaic surroundings of Miskatonic University, where so many of those dread secrets are hidden in ancient and little-known texts. Yet to understand the widespread occurrences that came after, the events of that night must be known.

Frolin and I spent most of the day investigating my grandfather's books and papers, in search of verification of certain legends he had hinted at in his conversation, not only with me, but with Frolin even before my arrival. Throughout this work occurred many cryptic allusions, but only one narrative at all relative to our inquiry—a somewhat obscure story, clearly of legendary origin, concerning the disappearance of two residents of Nelson, Manitoba, and a constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and their subsequent reappearance, as if dropped from the heavens, frozen and either dead or dying, babbling of *Ithaqua*, of the *Wind-Walker*, and of many places on the face of the earth, and carrying with them strange objects, mementoes of far places, which they had never been known to carry in life. The story was incredible, and yet it was related to the mythology so clearly put down in *The Outsider and Others*, and even more horribly narrated in the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, the *R'lyeh Text*, and the terrible *Necronomicon*.

Apart from this, we found nothing tangible enough to relate to our problem, and we resigned ourselves to waiting for the night.

At luncheon and dinner, prepared by Frolin in the absence of the Houghs, my grandfather carried on as normally he was accustomed to, making no reference to his strange exploration beyond saying that he now had definite proof that Leander had painted that unattractive landscape on the east wall of the study, and that he hoped soon, as he neared the end of the deciphering of Leander's long, rambling letter, to find the essential clue to that threshold of which he wrote, and to which he now alluded increasingly. When he rose from the dinner table, he solemnly cautioned us once more not to interrupt him in the night, under pain of his extreme displeasure, and so departed into that study out of which he never walked again.

"Do you think you can sleep?" Frolin asked me, when we were alone.

I shook my head. "Impossible. I'll stay up."

"I don't think he'd like us to stay downstairs," said Frolin, a faint frown on his forehead.

"In my room, then," I replied. "And you?"

"With you, if you don't mind. He means to see it through, and there's nothing we can do until he needs us. He may call ...."

I had the uncomfortable conviction that if my grandfather called for us it would be too late, but I forebore to give voice to my fears.

The events of that evening started as before—with the strains of that weirdly beautiful music welling flute-like from the darkness around the house. Then, in a little while, came the wind, and the cold, and the ululating voice. Then, preceded by an aura of evil so great that it was almost stifling in the room—then came something more, something unspeakably terrible. We had been sitting, Frolin and I, with the light out; I had not bothered to light my electric candle, since no light we could show would illumine the source of these manifestations. I faced the window and, when the wind began to rise, looked once again to the line of trees, thinking that surely, certainly, they must bend before this great onrushing storm of wind; but again there was nothing, no movement in that stillness. There was no cloud in the heavens; the stars shone brightly, the constellations of summer moving down to the western rim of earth to make the signature of autumn in the sky. The wind's sound had risen steadily, so that now it had the fury of a gale, and yet nothing, no movement, disturbed the line of trees dark upon the night sky.

Suddenly—so suddenly that for a moment I blinked my eyes in an effort to convince myself that a dream had shuttered my sight—in one large area of the sky the stars were gone! I came to my feet and pressed my face to the pane. It was as if a cloud had abruptly reared up into the heavens, to a height almost at the zenith; but no cloud could have come upon the sky so swiftly. On both sides and overhead stars still shone. I opened the window and leaned out, trying to follow the dark outline against the stars. *It*

was the outline of some great beast, a horrible caricature of man, rising to a semblance of a head high in the heavens, and there, where its eyes might have been, glowed with a deep carmine fire two stars!—or were they stars? At the same instant, the sound of those approaching footsteps grew so loud that the house shook and trembled with their vibrations, and the wind's demoniac fury rose to indescribable heights, and the ululation reached such a pitch that it was maddening to hear.

"Frolin!" I called hoarsely.

I felt him come to my side, and in a moment felt his tight grasp on my arm. So he, too, had seen; it was not hallucination, not dream—this giant thing outlined against the stars, and moving!

"It's moving," whispered Frolin. "Oh, God!—it's coming!"

He pulled frantically away from the window, and so did I. But in an instant, the shadow on the sky was gone, the stars shone once more. The wind, however, had not decreased in intensity one iota; indeed, if it were possible, it grew momentarily wilder and more violent; the entire house shuddered and quaked, while those thunderous footsteps echoed and re-echoed in the valley before the house. And the cold grew worse, so that breath hung a white vapor in air—a cold as of outer space.

Out of all the turmoil of my mind, I thought of the legend in my grandfather's papers—the legend of *Ithaqua*, whose signature lay in the cold and snow of far northern places. Even as I remembered, everything was driven from my mind by a frightful chorus of ululation, the triumphant chanting as of a thousand bestial mouths—

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua, Ithaqua! Ai! Ai! Ai! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm vultlagln vulgtmm. Ithaqua fhtagn! Ugh! Iä! Iä! Ai! Ai! Ai!"

Simultaneously came a thunderous crash and, immediately after, the voice of my grandfather, raised into a terrible cry, a cry that rose into a scream of mortal terror, so that the names he would have uttered—Frolin's and mine—were lost, choked back into his throat by the full force of the horror revealed to him.

As abruptly as his voice ceased to sound, all other manifestations came to a stop, leaving again that ghastly, portentous silence to close around us like a cloud of doom.

Frolin reached the door of my room before I did, but I was not far behind. He fell part of the way down the stairs, but recovered in the light of my electric candle, which I had seized on my way out, and together we assaulted the door of the study, calling to the old man inside.

No voice answered, though the line of yellow under the door was evidence that his lamp burned still.

The door had been locked from the inside, so that it was necessary to break it down before we could enter.

Of my grandfather, there was no trace. But in the east wall yawned a great cavity, where the painting, now prone upon the floor, had been—a rocky opening leading into the depths of the earth—and over everything in the room lay the mark of Ithaqua—a fine carpet of snow, whose crystals gleamed as from a million tiny jewels in the yellow light of Grandfather's lamp. Save for the painting, only the bed was disturbed—*as if Grandfather had been literally torn out of it by stupendous force!*

I looked hurriedly to where the old man had kept Uncle Leander's manuscript—but it was gone; nothing of it remained. Frolin cried out suddenly and pointed to the painting Uncle Leander had made, and then to the opening yawning before us.

"It was here all the time—the threshold," he said.

And I saw even as he had, as grandfather had seen too late—*for the painting by Uncle Leander was but the representation of the site of his home before the house had been erected to conceal that cavernous opening into the earth on the hillside, the hidden threshold against which Leander's manuscript had warned, the threshold beyond which my grandfather had vanished!*

Though there is little more to tell, yet the most damning of all the curious facts remain to be revealed. A thorough search of the cavern was subsequently made by county officials and certain intrepid adventurers from Harmon; it was found to have several openings, and it was plain that anyone or *anything* wishing to reach the house through the cavern would have had to enter through one of the innumerable hidden crevices discovered among the surrounding hills. The nature of Uncle Leander's activities was revealed after grandfather's disappearance. Frolin and I were put through a hard grilling by suspicious county officials, but were finally released when the body of my grandfather did not come to light.

Since that night, certain facts came into the open, facts which, in the light of my grandfather's hints, coupled with the horrible legends contained in the shunned books locked away here in the library of Miskatonic University, are damning and damnably inescapable.

The first of them was the series of gigantic footprints found in the earth at that place where on that fatal night the shadow had risen into the star-swept heavens—unbelievably wide and deep depressions, as of some prehistoric monster walking there, steps a half mile apart, steps that led beyond the house and vanished at a crevice leading down into that hidden cavern in tracks identical with those found in the snow in northern Manitoba, where those unfortunate travelers and the constable sent to find them had vanished from the face of the earth!

The second was the discovery of my grandfather's notebook, together with a portion of Uncle Leander's manuscript, encased in ice, found deep in the forest snows of upper Saskatchewan, and bearing every sign of having

been dropped from a great height. The last entry was dated on the day of his disappearance in late September; the notebook was not found until the following April. Neither Frolin nor I dared to make the explanation of its strange appearance which came immediately to mind, and together we burned that horrible letter and the imperfect translation Grandfather had made, the translation which in itself, as it was written down, with all its warnings against the terror beyond the threshold, had served to summon from *outside* a creature so horrible that its description has never been attempted by even those ancient writers whose terrible narratives are scattered over the face of the earth!

Last of all, the most conclusive, the most damning evidence—the discovery seven months later of my grandfather's body on a small Pacific island not far southeast of Singapore, and the curious report made of his condition: perfectly preserved, *as if in ice*, so cold that no one could touch him with bare hands for five days after his discovery, and the singular fact that he was found half-buried in sand, *as if "he had fallen from an aeroplane!"* Neither Frolin nor I could any longer have any doubt; this was the legend of Ithaqua, who carried his victims with him into far places of the earth, in time and space, before leaving them behind. And the evidence was undeniable that my grandfather had been alive for part of that incredible journey, for if we had had any doubt, the things found in his pockets—the mememtoes carried from strange hidden places where he had been—and sent to us, were final and damning testimony—the gold plaque, with its miniature representation of a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in cabalistic designs, the plaque which Dr. Rackham of Miskatonic University identified as having come from some place beyond the memory of man; the loathsome book in Burmese that revealed ghastly legends of that shunned and hidden Plateau of Leng, the place of the dread Tcho-Tcho people; and finally, the *revolting and bestial stone miniature of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth!*

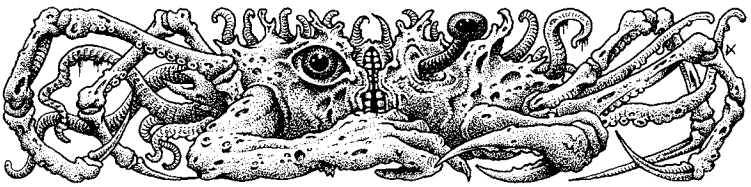
About "Born of the Winds"

Brian Lumley is best known today for his numerous and fantastically popular series of occult and science fiction novels, none of which has the slightest Lovecraftian connection. Cthulhu Mythos aficionados knew Lumley years before when he penned some of the most controversial Cthulhuvian epics ever written, read, and debated. In a long sequence of Mythos novels beginning with *The Burrowers Beneath* (1974) and concluding with *Elysia: The Coming of Cthulhu* (1989), Lumley steered the Mythos along daring new channels which seemed heretical to some Lovecraft purists and which were ironically based on a fresh and often acute reading of Lovecraft's texts. But there was a still earlier stage of Lumley's fiction, an earlier stratum easily missed under the massive blocks of his growing oeuvre, and this was his canon of short stories, many of them remarkable Derlethian pastiches of fine quality. The present story, "Born of the Winds", is one of the best.

For one thing, the vision of the story is pure Lovecraftian cosmic pessimism. There is nothing of the "Derlethian heresy" of dualism, pitting a pantheon of benign deities against the evil Old Ones. It is a tale of the Lovecraft Mythos pure and simple. This is all the more remarkable given that the story is a perfect Derleth pastiche in many ways. It follows pretty directly from Derleth's seminal Ithaqua tales "The Thing That Walked on the Wind" and "Ithaqua/The Snow-Thing." Not only does it strike genuine Lovecraftian and Derlethian notes, it tries to harmonize the two by doubling back and strengthening the Lovecraftian verisimilitude of Ithaqua by providing a "paper trail" of etymological evolution stemming from Akkadian and Hittite wind gods, an important move, since it serves to place Ithaqua back in the Middle East, where Alhazred could have heard of it and filtered it through his anti-Islam.

"Born of the Winds" first appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* #295, December 1975. Three years later, Lumley wrote a whole novel devoted to Ithaqua, *Spawn of the Winds* (Jove Books, 1978), which took a completely different approach. As he would later do in his Hero and Eldin series set in the Lovecraftian Dreamlands, in *Spawn of the Winds* Lumley returned to Lovecraft's Burroughsian roots (seen most clearly in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*). He has Ithaqua transport his abductees to the planet of Borea, where their descendants through the centuries have cobbled together a kind of pantundra culture of assorted Eskimos, Vikings, and Canadian Indians! It is a fascinating transformation of the Ithaqua myth, too long for inclusion here but demanding mention.

One annotation: Why does Lumley list "Khurdisan" among "forgotten worlds of antique legend and myth" alongside such names as R'lyeh and Mu? Lumley refers not to the *Kurdistan* of mundane geography, divided between Iraq and Turkey, but rather to *Khurdisan*, the object of the hero's journey in John Jake's Brak the Barbarian novels.



Born of the Winds

by Brian Lumley

I.

Consider: I am, or was, a meteorologist of some note—a man whose interests and leanings have always been away from fantasy and the so-called "supernatural"—and yet now I believe in a wind that blows between the worlds, and in a Being which inhabits that wind, striding in feathery cirrus and shrieking lightning storm alike across icy Arctic heavens.

Just how such an utter *contradiction* of beliefs could come about I will now attempt to explain, for I alone possess all of the facts. If I am wrong in what I more than suspect—if what has gone before has been nothing but a monstrous chain of coincidence confused by horrific hallucination—then with luck I might yet return out of this white wilderness to the sanity of the world I knew. But if I am right, and I fear that I am horribly right, then I am done for, and this manuscript will stand as my testimonial of an hitherto all-but-unrecognized plane of existence ... and of its *inhabitant*, whose like may only be found in legends whose sources date back geological eons into Earth's dim and terrible infancy.

My involvement with this thing has come about all in the space of a few months, for it was just over two months ago, fairly early in August, that I first came to Navissa, Manitoba, on what was to have been a holiday of convalescence following a debilitating chest complaint.

Since meteorology serves me both as hobby and means of support, naturally I brought some of my "work" with me; not physically, for my books and instruments are many, but locked in my head were a score of little problems beloved of the meteorologist. I brought certain of my notebooks, too, in which to make jottings or scribble observations on the almost Arctic conditions of the region as the mood might take me. Canada offers a wealth of interest to one whose life revolves about the weather: the wind and rain, the clouds, and the storms that seem to spring from them.

In Manitoba on a clear night, not only is the air sweet, fresh, strengthening of weakened lungs, but the stars stare down in such crystal clarity that at times a man might try to pluck them out of the firmament. It is just such a night now—though the glass is far down, and I fear that soon it may snow—but warm as I am in myself before my stove, still my fingers feel the awesome cold of the night outside, for I have removed my gloves to write.

Navissa, until fairly recently, was nothing more than a trail camp, one of many to expand out of humble beginnings as a trading post into a full-blown town. Lying not far off the old Olassie Trail, Navissa is quite close to deserted, ill-fated Stillwater; but more of Stillwater later ....

I stayed at the judge's house, a handsome brick affair with a raised log porch and chalet-style roof, one of Navissa's few truly modern buildings, standing on that side of the town towards the neighboring hills. Judge Andrews is a retired New Yorker of independent means, an old friend of my father, a widower whose habits in the later years of his life have inclined towards the reclusive; being self-sufficient, he bothers no one, and in turn he is left to his own devices. Something of a professional anthropologist all his life, the judge now studies the more obscure aspects of that science here in the thinly populated North. It was Judge Andrews himself, on learning of my recent illness, who so kindly invited me to spend this period of convalescence with him in Navissa, though by then I was already well on the way to recovery.

Not that his invitation gave me license to intrude upon the judge's privacy. It did not. I would do with myself what I would, keeping out of his way as much as possible. Of course, no such arrangement was specified, but I was aware that this was the way the judge would want it.

I had free run of the house, including the old gentleman's library, and it was there one afternoon early in the final fortnight of my stay that I found the several works of Samuel R. Bridgeman, an English professor of anthropology whose mysterious death had occurred only a few dozen miles or so north of Navissa.

Normally such a discovery would have meant little to me, but I had heard that certain of Bridgeman's theories had made him something of an outcast among others of his profession; there had been among his beliefs some which belonged in no way to the scientific. Knowing Judge Andrews to be a man who liked his facts straight on the line, undistorted by whim or fancy, I wondered what there could be in the eccentric Bridgeman's works that prompted him to display them upon his shelves.

In order to ask him this very question, I was on my way from the small library room to Judge Andrews' study when I saw, letting herself out of the

house, a distinguished-looking though patently nervous woman whose age seemed rather difficult to gauge. Despite the trimness of her figure and the comparative youthfulness of her skin, her hair was quite grey. She had plainly been very attractive, perhaps even beautiful, in youth. She did not see me, or if she did glimpse me where I stood, then her agitated condition did not admit of it. I heard her car pull away.

In the doorway of the judge's study I formed my question concerning Bridgeman's books.

"Bridgeman?" the old man repeated to me, glancing up sharply from where he sat at his desk.

"Just those books of his, in the library," I answered, entering the room proper. "I shouldn't have thought that there'd be much for you, Judge, in Bridgeman's work."

"Oh? I didn't know you were interested in anthropology, David."

"Well, no, I'm not really. It's just that I remember hearing a thing or two about this Bridgeman, that's all."

"Are you sure that's all?"

"Eh? Why, certainly! Should there be more?"

"Mmm," he mused. "No, nothing much—coincidence. You see, the lady who left a few moments ago was Lucille Bridgeman, Sam's widow. She's staying at the Nelson."

"Sam?" I was immediately interested. "You knew him then?"

"I did, fairly intimately, though that was many years ago. More recently I've read his books. Did you know that he died quite close by here?"

I nodded. "Yes, in peculiar circumstances, I gather?"

"That's so, yes." He frowned again, moving in this chair in what I took to be agitation.

I waited for a moment, and then when it appeared that the judge intended to say no more, I asked, "And now?"

"Hmm?" His eyes were far away even though they looked at me. They quickly focused. "Now—nothing ... and I'm rather busy!" He put on his spectacles and turned his attention to a book.

I grinned ruefully, inclined my head and nodded. Being fairly intimate with the old man's moods, I knew what his taciturn, rather abrupt dismissal had meant: "If you want to know more, then you must find out for yourself!" And what better way to discover more of this little mystery, at least initially, than to read Samuel R. Bridgeman's books? That way I should at least learn something of the man.

As I turned away, the judge called to me: "Oh, and David—I don't know what preconceptions you may have formed of Sam Bridgeman and his work, but as for myself ... near the end of a lifetime, I'm no closer now than

I was fifty years ago to being able to say what *is* and what *isn't.* At least Sam had the courage of his convictions!"

What was I to make of that?—and how to answer it? I simply nodded and went out of the room, leaving the Judge alone with his book and his thoughts ....

That same afternoon found me again in the library, with a volume of Bridgeman's on my lap. There were three of his books in all, and I had discovered that they contained many references to Arctic and near-Arctic regions, to their peoples, their gods, superstitions, and legends. Still pondering what little I knew of the English professor, these were the passages that primarily drew my attention: Bridgeman had written of these northern parts, and he had died here—mysteriously! No less mysterious, his widow was here now, twenty years after his demise, in a highly nervous if not actually distraught state. Moreover, that kindly old family friend Judge Andrew seemed singularly reticent with regards to the English anthropologist, and apparently the judge did not entirely disagree with Bridgeman's controversial theories.

But what were those theories? If my memory served me well, they had to do with certain Indian and Eskimo legends concerning a god of the Arctic winds.

At first glance there seemed to be little in the professor's books to show more than a normally lively and entertaining anthropological and ethnic interest in such legends, though the author seemed to dwell at unnecessary length on Gaoh and Hotoru, air elementals of the Iroquois and Pawnee respectively, and particularly upon Negafok, the Eskimo cold weather spirit. I could see that he was trying to tie such myths in with the little-known legend of the Wendigo, of which he seemed to deal far too positively.

> The Wendigo (Bridgeman wrote) is the avatar of a Power come down the ages from forgotten gulfs of immemorial lore; this great *Tornasuk* is none other than Ithaqua Himself, the Wind-Walker, and the very sight of Him means a freezing and inescapable death for the unfortunate observer. Lord Ithaqua, perhaps the very greatest of the mythical air elementals, made war against the Elder Gods in the Beginning, for which ultimate treason He was banished to frozen Arctic and interplanetary heavens to 'Walk the Winds Forever' through fantastic cycles of time and to fill the *Esquimaux* with dread, eventually earning His terrified worship and His sacrifices. None but such worshippers may look upon Ithaqua—for others to see Him is certain death! He is as a dark outline against the sky, anthropomorphic, a man-like yet bestial silhouette, striding both in low icy mists and high stratocumulus, gazing down upon the affairs of men with carmine stars for eyes!

Bridgeman's treatment of the more conventional mythological figures was less romantic; he remained solidly within the framework of accepted anthropology. For example:

> The Babylonian storm god, Enlil, was designated 'Lord of the Winds.' Mischievous and mercurial in temperament, he was seen by the superstitious peoples of the land to walk in hurricanes and sand-devils ....

Or, in yet more traditional legend:

> Teuton mythology shows Thor as being the god of thunder; when thunder storms boiled and the heavens roared, people knew that what they heard was the sound of Thor's war chariot clattering through the vaults of heaven.

Again, I could not help but find it more than noticeable that while the author here poked a sort of fun at these classical figures of mythology, he had *not* done so when he wrote of Ithaqua. Similarly, he was completely dry and matter-of-fact in his descriptive treatment of an illustration portraying the Hittite god of the storm, Tha-thka, photographed from his carved representation upon a baked clay tablet excavated in the Toros Mountains of Turkey. More, he compared Tha-thka with Ithaqua of the Snows, declaring that he found parallels in the two deities other than the merely phonetical similarity of their names.

Ithaqua, he pointed out, had left webbed tracks in the Arctic snows, tracks which the old *Esquimaux* tribes feared to cross; and Tha-thka (carved in a fashion very similar to the so-called "Amarna style" of Egypt, to mix ethnic art groups) was shown in the photograph as having star-shaped eyes of a rare, dark carnelian ... and webbed feet! Professor Bridgeman's argument for connection here seemed valid, even sound, yet I could see how such an argument might very well anger established anthropologists of "the Old School." How, for instance, might one equate a god of the ancient Hittites with a deity of comparatively modern Eskimos? Unless of course one was to remember that in a certain rather fanciful mythology Ithaqua had only been banished to the North following an abortive rebellion against the Elder Gods. Could it be that *before* that rebellion the Wind-Walker strode the high currents and tides of atmospheric air over Ur of the Chaldees and ancient Khem, perhaps even prior to those lands being named by their first inhabitants? Here I laughed at my own fancies, conjured by what the writer had written with such assumed authority, and yet my laughter was more than a trifle strained, for I found a certain cold logic in Bridgeman that made even his wildest statement seem merely a calm, studied exposition ...

And there were, certainly, wild statements.

The slimmest of the three books was full of them, and I knew after reading only its first few pages that this must be the source of those flights of

fancy which had caused Bridgeman's erstwhile colleagues to desert him. Yet without a doubt the book was by far the most interesting of the three, written almost in a fervor of mystical allusion with an abundance—a *plethora*—of obscure hints suggestive of half-discernible worlds of awe, wonder and horror bordering and occasionally impinging upon our very own.

I found myself completely enthralled. It seemed plain to me that behind all the hocus-pocus there was a great mystery here—one which, like an iceberg, showed only its tip—and I determined not to be satisfied with anything less than a complete verification of the facts concerning what I had started to think of as "the Bridgeman case." After all, I seemed to be ideally situated to conduct such an investigation: This was where the professor had died, the borderland of that region in which he had alleged at least one of his mythological beings to exist; and Judge Andrews (provided I could get him to talk) must be something of an authority on the man; and, possibly my best line of research yet, Bridgeman's widow herself was here now in this very town.

Just why this determination to dabble should have so enthused me I still cannot say; unless it was the way that Tha-thka, which Being Bridgeman had equated with Ithaqua, was shown upon the Toros Mountains tablet as walking splayfooted through a curious mixture of *cumulonimbus* and *nimbostratus*—cloud formations which invariably presage snow and violent thunderstorms! The ancient sculptor of that tablet had certainly gauged the Wind-Walker's domain well, giving the mythical creature something of solidarity in my mind, though it was still far easier for me to accept those peculiar clouds of ill omen than the Being striding among them ....

II.

It was something of a shock for me to discover, when finally I thought to look at my wristwatch, that Bridgeman's books had kept me busy all through the afternoon and it was now well into evening. I found that my eyes had started to ache with the strain of reading as it grew darker in the small library room. I put on the light and would have returned to the books yet again but for hearing, at the outer door of the house, a gentle knocking. The library door was slightly ajar so that I could hear the judge answering the knocking and his gruff welcome. I was sure that the voice that answered him was that of Bridgeman's widow, for it was vibrant with a nervous agitation as the visitor entered the house and went with the judge to his study. Well, I had desired to meet her; this seemed the perfect opportunity to introduce myself.

Yet at the open door to the judge's study I paused, then quickly stepped back out of sight. It seemed that my host and his visitor were

engaged in some sort of argument. He had just answered to some unheard question: "Not *me*, my dear, that is out of the question. ... But if you insist upon this folly, then I'm sure I can find someone to help you. God knows I'd come with you myself—even on this wild-goose chase you propose, and despite the forecast of heavy snow—but ... my dear, I'm an old man. My eyes are no good any more; my limbs are no longer as strong as they used to be. I'm afraid that this old body might let you down at the worst possible time. It's bad country north of here when the snows come."

"Is it simply that, Jason," she answered him in her nervous voice, "or is it really that you believe I'm a madwoman? That's what you as good as called me when I was here earlier."

"You must forgive me for that, Lucille, but let's face it—that story you tell is simply ... *fantastic*! There's no positive proof that the boy headed this way at all, just this ... premonition of yours."

"The story I told you was the truth, Jason! As for my 'premonition', well, I've brought you proof! Look at this—"

There was a pause before the judge spoke again. Quietly he asked, "But what is this thing, Lucille? Let me get my glass. Hmm—I can see that it depicts—"

"*No!*" her cry, shrill and loud, cut him off, "No, don't mention *Them*, and please don't say His name!" The hysterical emphasis she placed on certain words was obvious, but she sounded calmer when, a few seconds later, she continued: "As for what it is—" I heard a metallic clinking, like a coin dropped on the tabletop, "just keep it here in the house. You will see for yourself. It was discovered clenched in Sam's right hand when they—when they found his poor, broken body."

"All that was twenty years ago—" the judge said, then paused again before asking: "Is it gold?"

"Yes, but of unknown manufacture. I've shown it to three or four experts over the years, and always the same answer. It is a very ancient thing, but from no known or recognizable culture. Only the fact that it is made of gold saves it from being completely alien! And even the gold is ... not quite right. Kirby has one, too."

"Oh?" I could hear the surprise in the judge's voice. "And where did he get it? Why, just looking at this thing under the glass, I should have taken it for granted—even knowing nothing of it—that it's as rare as it's old!"

"I believe they are very rare indeed, surviving from an age before all earthly ages. Feel how cold it is. It has a chill like the ocean floor, and if you try to warm it ... but try it for yourself. I can tell you now, though, that it will not *stay* warm. And I know what that means ....

"Kirby received his in the mail some months ago, in the summer. We were at home in Merida, in Yucatan. As you know, I settled there after—after—"

"Yes, yes I know. But who would want to send the boy such a thing—and why?"

"I believe it was meant as—as a *reminder*, that's all—as a means to awaken in him all I have worked to keep dormant. I've already told you about ... about Kirby, about his strange ways even as a baby. I thought they would leave him as he grew older. I was wrong. That last month before he vanished was the worst. It was after he received the talisman through the mail. Then, three weeks ago, he—he just packed a few things and—" She paused for a moment, I believed to compose herself, for an emotional catch had developed in her voice. I felt strangely moved.

"—As to who sent it to him, that's something I can't say. I can only guess, but the package carried the Navissa postmark! That's why I'm here."

"The Navissa—" The judge seemed astounded. "But who would there be here to remember something that happened twenty years ago? And who, in any case, would want to make a gift of such a rare and expensive item to a complete stranger?"

The answer when it came was so low that I had difficulty making it out:

"There must have been *others*, Jason! Those people in Stillwater weren't the only ones who called Him master. Those worshippers of His—they still exist—they must!

"I believe it was one of them, carrying out his master's orders. As for where it came from in the first place, why, were else but—"

"No, Lucille, that's quite impossible," the judge cut her off. "Something I really can't allow myself to believe. If such things could be—"

"A madness the world could not face?"

"Yes, exactly!"

"Sam used to say the same thing. Nonetheless he sought the horror out, and brought me here with him, and then—"

"Yes, Lucille, I know what you believe happened then, but—"

"No buts, Jason—I want my son back. Help me, if you will, or don't help me. It makes no difference. I'm determined to find him, and I'll find him here, somewhere, I know it. If I have to, then I'll search him out alone, by myself, before it's too late!" Her voice had risen again, hysterically.

"No, there's no need for that," the old man cut in placatingly. "First thing tomorrow I'll find someone to help you. And we can get the Mounties from Nelson in on the job, too. They have a winter camp at Fir Valley only a few miles out of Navissa. I'll be able to get them on the telephone first thing in the morning. I'll need to, for the telephone will probably go out with the first bad snow."

"And you'll definitely find someone to help me personally—someone trustworthy?"

"That's my word. In fact I already know of one young man who might be willing. Of a very good family—and he's staying with me right now. You can meet him tomorrow—"

At this point I heard the scrape of chairs and pictured the two rising to their feet. Suddenly ashamed of myself to be standing there eavesdropping, I quickly returned to the library and pulled the door shut behind me. After some little time, during which the lady departed, I went again to Judge Andrews' study, this time tapping at the shut door, and entered at his word. I found the old man worriedly pacing the floor.

He stopped pacing as I entered.

"Ah, David. Sit down, please, there's something I would like to ask you." He seated himself, shuffling awkwardly in his chair. "It's difficult to know where to begin—"

"Begin with Samuel R. Bridgeman," I answered. "I've had time to read his books now. Frankly, I find myself very interested."

"But how did you know—"

Thinking back on my eavesdropping, I blushed a little as I answered, "I've just seen Mrs. Bridgeman leaving. I'm guessing that it's her husband, or perhaps the lady herself, you want to talk to me about."

He nodded, picking up from his desk a golden medallion some two inches across its face, fingering its bas-relief work before answering. "Yes, you're right, but—"

"Yes?"

He sighed heavily in answer, then said, "Ah, well, I suppose I'll have to tell you the whole story, or what I know of it—that's the least I can do if I'm to expect your help." He shook his head. "That poor, demented woman!"

"Is she not quite ... *right*, then?"

"Nothing like that at all," he answered hastily, gruffly. "She's as sane as I am. It's just that she's a little, well, *disturbed*."

He then told me the whole of the thing, a story that lasted well into the night. I reproduce here what I can remember of his words. They formed an almost unbroken narrative that I listened to in silence to its end, a narrative which only served to strengthen that resolution of mine to follow this mystery down to a workable conclusion.

"As you are aware," the judge began, "I was a friend of Sam Bridgeman's in our younger days. How this friendship came about is unimportant, but I also knew Lucille before they married, and that is why she now approaches me for help after all these years. It is pure coincidence that I live now in Navissa, so close to where Sam died.

"Even in those early days Sam was a bit of a rebel. Of the orthodox sciences, including anthropology and ethnology, few interested Sam in their accepted forms. Dead and mythological cities, lands with exotic names and strange gods, were ever his passion. I remember how he would sit and dream—of Atlantis and Mu, Ephiroth and Khurdisan, G'harne and lost Leng, R'lyeh and Theem'hdra, forgotten worlds of antique legend and myth—when by rights he should have been studying and working hard towards his future. And yet ... that future came to nothing in the end.

"Twenty-six years ago he married Lucille, and because he was fairly well-to-do by then, having inherited a sizable fortune, he was able to escape a working life as we know it to turn his full attention to those ideas and ideals most dear to him. In writing his books, particularly his last book, he alienated himself utterly from colleagues and acknowledged authorities alike in those specific sciences upon which he lavished his 'imagination.' That was how they saw his—fantasies?—as the product of a wild imagination set free to wreak havoc among all established orders, scientific and theological included.

"Eventually he became looked upon as a fool, a naive clown who based his crazed arguments in Blavatsky, in the absurd theories of Scott-Elliot, in the insane epistles of Eibon and the warped 'translations' of Harold Hadley Copeland, rather than in prosaic but proven historians and scientists ....

"When exactly, or why, Sam became interested in the theogony of these northern parts—particularly in certain beliefs of the Indians and half-breeds, and in Eskimo legends of yet more northerly regions—I do not know, but in the end he himself began to *believe* them. He was especially interested in the legend of the snow or wind god, Ithaqua, variously called 'Wind-Walker', 'Death-Walker', 'Strider in the Star-Spaces', etc., a being who supposedly walks in the freezing boreal wind and in the turbulent atmospheric currents of far northern lands and adjacent waters.

"As fortune—or misfortune—would have it, his decision to actually pay this region a visit coincided with problems of an internal nature in some few of the villages around here. There were strange undercurrents at work. Secret semireligious groups had moved into the area, in many cases apparently vagrant, here to witness and worship at a 'Great Coming!' Strange, certainly, but can you show me any single region of this earth of ours that does not have its crackpot organizations, religious or otherwise? Mind you, there has always been a problem with that sort of thing here ....

"Well, a number of the members of these so-called esoteric groups were generally somewhat more intelligent than the average Indian, half-breed, or Eskimo; they were mainly New Englanders, from such decadent Massachusetts towns as Arkham, Dunwich, and Innsmouth.

"The Mounties at Nelson saw no threat, however, for this sort of thing was common here; one might almost say that over the years there has been a surfeit of it! On this occasion it was believed that certain occurrences in and about Stillwater and Navissa had drawn these rather polyglot visitors, for five years earlier there had indeed occurred a very large number of peculiar and still unsolved disappearances, to say nothing of a handful of inexplicable deaths at the same time.

"I've done a little research myself into just what happened, though I'm still very uncertain, but conjecture aside, hard figures and facts are—surprising?—no, they are downright disturbing!

"For instance, the *entire population* of one town, Stillwater, vanished overnight! You need not take my word for it—research it for yourself. The newspapers were full of it.

"Well, now, add to a background like this a handful of tales concerning giant webbed footprints in the snow, stories of strange altars to forbidden gods in the woods, and a creature that comes on the wings of the winds to accept living sacrifices—and remember, please, that all such appear time and again in the history and legends of these parts—and you'll agree it's little wonder that the area has attracted so many weird types over the years.

"Not that I remember Sam Bridgeman as being a 'weird type', you understand; but it was exactly this type of thing that brought him here when, after five years of quiet, the cycle of hysterical superstition and strange worship was again at its height. That was how things stood when he arrived here, and he brought his wife with him ....

"The snow was already deep to the north when they came, but that did nothing at all to deter Sam; he was here to probe the old legends, and he would never be satisfied until he had done just that. He hired a pair of French-Canadian guides, swarthy characters of doubtful backgrounds, to take him and Lucille in search of ... of what? Dreams and myths, fairy tales and ghost stories?

"They trekked north, and despite the uncouth looks of the guides, Sam soon decided that his choice of these two men had been a good one; they seemed to know the region quite well. Indeed, they appeared to be somehow, well, cowed out in the snows, different again from when Sam had found them, drunk and fighting in a Navissa bar. But then again, in all truth, he had had little choice but to hire these two, for with the five-year cycle of strangeness at its peak few of Navissa's regular inhabitants would have ventured far from their homes. And indeed, when Sam asked his guides why they seemed so nervous, they told him it was all to do with 'the season.' Not, they explained, the winter season, but that of the strange myth-cycle. Beyond that they would say nothing, which only excited Sam's curios-

ity all the more—particularly since he had noticed that their restlessness grew apace the farther north they trekked.

"Then, one calm white night, with the tents pitched and a bright wood fire kindled, one of the guides asked Sam just what it was that he sought in the snow. Sam told him, mentioning the stories of Ithaqua the Snow-Thing, but got no further; for upon hearing the Wind-Walker's name spoken, the French-Canadian simply refused to listen to any more. Instead, he went off early to his tent where he was soon overheard muttering and arguing in a frightened and urgent voice with his companion. The next morning, when Sam roused himself, he discovered to his horror that he and his wife were alone, that the guides had run off and deserted them! Not only this, but they had taken all the provisions with them. The Bridgemans had only their tent, the clothing they stood in, their sleeping bags and personal effects. They had not even a box of matches with which to light a fire.

"Still, their case did not appear to be completely hopeless. They had had fair weather so far, and they were only three days and nights out from Navissa. But their trail had been anything but a straight one, so that when they set about making a return journey it was pure guesswork on Sam's part the correct direction in which to head. He knew something of the stars, however, and when the cold night came down, he was able to say with some certainty that they headed South.

"And yet lonely and vulnerable though they now felt, they had been aware even on that first day that they were not truly alone. On occasion they had crossed strange tracks, fresh-made by furtive figures that melted away into the firs or banks of snow whenever Sam called out to them across the wintry wastes. On the second morning, soon after setting out from their camp in the lee of tall pines, they came upon the bodies of their erstwhile guides; they had been horribly tortured and mutilated before dying. In the pockets of one of the bodies Sam found matches, and that night—though by now they knew the pangs of hunger—they at least had the warmth of a fire to comfort them. But ever in the flickering shadows, just outside the field of vision afforded by the leaping flames, there were those furtive figures, silent in the snow, watching and ... waiting?

"They talked, Sam and Lucille, huddled together in the door of their tent before the warming fire, whispering of the dead guides and how and why those men had come to such terrible ends; and they shivered at the surrounding shadows and the shapes that shifted within them. This country, Sam reasoned, must indeed be the territory of Ithaqua the Wind-Walker. At times, when the influence of old rites and mysteries was strongest, then the snow-god's worshippers—the Indians, half-breeds, and perhaps others less obvious and from farther parts—would gather here to attend His ceremonies. To the

outsider, the unbeliever, this entire area must be forbidden, taboo! The guides had been outsiders ... Sam and Lucille were outsiders, too ....

"It must have been about this time that Lucille's nerves began to go, which would surely be understandable. The intense cold and the white wastes stretching out in all directions, broken only very infrequently by the boles and snow-laden branches of firs and pines—the hunger eating at her insides now—those half-seen figures lurking ever on the perimeter of her vision and consciousness—the terrible knowledge that what had happened to the guides could easily happen again—and the fact, no longer hidden by her husband, that she and Sam were—lost! Though they were making south, who could say that Navissa lay in their way, or even that they would ever have the strength to make it back to the town?

"Yes, I think that at that stage she must have become for the most part delirious, for certainly the things she 'remembers' as happening from that time onwards were delusion-inspired, despite their detail. And God knows that poor Sam must have been in a similar condition. At any rate, on the third night, unable to light a fire because the matches had somehow got damp, events took an even stranger turn.

"They had managed to pitch the tent, and Sam had gone inside to do whatever he could towards making it comfortable. Lucille, as the night came down more fully, was outside moving about to keep warm. She suddenly cried out to Sam that she could see distant fires at the four points of the compass. Then, in another moment, she screamed, and there came a rushing wind that filled the tent and brought an intense, instantaneous drop in temperature. Stiffly, and yet as quickly as he could, Sam stumbled out of the tent to find Lucille fallen to the snow. She could not tell him what had happened, could only mumble incoherently of 'something in the sky!'

"God only knows how they lived through that night. Lucille's recollections are blurred and indistinct; she believes now that she was in any case more dead than alive. Three days and nights in that terrible white waste, wholly without food and for the greater part of the time without even the warmth of a fire. But on the morning of the next day—

"Amazingly everything had changed for the better overnight. Apparently their fears—that if they did not first perish from exposure they would die at the hands of the unknown murderers of the two guides—had been unfounded. Perhaps, Sam conjectured, they had somehow managed to pass out of the forbidden territory; and now that they were no longer trespassers, as it were, they were eligible for whatever help Ithaqua's furtive worshippers could give them. Certainly that was the way things seemed to be, for in the snow beside their tent they found tinned soups, matches, a kerosene cooker similar to the one stolen by the unfortunate guides, a pile of branches and, finally, a cryptic note which said, simply: 'Navissa lies seven miles to the southeast.' It was as

if Lucille's vision of the foregoing night had been an omen of good fortune, as if Ithaqua Himself had looked down and decided that the two lost and desperate human beings deserved another chance ....

"By midday, with hot soup inside them, warmed and rested, having slept the morning through beside a fire, they were ready to complete their return journey to Navissa—or so they thought!

"Shortly after they set out, a light storm sprang up through which they pressed on until they came to a range of low, pine-covered hills. Navissa, Sam reckoned, must lie just beyond the hills. Despite the strengthening storm and falling temperature, they decided to fight on while they had the strength for it, but no sooner had they started to climb than nature seemed to set all her elements against them. I have checked the records and that night was one of the worst this region had known in many years.

"It soon became obvious that they could not go on through the teeth of the storm but must wait it out. Just as Sam had made up his mind to pitch camp, they entered a wood of thick firs and pines; since this made the going easier, they pressed on a little longer. Soon, however, the storm picked up to such an unprecedented pitch that they knew they must take shelter there and then. In these circumstances they came across that which seemed a veritable haven from the storm.

"At first, seen through the whipping trees and blinding snow, the thing looked like a huge squat cabin, but as they approached it they could see that it was in fact a great raised platform of sorts, sturdily built of logs. The snow, having drifted up deeply on three sides of this edifice, had given it the appearance of a flat-roofed cabin. The fourth side being free of snow, the whole formed a perfect shelter into which they crept out of the blast. There, beneath that huge log platform whose purpose they were too weary to even guess at, Sam lit the kerosene stove and warmed some soup. They felt cheered by the timely discovery of this refuge, and since after some hours the storm seemed in no way about to abate, they made down their sleeping bags and settled themselves in for the night. Both of them fell instantly asleep.

"It was later that night that disaster struck. How, in what manner, Sam died, must always remain a matter for conjecture; but I believe that Lucille saw him die, and the sight of it must have temporarily broken her already badly weakened nerves. Certainly the things which she *believes* she saw, and one thing in particular which she *believes* happened that night, never could have been. God forbid!

"That part of Lucille's story, anyway, is composed of fragmentary mental images hard to define and even harder to put into common words. She has spoken of beacon fires burning in the night, of a 'congregation at Ithaqua's altar', of an evil, ancient Eskimo chant issuing from a hundred

adulatory throats—and of that which *answered* that chant, drawn down from the skies by the call of its worshippers ....

"I will go into no details of what she 'remembers' except to repeat that Sam died, and that then, as I see it, his poor wife's tortured mind must finally have broken. It seems certain, though, that even after the ... horror ... she must have received help from someone; she could not possibly have covered even a handful of miles in her condition on foot and alone—and yet she was found *here*, near Navissa, by certain of the town's inhabitants.

"She was taken to a local doctor, who was frankly astounded that, frozen to the marrow as she was, she had not died of exposure in the wastes. It was a number of weeks before she was well enough to be told of Sam, how he had been found dead, a block of human ice out in the snows.

"When she pressed them, then it came out about the condition of his body, how strangely torn and mangled it had been, as if ravaged by savage beasts, or as if it had fallen from a great height, or perhaps a combination of both. The official verdict was that he must have stumbled over some high cliff onto sharp rocks, and that his body had subsequently been dragged for some distance over the snow by wolves. This latter fitted with the fact that while his body showed all the signs of a great fall, there were no high places in the immediate vicinity. Why the wolves did not devour him remains unknown."

Thus ended the judge's narrative, and though I sat for some three minutes waiting for him to continue, he did not do so. In the end I said, "And she believes that her husband was killed by ...?"

"That Ithaqua killed him? Yes, and she believes in rather worse things, if you can imagine that." Hurriedly then he went on, giving me no opportunity to question his meaning.

"One or two other things: first, Lucille's temperature. It has never been quite normal since that time. She tells me medical men are astounded that her body temperature never rises above a level which would be death to anyone else. They say it must be a symptom of severe nervous disorders but are at a loss to reconcile this with her otherwise fairly normal physical condition. And finally this." He held out the medallion for my inspection.

"I want you to keep it for now. It was found on Sam's broken body; in fact it was clenched in his hand. Lucille got it with his other effects. She tells me there is—something strange about it. If any, well, *phenomena* really do attach to it, you should notice them ...."

I took the medallion and looked at it—at its loathsome bas-relief work, scenes of a battle between monstrous beings which only some genius artist in the throes of madness might conceive—before asking, "And is that all?"

"Yes, I think so—no, wait. There is something else, of course there is. Lucille's boy, Kirby. He ... well, in many ways it seems he is like Sam:

impetuous, with a love of strange and esoteric lore and legend; a wanderer at heart, I suspect; but his mother has always kept him down, earthbound. At any rate, he's now run off. Lucille believes that he's come north. She thinks perhaps that he intends to visit those regions where his father died. Don't ask me why; I think Kirby must be something of a neurotic where his father is concerned. This may well have come down to him from his mother.

"Anyway, she intends to follow and find him and take him home again away from here. Of course, if no evidence comes to light to show him positively to be in these parts, then there will be nothing for you to do. But if he really is here somewhere, then it would be a great personal favor to me if you would go with Lucille and look after her when she decides to search him out. Goodness only knows how it might affect her to go again into the snows, with so many bad memories."

"I'll certainly do as you ask, Judge, and gladly," I answered immediately. "Frankly, the more I learn of Bridgeman, the more the mystery fascinates me. There *is* a mystery, you would agree, despite all rationalizations?"

"A mystery?" He pondered my question. "The snows are strange, David, and too much snow and privation can bring fantastic illusions—like the mirages of the desert. In the snow men may dream while yet awake. And there again, there is that weird five-year cycle of strangeness which definitely affects this region. Myself, I suspect that it all has some quite simple explanation. A mystery?—I say the world is full of mysteries ...."

III.

That night I experienced my first taste of the weird, the inexplicable, the *outré*. And that night I further learned that I, too, must be susceptible to the five-year cycle of strangeness; either that, or I had eaten too well before taking to my bed!

There was first the dream of Cyclopean submarine cities of mad angles and proportions, which melted into vague but frightful glimpses of the spaces between the stars, through which I seemed to walk or float at speeds many times that of light. Nebulae floated by like bubbles in wine, and strange constellations expanded before me and dwindled in my wake as I passed through them. This floating, or walking, was accompanied by the sounds of a tremendous striding, like the world-shaking footsteps of some ponderous giant, and there was (of all things) an ether wind that blew about me the scent of stars and shards of shattered planets.

Finally all of these impressions faded to a nothingness, and I was as a mote lost in the darkness of dead eons. Then there came another wind—not the wind that carried the odor of outer immensities or the pollen of blossoming planets—a tangible, shrieking gale-wind that whirled me about and

around until I was sick and dizzy and in dread of being dashed to pieces. And I awoke.

I awoke and thought I knew why I had dreamed such a strange dream, a nightmare totally outside anything I had previously known. For out in the night it raged and blew, a storm that filled my room with its roaring until I could almost feel the tiles being lifted from the roof above.

I got out of bed and went to the window, drawing the curtains cautiously and looking out—before stumbling back with my eyes popping and my mouth agape in an exclamation of utter amazement and disbelief. *Outside, the night was as calm as any I ever had seen, with the stars gleaming clear and bright and not even a breeze to stir the small firs in the judge's garden!*

As I recoiled—amidst the rush and roar of winds which seemed to have their origin in my very room, even though I could feel no motion of the air and while nothing visibly stirred—I knocked down the golden medallion from where I had left it upon my window ledge. On the instant, as the dull yellow thing clattered to the smooth pine floor, the roaring of the wind was cut off, leaving a silence that made my head spin with its suddenness. The cacophony of mad winds had not "died away"—quite literally it had been cut off!

Shakily I bent to pick the medallion up, noticing that despite the warmth of my room it bore a chill that must have been near to freezing. On impulse I put the thing to my ear. It seemed that just for a second, receding, I could hear as in a sounding shell the rush and roar and hum of winds far, far away, winds blowing beyond the rim of the world!

In the morning, of course, I realized that it had all been a dream—not merely the fantastic submarine and interspatial sequences, but also those occurrences following immediately upon my "awakening." Nevertheless, I questioned the judge as to whether he had heard anything odd during the night. He had not, and I was strangely relieved ....

Three days later, when it was beginning to look like Lucille Bridgeman's suspicions regarding her son were without basis—this despite all her efforts, and the judge's, to prove the positive presence of Kirby Bridgeman in the vicinity of Navissa—then came word from the Mounties at Fir Valley that a young man answering Kirby's description had indeed been seen. He had been with a mixed crowd of seemingly destitute outsiders and local layabouts camping in crumbling Stillwater. Observers—two aging but inveterate gold-grubbers, out on their last prospecting trip of the year before the bad weather set in—had mentioned seeing him. Though these gnarled prospectors had been

by no means made welcome in Stillwater, nonetheless they had noted that this particular young man had appeared to be in a sort of trance or daze and that the others with him had held him in some kind of reverence; they had been tending to his needs and generally looking after him.

It was this description of the boy's condition (which made it sound rather as if he were not quite right in his head) that determined me to inquire tactfully of his mother about him as soon as the opportunity presented itself. For the last two days, though, I had been studying the handling and maintenance of a vehicle that the judge termed a "snow-cat"—a somewhat large motorized sledge of very modern design that he had hired for Mrs. Bridgeman from a friend of his in the town. The vehicle seemed a fairly economical affair, capable in suitable conditions of carrying two adults and provisions over snow at a speed of up to twenty miles per hour. It was capable, too, of a somewhat slower speed over more normal terrain. With such a vehicle two people might easily travel 150 miles without refuelling, in comparative comfort at that, and over country no automobile could possibly challenge.

The next morning saw us setting out aboard the snow-cat. Though we planned on returning to Navissa every second or third day to refuel, we had sufficient supplies aboard for at least a week. First we headed for Stillwater.

Following a fall of snow during the night, the track that led us to the ghost town was mainly buried beneath a white carpet almost a foot deep, but even so, it was plain that this barely fourth-class road (in places a mere trail) was in extremely poor repair. I recalled the judge telling me that very few people went to Stillwater now, following the strange affair of twenty years gone, and doubtless this accounted for the track's derelict appearance in those places where the wind had blown its surface clean.

In Stillwater we found a constable of the Mounties just preparing to leave the place for camp at Fir Valley. He had gone to the ghost town specifically to check out the story of the two old prospectors. Introducing himself as Constable McCauley, the Mountie showed us round the town.

Originally the place had been built of stout timbers, with stores and houses and one very ramshackle "saloon" bordering a main street and with lesser huts and habitations set back behind the street facades. Now, however, the main street was grown with grass and weeds beneath the snow, and even the stoutest buildings were quickly falling into dilapidation. The shacks and lesser houses to the rear leaned like old men with the weight of years, and rotten doorposts with their paint long flaked away sagged on every hand, threatening at any moment to collapse and bring down the edifices framing them into the snow. Here and there one or two windows remained, but warped and twisting frames had long since claimed by far the greater number, so that now sharp shards of glass stood up in broken rows

from sills like grinning teeth in blackly leering mouths. A stained, tattered curtain flapped moldering threads in the chill midday breeze. Even though the day was fairly bright, there was a definite gloominess about Stillwater, an aura of something *not quite right*, of strange menace, seeming to brood like a mantle of evil about the place.

Overall, and ignoring the fact that twenty years had passed since last it knew habitation, the town seemed to be falling far too quickly into decay, almost as if some elder magic had blighted the place in an effort to return it to its origins. Saplings already stood tall through the snow in the main street; grass and weeds proliferated on window ledges, along facades, and in the black gaps where boards had fallen from the lower stories of the crumbling buildings.

Mrs. Bridgeman seemed to notice none of this, only that her son was no longer in the town ... if he had ever been there.

In the largest standing building, a tavern that seemed to have fared better in its battle against decay than the rest of the town, we brewed coffee and heated soups. There, too, we found signs of recent, if temporary, habitation, for the floor in one of the rooms was fairly littered with freshly empty cans and bottles. This debris, plus the blackened ashes of a fire built on stones in one corner, stood as plain testimony that the building had been used by that group of unknown persons whose presence the prospectors had reported.

The Mountie mentioned how chill the place was, and at his remark it dawned on me that indeed the tavern seemed colder inside (where by all rights it ought to have been at least marginally warmer) than out in the raw air of the derelict streets. I was about to voice this thought when Mrs. Bridgeman, suddenly paler by far than usual, put down her coffee and stood up from where she sat upon a rickety chair.

She looked first at me—a queer, piercing glance—then at McCauley. "My son was here," she abruptly said, as if she knew it quite definitely. "Kirby was here!"

The Mountie looked hard at her, then stared about the room in mystification. "There's some sign that your boy was here, Mrs. Bridgeman?"

She had turned away and for a moment did not answer. She seemed to be listening intently for something far off. "Can't you hear it?"

Constable McCauley looked at me out of the corner of his eye. He frowned. The room was very still. "Hear what, Mrs. Bridgeman? What is it?"

"Why, the wind!" she answered, her eyes clouded and distant. "The wind blowing way out between the worlds!"

Half an hour later we were ready to move again. The Mountie, in the meantime, had taken me to one side, to ask me if I didn't think the search we

planned was just a little bit hazardous considering Mrs. Bridgeman's condition. Plainly he thought she was a bit touched. Perhaps she was! God knows, if what the judge told me was true, the poor woman had enough reason. Being ignorant of her real problem at that time, however, I shrugged her strangeness off, mentioning her relationship with her son as being obsessive out of all proportion to reality. In truth, this was the impression I had already half formed—but it did not explain the *other* thing.

I made no mention of it to the Mountie. For one thing, it was none of his business; and for another, I hardly wanted him thinking that perhaps I, too, was "a bit touched."

It was simply this: In the derelict tavern—when Mrs. Bridgeman had asked, "Can't you hear it?"—I had in fact heard something. At the exact moment of her inquiry, I had put my hand into a pocket of my parka for a pack of cigarettes. My hand had come into contact with that strange golden medallion, and as my fingers had closed upon the chill shape, I had felt a thrill as of weird energies, an electric tingle that seemed to energize all my senses simultaneously. I had felt the cold of the spaces between the stars; I had smelled again, as in my dreams, the scents of unknown worlds; for the merest fraction of a second there opened before me reeling vistas, incredible eons flashing by in a twinkling; and I, too, had heard a wind—a howling *sentience* from far beyond the Universe we know!

It had been so momentary, this—vision?—that I thought little more of it. Doubtless my mind, as I touched the medallion, had conjured in connection with the thing parts of that dream in which it had featured so strongly. That was the only explanation ....

I calculate that by 5:00 p.m. we must have been something like fifty miles directly north of Stillwater. It was there, in the lee of a low hill covered by tall conifers whose snow-laden branches bowed almost to the ground, that Mrs. Bridgeman called a halt for the night. Freezing, the snow already had a thin, crisp crust. I set up our two tiny bivouacs beneath a pine whose white branches formed in themselves something of a tent, and there I lit our stove and prepared a meal.

I had decided that the time was ripe to approach Mrs. Bridgeman tactfully regarding those many facets of her story of which I was still ignorant; but then, as if there were not enough of mystery, I was witness to that which brought vividly back to me what the judge had told me of the widow's body temperature.

We had finished our meal, and I had prepared my bivouac for the night, spreading my sleeping bag and packing snow close to the lower outside walls of the tiny tent against freezing drafts. I offered to do the same

for Mrs. Bridgeman, but she assured me that she could attend to that herself. For the moment she wanted "a breath of fresh air." That turn of phrase in itself might have been enough to puzzle me (the air could hardly have been fresher!) but in addition she then cast off her parka, standing only in sweater and slacks, before stepping out from under the lowered branches into the subzero temperatures of falling night!

Heavily wrapped, still I shivered as I watched her from the sanctuary of our hideaway beneath the tree. For half an hour she simply wandered to and fro over the snow, occasionally glancing at the sky and then again into the darkening distance. Finally, as I suddenly realized that I was quickly drawing close to freezing while waiting for her to come back to camp, I went stiffly out to her with her parka. She must by now, I believed, be very close to suffering from exposure. Blaming myself that I had not recognized sooner how terrifically cold it was, I came up to her and threw her parka about her shoulders. Imagine my astonishment when she turned with a questioning look, completely at ease and plainly quite comfortable, immensely surprised at my concern!

She must have seen immediately how cold I was. Chiding me that I had not taken greater care to keep warm, she hurried back with me to the bivouacs beneath the tree. There she quickly boiled water and made coffee. She drank none of the hot, reviving fluid herself, however, and I was so astounded at her apparent immunity to the cold that I forgot all about those questions I had intended to ask. Since Mrs. Bridgeman now plainly intended to retire and since my own sleeping bag lay warm and inviting inside my bivouac, I simply finished off the coffee, turned down the stove, and lay down for the night.

I was suddenly tired, and the last thing I saw before sleeping was a patch of sky through the branches, illumined by brightly twinkling stars. Perhaps that picture of the heavens, imprinted upon my mind's eye as I fell asleep, coloured my dreams. Certainly I dreamed of stars all night long, but they were uneasy dreams. The stars I saw were particularly sentient and paired like strange eyes; they glowed carmine against a moving black background of hideously suggestive design and immense proportions ....

In the morning over breakfast—cheese and tomato sandwiches, followed by coffee and fruit juice—I briefly mentioned Mrs. Bridgeman's apparent immunity to the cold, at which she looked at me with a very wry expression and said, "You may believe me, Mr. Lawton, when I tell you that I would give all of what little I have just once to feel the cold. It is this—*affliction*—of mine, an extremely rare condition which I contracted here in the north. And it has come out in—"

"In Kirby?" I hazarded the guess.

"Yes." She looked at me again, shrewdly this time. "How much did Judge Andrews tell you?"

I could not conceal my embarrassment. "He—he told me of your husband's death, and—"

"What did he say of my son?"

"Very little. He is not the kind of man to gossip idly, Mrs. Bridgeman, and—"

"And you suspect that there might be much to gossip about?" She was suddenly angry.

"I only know that I'm here, helping a woman look for her son, following her instincts and whims without question, as a favour to an old man. To be absolutely truthful, I suspect that there is a great mystery here; and I admit that I am addicted to mysteries, as curious as a cat. But my curiosity is without malice, you must believe that, and my only desire is to help you."

She turned away from me for a moment or two, and I thought she was still angry, but when she turned back her face was much more composed.

"And did the judge not warn you that there would be—danger?"

"Danger? Heavy snow is due, certainly—"

"No, the snow is nothing—I didn't mean the snow. The judge has Sam's books; have you read them?"

"Yes, but what danger can there be in mythology and folklore?" In fact, I guessed at what she was getting at, but better to hear it from her own lips. As she "believed" it and as her husband had "believed" it before her.

"What danger in myths and legends, you ask?" She smiled mirthlessly. "I asked the same question of Sam when he wanted to leave me in Navissa. God, that I'd listened to him! What danger in folklore? I can't tell you directly—not without you thinking me a madwoman, as I'm sure the judge must more than half believe—but I'll tell you this: today we return to Navissa. On the way you can teach me how to drive the snow-cat. I won't take you to horrors you can't conceive."

I tried to argue the point but she would say no more. We decamped in silence, packed the bivouacs and camp utensils aboard the 'cat, and then, despite a last effort on my part to dissuade her, she demanded that we head directly for Navissa.

For half an hour, travelling fairly slowly, we followed the course of a frozen stream between brooding fir forests whose dark interiors were made darker still by the shrouding snow that covered the upper branches. It was as I turned the snow-cat away from the stream, around a smaller copse of trees to head more nearly south, that I accidentally came upon that which should have gone far towards substantiating Mrs. Bridgeman's hints of terrible dangers.

It was a large depression in the snow, to which I had to react quickly in order to avoid a spill, when we might easily have tumbled directly into it. I halted our machine, and we stepped down to take a closer look at this strangely sunken place in the snow.

Here the drift was deeper, perhaps three or four feet, but in the centre of the depression it had been compacted almost to the earth beneath, as if some great weight had rested there. The size of this concavity must have been almost twenty feet long by seven or eight feet wide, and its shape was something like—

Abruptly the judge's words came back to me—what he had mentioned of the various manifestations of Ithaqua, the Wind-Walker—*and particularly of giant, webbed footprints in the snow!*

But of course that was ridiculous. And yet ....

I began to walk around the perimeter of the fantastic depression, only turning when I heard Mrs. Bridgeman cry out behind me. Paler than I had ever seen her before, now she leaned dizzily against the snow-cat, her hand to her throat. I went quickly to her.

"Mrs. Bridgeman?"

"He—*He was here!*" she spoke in a horrified whisper.

"Your son?"

"No, not Kirby—*Him!*" She pointed, staring wide-eyed at the compacted snow of the depression. "Ithaqua, the Wind-Walker—that is His sign. And that means that I may already be too late!"

"Mrs. Bridgeman," I made a half-hearted attempt to reason with her, "plainly this depression marks the spot where a number of animals rested during the night. The snow must have drifted about them, leaving this peculiar shape."

"There was no snow last night, Mr. Lawton," she answered, more composed now, "but in any case your explanation is quite impossible. Why, if there had been a number of animals here, surely they would have left tracks in the snow when they moved. Look about you. There are no tracks here! No, this is the footprint of the fiend. The horror was here—and somewhere, at this very moment, my son is trying to search Him out, helped on by those poor devils that worship Him!"

I saw my chance then to avoid an early return to Navissa. If we went back now, I might never learn the whole story, and I would never be able to face the judge, having let him down. "Mrs. Bridgeman, it's plain that if we go south now we're only wasting time. I for one am willing to face whatever danger there may be, though I can still see no such danger. However, if some peril does face Kirby, then we won't be helping him any by returning to Navissa. It would help, though, if I knew the background story. Some of it I know already, but there must be a lot you can tell me. Now listen, we

have enough fuel for about 120 miles more. This is my proposition: that we carry on looking for your son to the north. If we have not found him by the time our fuel reserves are halved, then we head back in a direct line for Navissa. Furthermore, I swear here and now that I'll never divulge anything you may tell me or anything I may see while you live. Now, then—we're wasting time. What do you say?"

She hesitated, turning my proposition over in her mind, and as she did so, I saw to the north the spreading of a cloud sheet across the sky and sensed that peculiar change of atmosphere which ever precedes bad weather. Again I prompted her: "The sky is growing more sullen all the time. We're in for plenty of snow—probably tonight. We really can't afford to waste time if we want to find Kirby before the worst of the weather sets in. Soon the glass will begin to fall, and—"

"The cold won't bother Kirby, Mr. Lawton—but you're right, there's no time to waste. From now on our breaks must be shorter, and we must try to travel faster. Later today I'll tell you what I can of ... of everything. Believe what you will, it makes little difference, but for the last time I warn you—if we find Kirby, then in all probability we shall also find the utmost horror!"

IV.

With regards to the weather, I was right. Having turned again to the north, skirting dense fir forests and crossing frozen streams and low hills, by 10:30 a.m. we were driving through fairly heavy snow. The glass was far down, though mercifully there was little wind. All this time—despite a certainty in my heart that there would be none—nevertheless, I found myself watching out for more of those strange and inexplicable hollows in the snow.

A dense copse where the upper branches interlaced, forming a dark umbrella to hold up a roof of snow, served us for a midday camp. There, while we prepared a hot meal and as we ate, Mrs. Bridgeman began to tell me about her son, about his remarkable childhood and his strange leanings as he grew into a man. Her first revelation, however, was the most fantastic, and plainly the judge had been quite right to suspect that the events of twenty years gone had turned her mind, at least as far as her son was concerned.

"Kirby," she started without preamble, "is not Sam's son. I love Kirby, naturally, but he is in no way a child of love. He was born of the winds. No, don't interrupt me, I want no rationalizations.

"Can you understand me, Mr. Lawton? I suppose not. Indeed, at first I, too, thought that I was mad, that the whole thing had been a nightmare. I thought so right until the time—until Kirby was born. Then, as he grew up from a baby, I became less sure. Now I know that I was never mad. It was no nightmare that came to me here in the snow but a monstrous fact!

And why not? Are not the oldest religions and legends known to man full of stories of gods lusting after the daughters of men? There *were* giants in the olden times, Mr. Lawton. There still are.

"Do you recall the Wendy-Smith expedition of '33? What do you suppose he found, that poor man, in the fastness of Africa? What prompted him to say these words, which I know by heart: 'There are fabulous legends of Star-Born creatures who inhabited this Earth many millions of years before Man appeared and who were still here, in certain black places, when he eventually evolved. They are, I am sure, to an extent here even now.'

"Wendy-Smith *was sure*, and so am I. In 1913 two monsters were born in Dunwich to a degenerate half-wit of a woman. They are both dead now, but there are still whispers in Dunwich of the affair, and of the father who is hinted to have been other than human. Oh, there are many examples of survivals from olden times, of beings and forces which have reached godlike proportions in the minds of men, and who is to deny that at least some of them could be real?

"And where Ithaqua is concerned—why!— there are elementals of the air mentioned in every mythology known to man. Rightly so, for even today, and other than this Ithaqua of the Snows, there are strange winds that blow madness and horror into the minds of men. I mean winds like the *Foehn*, the south wind of Alpine valleys. And what of the piping winds of subterranean caverns, like that of the Calabrian Caves, which has been known to leave stout cavers white-haired, babbling wrecks? What do we understand of such forces?

"Our human race is a colony of ants, Mr. Lawton, inhabiting an anthill at the edge of a limitless chasm called infinity. All things may happen in infinity, and who knows what might come out of it? What do we know of *the facts* of anything, in our little corner of a never-ending universe, in this transient revolution in the space-time continuum? Seeping down from the stars at the beginning of time there were giants—beings who walked or flew across the spaces between the worlds, inhabiting and using entire systems at their will—and some of them still remain. What would the race of man be to creatures such as these? I'll tell you—we are the plankton of the seas of space and time!

"But there, I'm going on a bit, away from the point. The facts are these: that before I came to Navissa with Sam, he had already been told that he was sterile, and that after I left—after that horror had killed my husband—well, then I was pregnant.

"Of course, at first I believed that the doctors were wrong, that Sam had not been sterile at all, and this seemed to be borne out when my baby was born just within eight months of Sam's death. Obviously, in the normal scale of reckoning, Kirby was conceived before we came to Navissa. And yet

it was a difficult pregnancy, and as a newborn baby he was a weedy, strange little thing—frail and dreamy and far too quiet—so that even without knowing much of children I nevertheless found myself thinking of his birth as having been ... premature!

"His feet were large even for a boy, and his toes were webbed with a pink stretching of skin that thickened and lengthened as he grew. Understand, please, that my boy was in no way a freak—not visibly. Many people have this webbing between their toes; some have it between their fingers, too. In all other respects he seemed to be completely normal. Well, perhaps not completely ....

"Long before he could walk, he was talking—baby talk, you know—but not to me. Always it was when he was alone in his cot, and always when there was a wind. He could hear the wind, and he used to talk to it. But that was nothing really remarkable; grown children often talk to invisible playmates, people and creatures that only they can see; except that I used to listen to Kirby, and sometimes—

"Sometimes I could swear that the winds talked back to him!

"You may laugh if you wish, Mr. Lawton, and I don't suppose I could blame you, but there always seemed to be a wind about our home, when everywhere else the air was still ....

"As Kirby grew older this didn't seem to happen so frequently, or perhaps I simply grew used to it, I really don't know. But when he should have been starting school, well, that was out of the question. He was such a dreamer, in no way slow or backwards, you understand, but he constantly lived in a kind of dream world. And always—though he seemed later to have given up his strange conversations with drafts and breezes—he had this fascination with the wind.

"One summer night when he was seven, a wind came up that threatened to blow the very house down. It came from the sea, a north wind off the Gulf of Mexico—or perhaps it came from farther away than that, who can say? At any rate, I was frightened, as were most of the families in the area where we lived. Such was the fury of that demon wind, and it reminded me so of ... of another wind I had known. Kirby sensed my fear. It was the strangest thing, but he threw open a window and he shouted. He shouted right into the teeth of that howling, banshee storm. Can you imagine that? A small child, teeth bared and hair streaming, shouting at a wind that might have lifted him right off the face of the Earth!

"And yet in another minute the worst of the storm was over, leaving Kirby scolding and snapping at the smaller gusts of air that yet remained, until the night was as still as any other summer night ....

"At ten he became interested in model airplanes, and one of his private tutors helped him and encouraged him to design and build his own. You see,

he was far ahead of other children his own age. One of his models created a lot of excitement when it was shown at an exhibition of flying models at a local club. It had a very strange shape; its underside was all rippled and warped. It worked on a gliding principle of my son's own invention, having no motor but relying upon what Kirby called his 'rippled-air principle.' I remember he took it to the gliding club that day, and that the other members—children and adults alike—laughed at his model and said it couldn't possibly fly. Kirby flew it for them for an hour, and they all marvelled while it seemingly defied gravity in a fantastic series of flights. Then, because they had laughed at him, he smashed the model down to its balsa wood and tissue paper components to strew them like confetti at the feet of the spectators. That was his pride working, even as a child. I wasn't there myself, but I'm told that a designer from one of the big model companies cried when Kirby destroyed his glider ....

"He loved kites, too—he always had a kite. He would sit for hours and simply watch his kite standing on the air at the end of its string.

"When he was thirteen he wanted binoculars so that he could study the birds in flight. Hawks were of particular interest to him—the way they hover, motionless except for the rapid beating of their wings. They, too, seem almost to walk on the wind.

"Then came the day when a more serious and worrying aspect of Kirby's fascination with the air and flight came to light. For a long time I had been worried about him, about his constant restlessness and moodiness and his ominous obsession.

"We were visiting Chichen Itza, a trip I hoped would take Kirby's mind off other things. In fact the trip had a twofold purpose; the other was that I had been to Chichen Itza before with Sam, and this was my way of remembering how it had been. Every now and then I would visit a place where we had been happy before ... before his death.

"There were, however, a number of things I had not taken into account. There is often a wind playing among those ancient ruins; and the ruins themselves—with their aura of antiquity, their strange glyphs, their history of bloody worship and nighted gods—can be ... disturbing.

"I had forgotten, too, that the Mayas had their own god of the air, Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent, and I suspect that this was almost my undoing.

"Kirby had been quiet and moody during the outward trip, and he stayed that way even after freshening up and while we began to explore the ancient buildings and temples. It was while I was admiring other ruins that Kirby climbed the high, hideously adorned Temple of the Warriors, with its facade of plumed serpents, their mouths fanged and tails rampant.

"He was seen to fall—or jump—by at least two dozen people, mainly Mexicans, but later they all told the same story: how the wind had seemed almost to buoy him up; how he had seemed to fall in slow motion; how he had uttered an eerie cry before stepping into space, like a call to strange gods for assistance. And after that terrible fall, onto ancient stone flags and from such a great height ...?

"It was a miracle, people said, that Kirby was unhurt.

"Well, eventually I was able to convince the authorities at the site that Kirby must have fallen, and I was able to get him away before he came out of his faint. Oh, yes, he had fainted. A fall like that, and the only result a swoon!

"But though I had explained away the incident as best I could, I don't suppose I could ever have explained the look on Kirby's face as I carried him away—that smile of triumph or strange satisfaction.

"Now all this happened not long after his fourteenth birthday, at a time when here in the north the five-year cycle of so-called 'superstitious belief and mass hysteria' was once more at its height, just as it is now. So far as I was concerned, there was an undeniable connection.

"Since then—and I blame myself that I've only recently discovered this—Kirby has been a secret saver, hoarding away whatever money he could lay his hands on towards some future purpose or ambition; and now of course I know that this was his journey north. All his life, you see, he has followed the trail of his destiny, and I don't suppose that there was anything I could have done to change it.

"A short time ago something happened to clinch it, something that drew Kirby north like a magnet. Now—I don't know what the end will be, *but I must see it*—I must find out, one way or the other, once and for all ...."

V.

By 1:30 p.m. we were once again mobile, our vehicle driving through occasional flurries of snow, fortunately with a light tail wind to boost us on our way. And it was not long before we came upon signs that warned of the presence of others there in that white waste, fresh snowshoe tracks that crossed our path at a tangent and moved in the direction of low hills. We followed these tracks—apparently belonging to a group of at least three persons—until they converged with others atop one of the low bald hills. Here I halted the snow-cat and dismounted, peering out at the wilderness around and discovering that from here, between flurries of snow, I could roughly make out the site of our last camp. It dawned on me at once that this would have been a wonderful vantage point from which to keep us under observation.

Then Mrs. Bridgeman tugged at the sleeve of my parka, pointing away to the north where finally I made out a group of black dots against the pure white background straggling towards a distant pine forest.

"We must follow them," she declared. "They will be members of His order, on their way to ceremonies. Kirby may even be with them!" At the thought her voice took on a feverish excitement: "Quickly—we mustn't lose them!"

But lose them we did.

By the time we reached that stretch of open ground where first Mrs. Bridgeman had spied the unknown group, its members had already disappeared into the darkness of the trees some hundreds of yards away. At the edge of the forest I again brought our vehicle to a halt, and though we might easily have followed the tracks through the trees—which was my not-so-delicate companion's immediate and instinctive desire—that would have meant abandoning the snow-cat.

Instead, I argued that we should skirt the forest, find a vantage point on its northern fringe, and there await the emergence of whichever persons they were who chose to wander these wastes at the onset of winter. To this seemingly sound proposal Mrs. Bridgeman readily enough agreed, and within the hour we were hidden away in a cluster of pines beyond the forest proper. There we took turns to watch the fringe of the forest, and while I took first watch, Mrs. Bridgeman made a pot of coffee. We had only unpacked our stove, deeming it unwise to make ourselves too comfortable in case we should need to be on the move in a hurry.

After only twenty minutes at my post I would have been willing to swear that the sky had snowed itself out for the day. Indeed I made just such a comment to my pale companion when she brought me a cup of coffee. The leaden heaven had cleared—there was hardly a cloud in sight in the afternoon sky—and then, as if from nowhere, there came the wind!

Instantly the temperature dropped, and I felt the hairs in my nostrils stiffening and cracking with each sniff of icy air. The remaining half cup of coffee in my hand froze in a matter of seconds, and a rime of frost sprang up on my eyebrows. Heavily wrapped as I was, still I felt the cold striking through, and I drew back into the comparative shelter of the trees. In all my meteorological experience I have never known or heard of anything like it before. The storm that came with the wind and the cold, rising up in the space of the next half hour, took me totally by surprise.

Looking up, through gaps in the snow-laden branches, I could plainly see the angry boiling up of clouds into a strange mixture of cumulonimbus and nimbostratus, where only moments before there had been no clouds at all! If the sky had seemed leaden earlier in the day, now it positively glowered. The atmosphere pressed down with an almost tangible weight upon our heads.

And finally it snowed.

Mercifully, and despite the fact that all the symptoms warned of a tremendous storm to come, the wind remained only moderate, but by comparison the snow came down as if it had never snowed before. The *husshhh* of settling snow was quite audible as the huge flakes fell in gust-driven, spiralling myriads to the ground.

Plainly my watch on the forest was no longer necessary, indeed impossible, for such was the curtain of falling snow that visibility was down to no more than a few feet. We were stuck, but surely no more so than that suspicious band of wanderers in the forest—members of "His order", as Mrs. Bridgeman would have it. We would have to wait the weather out, and so would they.

For the next two hours, until about 5:00 p.m., I busied myself making a windbreak of fallen branches and packed snow until even the moderate wind was shut out of our hideaway. Then I built a small fire in the centre of this sheltered area close to the snow-cat. Whatever happened, I did not want the works of that machine put out of order by freezing temperatures.

During all this time Mrs. Bridgeman simply sat and brooded, plainly unconcerned with the cold. She was frustrated, I imagined, by our inability to get on with the search. In the same period, busy as I was with my hands, nevertheless I was able to ponder much of what had passed, drawing what half-formed conclusions I could in the circumstances.

The truth of the matter was that there did seem to be too many coincidences here for comfort, and personally I had already experienced a number of things previously unknown to me or alien to my nature. I could no longer keep from my mind memories of that strange dream of mine, and similarly the odd sensations I had felt on contact with or in close proximity to the yellow medallion of gold and obscure alloys.

Then there was the simple, quite definite fact—bolstered both by the judge and the widow Bridgeman alike, and by McCauley the Mountie—that a freakish five-year cycle of strange excitement, morbid worship, and curious cult activity *did* actually exist in these parts. And dwelling on thoughts such as these, I found myself wondering once again just what had happened here twenty years gone, that its echoes should so involve me here and now.

Patently it had not been—could not possibly have been—as Mrs. Bridgeman "remembered" it. And yet, apart from her previous nervousness and one or two forgivable lapses under emotional stress since then, she had seemed to me to be as normal as most women—

Or had she?

I found myself in two minds. What of this fantastic immunity of hers to subzero temperatures? Even now she sat there, peering out into the

falling snow, pale and distant and impervious still to the frost that rimed her forehead and dusted her clothes, perfectly comfortable despite the fact that she had once again shed her heavy parka. No, I was wrong, and it amazed me that I had fooled myself for so long. There was very little of normalcy about this woman. She had known—*something*. Some experience to set her both mentally and physically aside from mundane mankind.

But could that experience possibly have been the horror she "remembered?" Even then I could not quite bring myself to believe.

And yet ... what of that shape we had stumbled across in the snow, that deep imprint as of a huge webbed foot? My mind flashed back to our first night out from Navissa, when I had dreamed of a colossal shape in the sky, a shape with carmine stars for eyes!

But this was no good. Why!—here I was, nervous as a cat, starting at the slightest flurry of snow out there beyond the heavy branches. I laughed at my own fancies, albeit shakily, because just for a second as I had turned from the bright fire I had imagined that a shadow moved out in the snow, a furtive figure that shifted just beyond my periphery of vision.

"I saw you jump, Mr. Lawton," my companion suddenly spoke up. "Did you see something?"

"I don't think so," I briskly answered, my voice louder than necessary. "Just a shadow in the snow."

"He has been there for five minutes now. We are under observation!"

"What? You mean there's someone out there?"

"Yes, one of His worshippers, I imagine, sent by the others to see what we're up to. We're outsiders, you know. But I don't think they'll try to do us any harm. Kirby would never allow that."

She was right. Suddenly I saw him, limned darkly against the white background as the whirling snow flurried to one side. Eskimo or Indian, I could not tell which, but I believe his face was impassive. He was merely—watching.

From that time on the storm strengthened, with the wind building up to a steady blast that drove the snow through the trees in an impenetrable icy wall. Behind my barrier of branches and snow we were comfortable enough, for I had extended the shelter until its wall lay open only in a narrow gap to the south; the wind was from the north. The snow on the outside of the shelter had long since formed a frozen crust, so that no wind came through, and the ice-stiffened branches of the surrounding trees gave protection from above. My fire blazed and roared in subdued imitation of the wind, for I had braved half a dozen brief excursions beyond the shelter to bring back armfuls of fallen branches. Their trimmed ends burning, Indian fashion, where they met like the spokes of a wheel to form the centre of the fire, these

branches now warmed our small enclosure and gave it light. They had burned thus all through the afternoon and into the night.

It was about 10:00 p.m., pitch-black beyond the wall of the shelter and still snowing hard, when we became aware of our second visitor; the first had silently left us some hours earlier. Mrs. Bridgeman saw him first, grabbing my elbow so that I started to my feet and turned towards the open end of our sanctuary. There, framed in the firelight, white with snow from head to foot, stood a man.

A white man, he came forwards, shaking the snow from his clothes. He paused before the fire and tipped back the hood of his fur jacket, then shed his gloves and held his hands out to the flames. His eyebrows were black, meeting across his nose. He was very tall. After a while, ignoring me, he turned to Mrs. Bridgeman. He had a strong New England accent when he said, "It is Kirby's wish that you go back to Navissa. He does not want you to be hurt. He says you should return now to Navissa—both of you—and that you should then go home. He knows everything now. He knows why he is here, and he wants to stay. His destiny is the glory of the spaces between the worlds, the knowledge and mysteries of the Ancient Ones who were here before man, godship over the icy winds of Earth and space with his Lord and Master. You have had him for almost twenty years. Now he wants to be free."

I was on the point of questioning his authority and tone when Mrs. Bridgeman cut me short. "Free? What kind of freedom? To stay here in the ice; to wander the icy wastes until any attempt to return to the world of men would mean certain death? To learn the alien lore of monsters spawned in black pits beyond time and space?"

Her voice rose hysterically. "To know no woman's love but sate his lust with strangers, leaving them for dead and worse in a manner which *only his loathsome father could ever teach him?*"

The stranger lifted his hand in sudden anger. "You dare to speak of Him like—" I sprang between them, but it was immediately apparent that I was not needed.

The change in Mrs. Bridgeman was almost frightening. She had been near to hysterics only seconds ago; now her eyes blazed with anger in her white face, and she stood so straight and regal as to make our unknown visitor draw back, his raised arm falling quickly to his side.

"Do *I* dare?" Her voice was as chill as the wind. "I am Kirby's mother! Yes, I dare—but what *you* have dared …! You would raise your hand to me?"

"I … it was only … I was angry." The man stumbled over his words before finding his former composure. "But all this makes no difference. Stay if you wish; you will not be able to enter the area of the ceremonies, for there will be a watch out. If you did get by the watch unseen—then the result

would be upon your own heads. On the other hand, if you go back now, I can promise you fair weather all the way to Navissa. But only if you go now, at once."

My white-faced companion frowned and turned away to stare at the dying fire.

No doubt believing that she was weakening, the stranger offered his final inducement: "Think, Mrs. Bridgeman, and think well. There can only be one conclusion, one end, if you stay here—for you have looked upon Ithaqua!"

She turned back to him, desperate questions spilling from her lips. "Must we go tonight? May I not see my son just once? Will he be—?"

"He will not be harmed." She was cut off. "His destiny is—*great!* Yes, you must go tonight; he does not wish to see you, and there is so little—" he paused, almost visibly biting his tongue, but it seemed that Mrs. Bridgeman had not noticed his gaffe. Plainly he had been about to say, "There is so little time."

My companion sighed and her shoulders slumped. "If I agree—we will need fair weather. That can be ... arranged?"

The visitor eagerly nodded (though to me the idea that he might somehow contrive to control the weather seemed utterly ridiculous) and answered, "From now until midnight, the snow will lessen, the winds will die away. After that—" he shrugged. "But you will be well away from here before then."

She nodded, apparently in defeat. "Then we'll go. We need only sufficient time to break camp. A few minutes. But—"

"No buts, Mrs. Bridgeman. There was a Mountie here. He did not want to go away either. Now—" again he shrugged, the movement of his shoulders speaking volumes.

"McCauley!" I gasped.

"That was not the Mountie's name," he answered me, "but whoever he was, he too was looking for this lady's son." He was obviously talking about some other Mountie from Fir Valley camp, and I remembered McCauley having mentioned another policeman who set out to search the wastes at the same time as he himself had headed for Stillwater.

"What have you done to him, to this man?" I asked.

He ignored me and, pulling on his gloves, again addressed Mrs. Bridgeman: "I will wait until you go." He pulled the hood of his jacket over his head, then stepped back out into the snow.

The conversation, what little there had been, had completely astounded me. In fact my astonishment had grown apace with what I had heard. Quite apart from openly admitting to what could only be murder, our strange visitor had agreed with—indeed, if my ears had not deceived me, he had *confirmed*—the wildest possible nightmares, horrors which until now, so

far as I was aware or concerned, had only manifested themselves in the works of Samuel Bridgeman and others who had worked the same vein before him, and in the disturbed imagination of his widow. Surely this must be the final, utmost proof positive of the effect of the morbid five-year cycle on the minds of men? Could it be anything else?

Finally I turned to the widow to ask, "Are we actually going back to Navissa, after all your efforts? And now, when we're so close?"

First glancing cautiously out into the falling snow, she hurriedly shook her head, putting a warning finger to her lips. No, it was as I had suspected; her almost docile concurrence, following that blazing, regal display of defiance, had merely been a ruse. She in no way intended to desert her son, whether he wished it or not. "Quickly—let's get packed up," she whispered. "He was right. The ceremony is tonight, it must be, and we haven't much time."

VI.

From then on my mind was given little time to dwell on anything; I simply followed Mrs. Bridgeman's directions to the letter, questioning nothing. In any case it was obvious that her game must now be played to outwit the enemy (I had come to think of the strange worshippers as "the enemy"), not to physically defeat them or talk them down. That was plainly out of the question. If indeed they had resorted to murder in order to do whatever they intended to do, they would surely not let a mere woman stop them now.

So it was that when we set off south aboard the snow-cat, in a direction roughly that of Navissa, I knew that it would not be long before we were doubling back on our tracks. And sure enough, within the half hour, at about 11:00 p.m., as we came over a low hill in the then very light snow, there Mrs. Bridgeman ordered a wide swing to the west.

We held this westward course for ten more minutes, then turned sharply to our right flank, bringing the snow-cat once again onto a northerly course. For a further twenty minutes we drove through the light snow, which, now that it had the slackening north wind behind it, stung a little on my face. Then, again at Mrs. Bridgeman's direction, we climbed a thinly wooded slope to fetch a halt at the top not twenty minutes distant from our starting point. At the speed we had travelled (and given that the enemy had no machine comparable with our snow-cat), we could not possibly have been followed; and here, sheltered by the thin trees and the still-lightly falling snow, we should be quite invisible to the enemy somewhere to our front.

Now, while we paused for a moment, I once more found questions forming in my mind for which I had no answers, and I had no sooner decided to voice them than my pale companion pointed suddenly out through the

thin branches of the trees on the summit of the hill in the direction of a great black forested area some half mile to the north.

It was that same forest into which the enemy had vanished earlier in the day when we had been trailing them. Now, at its four cardinal points, up sprang great fires of leaping red flame; and now too, coming to us on the wings of the north wind, faint and uneven we heard massed voices raised in a chilling ritual—the Rites of Ithaqua:

Iä! Iä!—Ithaqua! Ithaqua!
Ai! Ai! Ai!—Ithaqua!
Ce-fyak vulg-t'uhm—
Ithaqua fhtagn!
Ugh!—Iä! Iä!—Ai! Ai! Ai!

Again and again, repeatedly the wind carried that utterly alien chorus to our ears, and inside me it seemed suddenly that my blood froze. It was not only this abhorrent chanting with its guttural tones, but also the *precision* of the—singing?—and the obvious familiarity of the voices with the song. This was no blind, parrot-like repetition of obscure vocal forms but a combination of a hundred or more perfectly synchronized voices whose soul-rending interpretation of a hideous alien liturgy had transformed it into this present awesome cacophony—a cacophony whose horror might indeed breach the voids between the worlds! Suddenly I knew that if there was an Ithaqua, then he must surely hear and answer the voices of his worshippers.

"Very little time now," my companion muttered, more to herself than to me. "The place of the ceremony must be central in that forest—and that's where Kirby is!"

I stared hard through the snow, which again was beginning to fall heavier, seeing that the nearest and most southerly of the four fires blazed some distance to the northeast of our position. The westerly fire was about half a mile southwest of us.

"If we head directly between those two fires," I said, "entering the woods and heading straight for the most northerly fire, on the far side, then we should come pretty close to the centre of the forest. We can take the snow-cat to the edge of the trees, but from there we must go on foot. If we can grab Kirby and make a run for it—well, perhaps the cat can take three, at a push."

"Yes," she answered, "it's worth a try. If the worst comes to the worst ... then at least I'll know what the end of it was ....."

With that I started up the 'cat's motor again, thankful that the wind was in our favour and knowing that under cover of the continuous chanti-

ng we stood a fair chance of driving right up the edge of the forest without being heard.

As we headed out across the white expanse of snow to the forest's edge, I could see in the heavens the glow of the fires reflected from the base of towering, strangely roiling nimbostratus. I knew then, instinctively, that we were in for a storm to end all storms.

At the edge of the forest, undetected so far, we dismounted and left the snow-cat hidden in the lower branches of a great pine, making our way on foot through the forest's dark depths.

The going was of necessity very slow, and of course we dared show no light, but having progressed only a few hundred yards, we found that we could see in the distance the fires of individual torches, and the chanting became much louder and clearer. If there were guards, then we must have passed them by without attracting attention. The chanting was tinged now with a certain hysteria, a frenzy that built steadily towards a crescendo, charging the frosty air with unseen and menacing energies.

Abruptly, we came to the perimeter of a great cleared area where the trees had been cut down to be built into a huge platform in the centre. All about this platform a mongrel congregation of fur- and parka-clad men and women stood, their faces showing ruddy and wild-eyed in the light of numerous torches. There were Eskimos, Indians, Negroes, and white—people from backgrounds as varied as their colours and races—over one hundred and fifty of them at a guess.

The time by then was rapidly approaching midnight, and the deafening, dreadful chanting had now reached such an intensity as to make any increase seem almost impossible. Nevertheless there *was* an increase, at which, with one final convulsive shriek, the entire crowd about the pyramidal platform prostrated themselves face-down in the snow—all bar one!

"Kirby!" I heard Mrs. Bridgeman gasp, as that one upright man, proud and straight-backed, naked except for his trousers, commenced a slow and measured climb up the log steps of the platform.

"*Kirby!*" She shouted his name this time, starting forwards and avoiding the arms I held out to restrain her.

"*He comes! He comes!*" The cry went out in a hiss of rapture from one hundred and fifty throats—drowning Lucille Bridgeman's shout—and suddenly I felt the expectancy in the air.

The prostrate figures were silent now, waiting; the slight wind had disappeared; the snow no longer fell. Only Mrs. Bridgeman's running figure disturbed the stillness, that and the flickering of torches where they stood up from the snow; only her feet on the ice-crusted surface broke the silence.

Kirby had reached the top of the pyramid, and his mother was running between the outermost of the encircling, prostrate figures when it hap-

pened. She stopped suddenly and cast a terrified glance at the night sky, then lifted a hand to her open mouth. I, too, looked up, craning my neck to see—and something moved high in the roiling clouds!

"*He comes! He comes!*" The vast sigh went up again.

Many things happened then, all in the space of a few seconds, comprising a total and a culmination beyond belief. And still I pray that what I heard and saw at that time, that everything I experienced, was an illusion engendered of too close a proximity to the mass lunacy of those who obey the call of the five-year cycle.

How best to describe it?

I remember running forwards a few paces, into the clearing proper, before my eyes followed Mrs. Bridgeman's gaze to the boiling heavens where at first I saw nothing but the madly whirling clouds. I recall, however, a picture in my memory of the man called Kirby standing wide-legged atop the great pyramid of logs, his arms and hands reaching in a gesture of expectancy or welcome up and outwards, his hair streaming in a wind which sprang up suddenly *from above* to blow slantingly down from the skies. And then there is the vision that burns even now in my mind's eye of a *darkness* that fell out of the clouds like a black meteorite, a darkness grotesquely shaped like a man with carmine stars for eyes in its bloated blot of a head, and my ears still ring to the pealing screams of mortal fear and loathing that went up in that same instant from the poor, paralyzed woman who now saw and recognized the horror from the skies.

The Beast-God came striding down the wind, descending more slowly now than at first but still speeding like some great bird of prey to earth, its fantastic splay-footed strides carrying it as if down some giant, winding, invisible staircase straight to the waiting figure atop the pyramid, until the huge black head turned and, from high above the trees, the thing called the Wind-Walker saw the hysterically screaming woman where she stood amid the prostrate forms of its worshippers—and saw and *knew* her!

In midair the Being came to an abrupt, impossible halt—and then the great carmine eyes grew larger still, and the blackly outlined arms lifted to the skies in what was clearly an attitude of rage! One monstrous hand reached to the rushing clouds, and through them, to emerge but a split second later and hurl something huge and round to earth. Still Mrs. Bridgeman screamed—loud, clear, and horrifically—as the unerringly hurled thing smashed down upon her with a roar of tortured air, flattening her instantly to the frozen ground and splintering into a mad bomb-burst of exploding shards of—ice!

The scene about the log pyramid at that hellish moment must have been chaos. I myself was thrown in the rush of pressured air back into the

trees, but in the next moment when I looked out again upon the clearing, all I could see was ... blood!

The ice-torn, mangled bodies of a wide segment of worshippers were still tumbling outwards from the blasted area where Mrs. Bridgeman had stood—a number of bloodied bodies still fell, lazily almost, like red leaves through the howling air; logs were beginning to burst outwards from the base of the pyramid where flying chunks of ice had crashed with the force of grenades.

Nor was Ithaqua finished!

It seemed almost as if I could read this horror's thoughts as it towered raging in the sky: *Were these not His worshippers?—and had they not betrayed their faith in this matter, which was to have been His first meeting with His son on Earth? Well, they would pay for this error, for allowing this Daughter of Man, the mother of His son, to interfere with the ceremony!*

In the space of a few more seconds huge balls of ice were flung to earth like a scattering of hailstones—but with far more devastating effect. When the last of them had scattered its ice-knife shards far and wide about the clearing, the snow was red with spouting blood; the screams of the torn and dying rose even above the howling devil-wind that Ithaqua had brought with Him from the star-spaces. The trees bent outwards now from the clearing with the fury of that fiendish storm, and logs snapped and popped like matchsticks from the base of the platform at the crimson clearing's centre.

But a change had taken place in the attitude of the lone figure standing wild and wind-blown at the top of the tottering pyramid.

While the gigantic, anthropomorphic figure in the sky had raged and ravaged, raining down death and destruction in the form of ice-globes frozen in his hands and snatched down out of the heavens, so the man-God-child, now grown to strange adulthood, had watched from his vantage point above the clearing all that transpired. He had seen his mother ruthlessly crushed to a raw, red pulp; he had watched the demoniac destruction of many, perhaps all, of those deluded followers of his monstrous father. Still, in a dazed bewilderment, he gazed down upon the awful aftermath in the clearing—and then he laid back his head and screamed in a composite agony of frustration, horror, despair, and rapidly waxing rage!

And in that monumental agony his hellish heritage told. For all the winds screamed with him, roaring, howling, shrieking in a circular chase about the platform that lifted logs and tossed them as twigs in a whirlpool round and about in an impossible spiralling whirl. Even the clouds above rushed and clashed the faster for Kirby's rage, until at last his Father knew the anger of His son for what it was—but did He understand?

Down through the sky the Wind-Walker came again, striding on great webbed feet through the currents of crazed air, arms reaching as a father reaches for his son—

—and at last, battered and bruised as I was and half unconscious from the wind's screaming and buffeting, I saw that which proved to me beyond all else that I had indeed succumbed to the five-year cycle of legend-inspired lunacy and mass hysteria.

For as the Ancient One descended, so His son rose up to meet Him—Kirby, racing up the wind in sure-footed bounds and leaps, roaring with a hurricane voice that tore the sky asunder and blasted the clouds back across the heavens in panic flight—Kirby, expanding, exploding outwards until his outline, lined against the frightened sky, became as great as that of his alien Sire—Kirby, Son of Ithaqua, whose clawing hands now reached in a raging blood-lust, whose snarling, bestial, darkening features demanded revenge!

For a moment, perhaps astounded, the Wind-Walker stood off—and there were two darkly towering figures in that tortured sky, two great heads in which twin pairs of carmine stars glared—and these figures rushed suddenly together in such a display of aerial fury that for a moment I could make out nothing of the battle but the flash of lightning and roar of thunder.

I shook my head and wiped the frost and frozen blood droplets from my forehead, and when next I dared look at the sky, I could see only the fleeing clouds and high, high above them, two dark dots that fought and tore and dwindled against a familiar but now leering background of stars and constellations ....

Almost twenty-four hours have passed. How I lived through the horrors of last night I shall never know; but I did, and physically unscathed, though I fear that my mind may be permanently damaged. If I attempt to rationalize the thing, then I can say that there was a storm of tremendous and devastating fury, during the course of which I lost my mind. I can say, too, that Mrs. Bridgeman is lost in the snow, even that she must now be dead despite her amazing invulnerability to the cold. But of the rest ...?

On the other hand, if I forego all rationalizations and listen only to the little winds whispering among themselves behind my flimsy shelter ...? Can I deny my own senses?

I remember only snatches of what followed the awful carnage and the onset of the aerial battle—my return to the snow-cat and how that machine broke down less than half an hour later in a blinding snowstorm; my frozen, stumbling fight against great white drifts with various items of equipment dragging me down; my bruising fall into a frozen hole in the snow whose *outlines* sent me in a renewed frenzy of gibbering terror across the wastes—until,

exhausted, I collapsed here between these sheltering trees. I remember knowing that if I remained still where I had fallen, then I must die; and I recall the slow agony of setting up my shelter, packing the walls solid and lighting the stove. There is nothing more, however, until I awakened around noon.

The cold had roused me. The stove had long since burned itself out, but empty soup cans told me that somehow I had managed to feed myself before giving in to my absolute fatigue. I opened the reservoir of fuel in the stove's body and fired it again, once more attending to my hunger before drying out and warming my clothes item by item. Then, fortified and almost warm, heartened by a slight rise in the outside temperature, I set about the strengthening of this my last refuge; for I knew by then that this was as far as I could hope to go.

At about 4:00 p.m. The sky told me that soon it must storm again, and it was then that I thought to search out the snow-cat and fetch precious fuel for my stove. I almost lost myself when the snow began to fall again, but by 6:00 p.m. I was back in my shelter having recovered almost a gallon of fuel from the crippled 'cat. I had spent at least fifteen futile minutes trying to restart the vehicle, which still lies where I found it less than half a mile from my refuge. It was then, knowing that I could live only a few days more at the outside, that I began to write this record. This is no mere foreboding, this grimly leering doom from which there can be no escape. I have given it some thought: I am too far from Navissa to stand even the slightest chance of making it on foot. I have food and fuel for three days at the most. Here ... I can live for a few days more, and perhaps someone will find me. Outside, in some futile attempt to reach Navissa in the coming storm ... I might last a day or even two, but I could never hope to cover all those miles in the snow.

It is about four in the morning. My wristwatch has stopped and I can no longer tell the time accurately. The storm, which I mistakenly thought had passed me by some miles to the north, has started outside. It was the roaring of the wind that roused me. I must have fallen asleep at my writing about midnight.

This is strange: The wind howls and roars, but through an opening in my canvas I can see the snow falling *steadily* against the black of the night, not hurriedly and hustled by the wind! And my shelter is too steady; it does not tremble in the gale. What does this mean?

I have discovered the truth. I am betrayed by the golden medallion which, when I discovered the howling thing still in my pocket, I hurled out into a drift. There is lies now, outside in the snow, shrieking and screaming with the eternal crying of the winds that roar between the worlds.

To leave my shelter now is certain death. And to stay ...?

I must be quick with this, for He has come! Called by the demon howling of the medallion, He is here. No illusion this, no figment of my imagination, but hideous fact. *He squats without, even now!*

I dare not look out into His great eyes; I do not know what I might see in those carmine depths. But I do know now how I will die. It will be quick.

All is silence now. The falling snow muffles all. The black thing waits outside like a huge hunched blot on the snow. The temperature falls, drops, plummets. I cannot get close enough to my stove. This is how I am to pass from the world of the living, in the icy tomb of my tent, for I have gazed upon Ithaqua!

It is the end ... frost forms on my brow ... my lips crack ... my blood freezes ... I cannot breathe the air ... my fingers are as white as the snow ... the cold ...

* * *

Navissa Daily

The Snows Claim a Fresh Victim!

Just before the Christmas season, bad news has come out of Fir Valley camp where members of the Royal Canadian North-West Mounted Police have winter residence. During the recent lull in the weather, Constables McCauley and Sterling have been out in the wastes north of Navissa searching for traces of their former companion, Constable Jeffrey, who disappeared on routine investigations in October. The Mounties found no trace of Constable Jeffrey, but they did discover the body of Mr. David Lawton, an American meteorologist, who also disappeared into the snow in October. Mr. Lawton, accompanied by a Mrs. Lucille Bridgeman (still missing), set out at that time in search of one Kirby Bridgeman, the lady's son. It was believed that this young man had gone into the wastes with a party of Eskimos and Indians, though no trace of this party has since been found. The recovery of Mr. Lawton's body will have to wait until the

spring thaw; Constables McCauley and Sterling report that the body is frozen solid in a great block of clear ice which also encloses a canvas shelter and bivouac. The detailed report mentions that the eyes of the corpse are open and staring, as though the freezing took place with great rapidity. ...

Nelson Recorder for Christmas Eve:

A Christmas Horror!

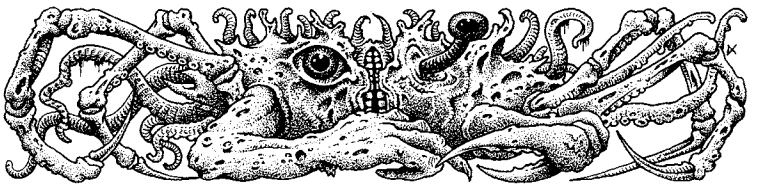
Carol singers in the High Hill quarter of Nelson were astounded and horrified when, at 11:00 p.m., the frozen body of a young man crashed out of the upper branches of a tree in the grounds of No. 10 Church Street, where they were caroling. Such was the force of its fall that the icy, naked figure brought down many branches with it. At least two of the witnesses state that the horribly mauled and mangled youth—whose uncommonly large and strangely webbed feet may help identify him—fell not out of the tree but through it, as from the sky! Investigations are continuing ....

About "Spawn of the North"

In virtually all Ithaqua stories the real star is not Ithaqua the Wind-Walker but rather the Cthulhu Mythos, of which Ithaqua merely happens to be the momentary avatar. This is especially evident in a story like Derleth's "Beyond the Threshold", where it almost does not finally matter who is the bogeyman in charge, but it is implicit in most others as well. See also Lumley's *The Transition of Titus Crow*, in which the Cthulhu cycle deities seem to have drawn straws for the honor of extinguishing the pesky Titus Crow, and Ithaqua won. All reference to American Indian or Arctic lore is just window-dressing. Here, by contrast, we have a story which, while recognizing the Lovecraftian connection, draws on the legend in its more familiar form. The perspective is interesting: The Mythos connection is all the more effective for being a distant echo. The story actually concerns rugged life in the north country among rugged pioneering macho men, not bespectacled scholars hemming and hawing their way to eldritch doom. As concerns Ithaqua the Mythos god, "Spawn of the North" but touches the edges of his ways.

The storytelling is simple, open-faced, blunt and yet deceptively so, as these traits serve to conceal a subtle semiotic slippage between characters. "Monty" (= man mountain) is first met when the "Zadok Allen" actant, Old Jac, finishes his tale of a past brush with the Wendigo and stumbles into Monty entering the saloon. Still momentarily trapped in his memories, he "mistakes" Monty for the Wind-Walker. Later in the story we will see that he was right after all, and this because of a fascinating paradox whereby Monty, vanquished by the Wendigo acting the role of Nemesis, ironically supplants the Wendigo himself to keep a promise to his friend Ray, saving him from the just vengeance he himself has suffered. The switch-off is all the more interesting in that Monty and his friend Ray are clearly alter egos before and after Monty's death, even once Monty becomes the alter ego of the Wendigo. The result is that Monty, having become the twin of two opposed characters (Ray and the Wendigo, who owes Ray the same punishment he meted out to Monty), must choose between the two, using his likeness to the Wendigo to stymie the vengeance of the Wendigo!

"Spawn of the North" initially appeared in *Space and Time* #33, November 1975.



Spawn of the North

by George C. Diezel II and Gordon Linzner

The nameless company town had only two places where workers could squander money they'd intended saving. The Lucky Nugget saloon was cheaper, doing a brisk business most nights, while Diamond Lil's clientele dwindled rapidly between paydays.

Tonight was no exception. Gold coins changed to whiskey with a superhuman speed. No sooner did one flannel-shirted Consolidated Mine worker pull away from the crowd at the bar, tightly clutching his prize, than he was replaced by another.

"I see Old Jac has a new ear to bend tonight," the bartender commented, addressing a four-fingered hand. He'd learned not to ask direct questions of men like these. If one felt like talking, you might extract a fact or two. If not, you remained curious—and, wise enough not to press the point, you also remained alive and healthy.

Four-fingers was garrulous tonight, replying as he grasped the neck of his purchase.

"Yuh, new man—jest signed up today."

"Be interesting to see what he does when Jac goes into his act," the bartender continued, hoping for more information. But the mutilated hand had already vanished into the crowd, and others were expressing an impatience not to be ignored.

The new man was Raymond Spear, a tall and lanky Texan with a square jaw and a cold, steady eye. He'd drifted north to the Yukon from California, disillusioned by the fancy land deeds and fast-talking Eastern lawyers who'd made it possible for a big mining concern to cheat him out of the fortune he'd discovered in the earliest days of the great Gold Rush. Here in the frozen wastelands, he'd thought a real man could hold on to what was his. But the code of the North proved much harsher than he'd anticipated. In short order, he was forced to accept employment with yet another large mining company to stave off starvation and build up enough of a grubstake once more to strike out on his own. The thought of it still rankled. Signing

that contract felt like hot bacon grease on his pride, but a man did what he had to.

With his last dollar, in cynical celebration of his new job, Ray had purchased a shot of cheap grain alcohol. He nursed the last few drops, idly listening to the fantastic legends spewing from the weather-beaten codger opposite.

"... a solid mountain of gold," the old man went on. "The assayer said them nuggets were the purest he'd ever seed. But they warn't no good to Ben Ryan. He was sittin' in this very saloon, day 'fore headin' back to confirm his claim, when he starts to chokin' and gaspin', and before ya know it he keels over dead, with a real funny expression on his face. I was there! An' he didn't even get a chance to tell us where his mine was. Nobody's found it in the twenny years since; least, no one that's come back alive. You watch out fer the curse of Ryan's mine!"

Old Jac paused between stories to draw deeply from the bottle before him. It was the opening Ray had been waiting for. The old-timer could spin some tall tales, all right, but now was the time to show him how it was done Texas-style.

"Well, now," he began, "I gotta admit that curses are pretty nasty things, but there ain't much a fella can do about them. I don't see much point in worrying 'bout somethin' I can't even touch. But you show me somethin' in the flesh, somethin' I can fight and mebbe get kilt by, and I'll show you somethin' to be scart of. And we got some mighty worrisome creatures down where I come from."

The bottle froze at Old Jac's lips. It was still tilted, but not enough to allow additional flow of the amber liquid within. The old man's watery blue eyes fixed on Ray. The young man took the expression as a sign of interest and continued on, encouraged.

"Yessir, down in Texas we got bears that'd make those puny grizzlies of yours look like field mice. Tall as redwoods when they stand on their hind paws! And the wolves! I seen one wolf swallow a full-grown longhorn, whole, and still have that hungry gleam in his eyes ...."

Ray's bragging faded as he noticed an altogether different kind of look in the old man's eyes. Other patrons of the Lucky Nugget knew it immediately as *the* look. Ray only knew that something was suddenly, terribly different. Jac placed his bottle on the table again, staring blankly ahead, as if on a different plane of existence.

There was a long, uncomfortable moment of silence. The Texan was aware of sound and movement from the rest of the saloon, but such things were far-off, unreal. All of reality was contained in the immediate vicinity of this small table.

Then the old man spoke.

"Ain't beast alive 'tween here and Texas could impress me. You might as well give up tryin'. Not after what I seen. Not after the Wendigo."

A snicker of laughter from the back of the growing audience was quickly hushed. Ray did not hear it. He uncrossed his legs, bending closer to Old Jac. He meant to go on with his boasting, to continue with an even more extravagant exaggeration, and Ray was not a man easily dissuaded from his intentions.

But he spoke only one word.

"Wendigo?"

"More than fifty summers now, and not a day goes by I'm not reminded of it. Me and my pard met the thing at midnight. Had to be midnight, for the monster. Coldest night I can remember. My pard. He died for me. I can't even recollect his name. But I can't forget the Wendigo. He died to save me from it."

Old Jac rambled on, his speech growing less coherent, almost unintelligible. The old man's eyes grew moist and his hand, resting inches from the bottle of whiskey, shook convulsively. The pathetic sight made Ray queasy, and he started to turn away.

Jac reached up for his own collar, suddenly ripping open the front of his shirt. "Look!" he cried. "Look, if you don't believe me! Look! The mark of the Wendigo!"

It was a mark made by no animal Ray had ever seen or heard of, shaped something like a bear's claw of fantastic size. The fearful scar was branded across the aged flesh of the old man's chest, a reminder of the past he could never be free of.

Jac did not wait for Ray's startled reaction. The sight of his own wound brought back, as it always did, maddeningly clear memories of horror and pain. His cracked lips parted in a hideous scream which grew more frantic as the patrons of the Lucky Nugget burst into laughter.

"There goes Old Jac again!" came a mirthful voice from the back of the crowded room. Now Ray understood what was happening, that he had undergone a sort of initiation. The astonishment faded from his face and he joined the laughers. Old Jac shook and quivered and screamed some more, moving about spasmodically, oblivious of his audience, until he could sit no longer. He bolted from his chair for the door of the saloon.

His flight ended in an abrupt collision with the seven-foot mountain of muscle named Monty Bates.

Instinctively, Monty's huge hand grasped the old man by the open collar of his shirt, lifting him fully a foot off the ground. Jac screamed and moaned and kicked empty air.

"The Wendigo! He's got me! The Wendigo!"

As Monty realized whom he was holding, his anger dissipated. With a broad grin, he set the codger down. Jac's feet barely had touched the rough wooden flooring when he was through the open doorway. Seconds later he had vanished into the night.

But all laughter had stopped at Monty's entrance. Every man there waited in silence, depending on the red-haired giant's mood to set the tone for the rest of the evening. Every man but Ray, blissfully unaware of Monty's reputation for mauling rash newcomers.

"Takes some kind of animal to pick on a crazy old man," the Texan said.

Monty studied Ray from the corner of his eye, as one might look at a mildly annoying insect. Ray did not look back. He spoke again, addressing himself to no one in particular.

"Down Texas way, we don't even bother hanging men like that. We just stomp 'em, like the slimy roaches they are."

A space cleared between the two as miners backed off from the certain conflict.

"You got a name, bug-killer?" the big man asked.

"Ray Spear," replied the challenger, finally raising his eyes to meet Monty's cold gaze. "Born and bred in the independent Republic of Texas, where even an old man like Jac could wipe the floor with a coward like you."

"Don't think all that'll fit on your tombstone. Maybe just the cause of death: stupidity." Monty had inched closer to where the Texan sat. He suddenly shot his right foot out, hooking Ray's chair with his instep. In a smooth motion, he pulled it from under the newcomer.

Ray was ready for the move. Instead of falling, he leaped to his feet. His tightly knotted fist smashed into the big man's gut.

It felt like punching a brick wall. Monty laughed at Ray's startled expression even as he swung his own enormous fist at the Texan's chin. One of Monty's blows was so powerful, the breeze alone would knock down most men. If it connected, the fight would end before it even began. But Monty lacked speed and timing, a fact to which many a Consolidated Miner owed his life. Ray dodged easily. Recognizing his opponent as a poor choice for a bare-handed contest, Ray picked up his fallen chair and shattered it over Monty's skull.

Bates merely shook his head. The grin on his face grew wider. This would be a good fight.

The battle strategy had been set. Ray discovered that several quick, hard blows at one spot had some effect on his oversized opponent. His natural speed and agility saved him from all but the most glancing of Monty's blows. But even glancing blows from those enormous fists sent the Texan reeling into the retreating crowd of spectators. Tables and chairs broke

against Monty's thick skull regularly, with no other result save the reduction of the saloon's furniture to splinters.

The fight had been underway for over two hours when the owner of the Lucky Nugget made an inopportune and ill-advised appearance, having spent his evening with the competition. The two men were a bit slower and considerably bloodier, but still going strong with no end in sight.

The man was understandably upset. Monty had always been courteous enough in the past to step outside before pulping the latest arrival. This was intolerable. With a courage born more of fifteen-dollar whiskey than common sense, he pushed through the crowd outside the saloon, staring in through grimy windows. Ray had run out of furniture, and the two men stood facing each other, a momentary lull, each waiting for the other's move.

The proprietor was at least a head shorter than Ray, and his thick frame betrayed an aversion to physical activity. But he had stern, cold blue eyes which had stared down many an unruly customer and a bullfrog voice surprising to those who'd never heard him speak. He stepped boldly between the two men, grasping each by the arm.

"What the hell is going on here?" he croaked.

As one, Monty and Ray turned to face the little man. Monty looked at Ray. Ray looked at Monty. They nodded.

From that day on, the unfortunate owner of the Lucky Nugget spoke with a lisp.

Ray stared silently at the unconscious form lying at his feet. "I guess we shouldn't have hit him so hard," he said finally.

Monty grinned. "Well, he did spoil our fun."

The Texan couldn't help laughing as he looked at the big man, caked with blood and grinning like an ape, while he must look just as ridiculous. "It was a damned good fight, wasn't it?"

"Best I ever had," Monty replied, wiping the blood from his mouth. "You're the only guy ever lasted this long, Ray."

"I'd have beat you, too."

"I don't know about that. But we're friends now, Texan. Anybody can fight the way you do is a friend of Monty Bates."

Ray extended a hand. Monty grasped it in his powerful grip, causing the newcomer to wince.

"Anytime you need some help, Ray, I'll be there. That's what friends are for."

"Double for me, Monty."

Both men laughed, clasping each other like long-lost brothers as they left the scene of carnage.

* * *

The foreman at this operation of Consolidated Mining was a black-hearted Mexican named Chico Waldiez and called Broken-Nose—and a lot worse. He was despised by everyone who worked for him, especially the other Mexicans who often suffered abuse and prejudice because of his indiscretions.

It was a state of affairs Chico was unconcerned over. As long as he regularly obtained a gallon of tequila and enough privacy to rage drunkenly against worthless gringos he was content to be an object of scorn. The special hatred he bore for Texans, which he had to control while working, could be released fully under the influence.

The habit proved fatally indiscreet.

Less than a week after the Lucky Nugget fight, Monty Bates passed by Chico's tent. He'd heard the Mexican rage before, of course. Hardly a man in the camp was unaware of their foreman's habits. Like every one else, the big man generally ignored him. But that was before he'd become fast friends with Ray and gained a new respect for the people of his Republic.

So this time, when he overheard Chico complain about "every last one of those stinking sons of a coyote"—the mildest of the Mexican's epithets—Monty Bates chose not to ignore it.

The big, red-haired man was only a few feet from the foreman's tent, and his powerful arm shot forward to draw back the flap. Seeing the dark little man with the thick mustache lying back on his cot, cursing between sips from the large bottle of clear liquid, Monty couched his demand for an immediate retraction without subtlety.

"You best hold your tongue about your betters, you greasy bastard, else I'll bounce you across two borders to whatever pueblo you crawled out from under!"

Dark eyes focused on the intruder. Chico let his bottle fall the short distance to the ground. It was empty anyway. His lip curled to demonstrate he was unimpressed with Monty's diplomacy. He howled his reply in Spanish.

The big man understood the meaning, if not the words. He also understood the long, wicked-looking knife Chico suddenly produced from the folds of a blanket. The time for meaningful discussion was past. The Mexican would be satisfied with nothing less than carving out Monty's heart.

Monty backed off, less out of fear than to gain some maneuvering room. In the cramped quarters of the foreman's tent, the Mexican could not fail to cut him. Outside Monty could keep out of range. Screeching unintelligibly, Chico leaped after him.

It was only fair, Monty decided, that he should also have a weapon. Stacked next to Chico's tent were heavy timbers used as braces in the mine, and the big man laid hands on the nearest one. His mighty muscles easily lifted the wood high above his head.

Chico reopened the flap of his tent. With a blood-curdling yell, he bore down on his antagonist, holding the hilt of his knife in both hands. Its point was aimed directly at Monty's belly.

Dodging the blow was out of the question. Monty shifted his weight and brought the makeshift weapon down flatly on the crown of his attacker's head.

Chico's skull split open like a ripe melon.

The noise had attracted a handful of miners to witness to the death of their foreman, and Monty started at their furtive cheering.

"It was a fair fight," one bearded man called out. "You had no other choice. I'm a witness to that!"

The rest of the crowd agreed, all promising to give testimony if there was any trouble with the law. But the law was practically nonexistent in this area of the Yukon. Monty was more concerned with how the management of Consolidated Mining would treat the situation.

* * *

Monty Bates, in an uncharacteristically taciturn mood, occupied a corner table at the newly refurbished Lucky Nugget. He'd started on his fourth bottle of whiskey when Ray Spear burst into the near-empty saloon. He ordered a bottle of his own from the owner, who was tending bar in this normally quiet hour. The little man moved quickly, eager to please. The braces were still on his jaw.

Monty looked up uncuriously as the Texan joined him. "You heard what happened?" It was more of a statement than a question.

"Not more'n half an hour ago," Ray replied, uncorking his whiskey. "You got a raw deal, Monty."

"Yup. The company don't see much profit in getting their foremen killed."

"From what I've heard, that Mex was no great loss. Anyway, I gave them a piece of my mind, said I was walkin' out. They wouldn't let me. I'd signed a contract for a solid year, and I had to work it out."

Monty grunted. "Seems to me I had a few months left on my contract."

"I asked about that. Seems there's a due cause clause, says the company can terminate the contract at any time. Damn fancy lawyer words! Thought I'd left all that back in California!"

As the afternoon wore on, the two men squandered what little money they'd saved. They were trying to get drunk enough to concoct a fitting revenge against the Consolidated Mining Company.

"We could steal their maps and surveys," Monty suggested. "Sell them to another company. Amalgamated's looking for some fresh openings."

Ray shook his head. "Take too long. We gotta let them know right away how we feel."

"Right," Monty agreed. He thought in silence again. The strain showed on his face.

"I know!" he said at length. "We can weaken the timbers of the mine. The entrance'd seal up under tons of rock. That'd set them back weeks."

"I like it," the Texan drawled. "Only trouble is some of the miners might get hurt. They're regular guys like us. It's the company we want to hurt. You're on the right track, though. Listen, Monty, can we get hold of about a case of dynamite?"

Monty smiled. "Easiest thing in the world."

Night had fallen by this time, and mine workers were beginning to drift in as they left their shifts. But Ray now had a plan, and for the Texan to think was to act. He and Monty left, much to the relief of the Lucky Nugget's owner. Their destination was the main supply shack.

Ray drew back at the sight of the guard in front of the shack. Monty urged him forward. "Jake's a friend of mine," he confided. "Right, Jake?"

Jake peered down from the hillock on which the supply shed stood. He had not heard the first part of Monty's speech but he recognized the voice. And that gigantic form, silhouetted in the light of a freshly risen full moon, was unmistakable.

"R-r-right, m-m-Monty," he replied.

The two men strolled casually up to the stuttering watchman. "H-h-heard about your f-f-fight, m-Monty. T-t-tough b-break. Everybody s-s-says you got a d-d-dirty d-d-deal."

"I appreciate that, Jake. We're gonna even that score, don't you worry. I wonder if you'd mind us just borrowing a couple of things from the shack?"

"S-s-sure, m-m-Monty. Anything f-f-for you. They c-c-can't blame me if s-s-something d-d-disappears while I'm answering n-n-nature's c-c-call." Without another word, the watchman limped down the hillside to relieve himself.

"You know him well?" asked Ray, breaking the lock with the butt of his Navy Colt. Aside from his father's Bowie knife, the gun was the only thing Ray had held on to through all his trials.

"Kinda. 'Fraid I got carried away the first day he came, and broke both his legs. No hard feelings, though. There ain't hardly nothing Jake won't do for me."

The full moon hung high in the frosty northern sky when the two men arrived at the mining office. Each shouldered half a case of TNT. They joked together in boyish glee as they set the charges. It would take weeks for the company to replace their business records, if they ever could. The

prank wasn't enough to pay back the company for what it had done, but it would have to do.

The calm scene was suddenly broken by a powerful beam of light shining from within the office. A gruff shout followed.

"Who in tarnation's poking around out there? Speak up, or I'll give ya both barrels outta this here shotgun!"

Ray did not wait for the threat to become reality. With desperate speed, he whipped out his blue-steel Navy Colt and fanned off three deadly shots. Glass from the shattered window was still falling as the watchman crashed in a lifeless heap to the floor of the office.

"Blast our luck, anyhow," Ray cursed. "Someone's bound to get curious about all that racket. What the hell they need a watchman here for?"

"Beats me," Monty replied. "There isn't one, usually."

"Finish with those charges, Monty. I'll have a look-see inside."

Climbing in through the broken window, Ray began to search the office. He found the reason for the watchman almost at once, and it set off a greedy gleam in his eyes. A ponderous strong box took up one corner of the room. A blow from his pistol butt smashed the lock, and inside Ray found bag after bag filled with refined gold dust. Perhaps a hundred pounds of the stuff! Fortune enough to go anywhere, do anything!

When Monty joined Ray in the office his feelings mirrored the Texan's. The gold really belonged to them; the cheating company owed it to them.

They hurried now, expecting at any moment that Ray's shots would attract the rest of the camp. Together the two men shouldered the back-breaking strongbox onto a nearby sled. The dogs were still tied to it; apparently the watchman had arrived only moments before the pair of them.

A long fuse was lit for the explosives.

Then Monty cracked a long horsewhip over the ear of the lead dog. The animals set a good pace, considering the load they carried. Miles slipped by under their pounding paws before they heard the low rumble of a detonation rolling back through the legions of black, towering pines.

* * *

Winter in the Yukon comes down like a crushing ice mallet, and it comes down early. This was only mid-November, and already the temperatures were in the thirties-below-zero. The men pushed themselves and the dogs to the breaking point. They knew they had but a slim chance of getting out of the raw wilderness alive, and their only hope lay in speed. A hundred miles stretched before them as they planned to follow the western fork of the Lewes River heading southward to British Columbia and comparative safety.

The odds against them were tremendous. They had no provisions and game was scarce, but their real enemy was the mind-boggling cold, cold which made every step agony. Even the simple act of breathing was painful, for the superchilled air burned a man's lungs. A modern man, his brain filled with facts gathered from musty books, would have given up, turned back. He would know the human body couldn't travel so far at such extreme temperatures.

Neither Monty nor Ray possessed any such self-defeating knowledge of the impossible. They were born and raised in a rougher age, when men were not afraid to stand toe to toe with nature, trading blow for blow with it even in its most savage moods. They had their limits, and would reach them only when they lay face down in the snow. Death was the end of one last grand adventure. In the frozen forest ahead there was at least a chance. To turn back now meant certain death at the hands of a blood-mad mob eager to collect the mining company's bounty. They might be within a few hours of capture at their hands.

After three days on the trail, Ray's hands were nearly frozen clear through. The flesh was beginning to crack, peeling off in crimson clumps from bleeding palms. Monty's face was spotted with white blossoms, the calling card of frostbite.

That night was especially dark, darker than the far side of the moon, darker than death. The cold seemed bitter and ominous, possessing a malevolence beyond nature's own harsh realities.

"The breath of the Wendigo," Monty called it.

"What was that?" Bates' comment was out of character, and Ray half-believed the big man hadn't spoken at all, that it was just the wind.

"This cold. It has a way about it. Like the breath of the Wendigo."

"Ain't that the creature Old Jac was so crazy about?"

"Jac ain't as crazy as people think, Ray. It's easier to laugh at someone like that than admit he's right."

"Just what kind of varmint is this Wendigo?"

Monty's voice came harsh between his cracking lips, adding to the eerie mood of his tale. His eyes glazed as he spoke. Ray had never seen his friend in this state before.

"You're green in this country, Ray. There are things and powers haunting these silent black woods that were old before the white man, or even the red man, ever spoke of ghosts or monstrous things on your Texas plains. I ain't saying I believe every word Black Tree, the Injun witch man, once told me ... like that nonsense about the Wendigo granting some strange second life to a foe who stands and fights it bravely. But it is more than just the demon of the north and wind that most men suppose it to be. It's a thing from the early days of the earth, something that just hung on from age to

age, waiting for something: Some call it Wendigo, some the demon of the north. Black Tree called it one name by which witch men the world over knew it. Ithaqua, the wind walker!"

Ray was silent. Coming up through the woods of Oregon, the Texan had heard the legend of Ithaqua from a dying hermit. He'd dismissed it as fantasy but the memory had lodged in his brain. Monty may not have been overly bright, but he was firmly rooted in reality. If he was so sure of this creature's existence ....

"Ray," Monty continued, "when a man feels the breath of the Wendigo he knows he's going to die."

"Take it easy, Monty, the cold's getting to you. Get some sleep. We'll need it tomorrow."

"Remember that first night, Ray, when we swore in blood and steel to stick by each other, to always be there when needed?"

"How could I forget, Monty?"

"Don't, Ray. Monty Bates keeps his promises." With those words, the big man turned on his side to sleep. Ray followed his example, but his rest would not last long.

* * *

The Texan was awakened an hour later by a roaring of wind, thundering down from a wild sky. With it came great sheets of blinding snow. He turned to where Monty lay but the hail of snow and the demoniac howling of the wind blinded and deafened him. Ray screamed, more from a gripping, incomprehensible fear than the pain of the razor wind across his face. There was something odd in so sudden an outburst of nature, something beyond human ken. Something supernatural.

Then the fury cleared slightly and Ray saw something which sent burning talons of terror into his soul! Monty was battling a *thing*—that was the only word Ray knew to describe it. It stood twice as tall as the red-haired giant, and its flesh was such a blinding silver-white that it hurt Ray's eyes. Whiter even than the driving snow around them.

The thing struck downward at Monty as if the man were some oversized spike that it meant to hammer into the icy sod. Slow as Monty was, he moved a shade quicker than the thing. Again and again he dodged those sledgehammer blows, but even when he took one of them full on he did not fall!

Ray tried to stand, to reach his friend and aid in the fierce struggle, but the wind and snow conspired against him. The forces of nature held him down as securely as if he'd been tied with three-quarter-inch hemp. He could not even reach his Colt to fire a shot at the creature. But he had to

marvel at his pard. That overgrown mountain of muscle had taken punishment that would have made a gore-splattered carcass of a grizzly.

Monty did more than take punishment. He carried the fight to his opponent, though he could only guess at the nature of his albino foe.

The big man leaped at the titan, delivering several smashing, well timed blows. He might have pounded on a glacier for all the effect they had, but the thought of giving up would never enter Monty's head. At last the apparition of ice and snow grew weary of its sport. Bending down, it grasped Monty in its vast paws. Slowly it raised the man, still fighting in a desperate frenzy, until Monty hung several feet above its huge, misshapen head. Out of that terrible nightmare form came a roaring howl, a frightful bestial ululation that rose in pitch from a deep thunder to an unbearably piercing tone.

Ray slipped into a merciful oblivion.

* * *

The clear morning sky of the high country greeted Ray's wakening eyes. He rose in silent dread, praying that the black events of the previous night had been but a miasma of grotesque phantoms stalking through his nightmare-haunted slumber. In moments, he learned the horror-laden truth.

Monty lay stiff and silent, coated in a sheath of frozen, jewel-hard, ruby-hued gore. Ray had looked on death before. He'd seen what wolves and bears could do to a man, viewed the handiwork of the Apache as it hung from charred stakes in his own Texas badlands. This was different. It was more than the physical carnage wrought upon Monty, though that was terrible enough. It was the look in his glazed eyes, a look of stark terror. The look of one who had gazed into the depths of hell itself and paid the penalty, as all mortals must.

The same look had entered Old Jac's eyes, right before his fit, that night ... ages ago ... when Ray first had set foot in the Lucky Nugget.

Bending to grab a miner's pick from the sledge, Ray dug a shallow grave for his friend. He ignored the pain shooting through his frost-ravaged hands. With Monty he placed the contents of the strong box, which had been shattered in last night's storm, partially spilling out its gleaming hoard. He could carry it no further. The dogs had fled during the night's tempest. Fled ... or been carried off.

Before packing down the pit, Ray said a simple good-bye to his pard.

"This looks like the end of the drive for me and you, Monty. Ya took an awful beating before ya cashed in, an' I'm betting that whatever kind of queer varmint ya tangled with knows it was in the scrap of its life."

There was nothing more left to say, nor would Monty have wanted more. Ray was sure the gold would be safe with his pard until the coming of spring, when he could return to give Monty a more Christian burial.

For long hours the only sound to be heard in the tomb-like silence of the forest was the constant thud of Ray's driving feet, up and down like tireless pistons. Stopping to rest or tarry meant sleep, and a dreamless death.

As the red sun sank behind the mountains and the centuried pines stretched hoary shadows over glittering glades, there came to Ray the far-off sound of heavy footfalls from his rear. Coming fast. The posse they'd been fearing had finally caught up. Ray had expected them sooner. He gave silent thanks that the long chase was almost over. At least his death would be at the hands of human butchers, and not some horror of ice and snow as old as the Northland itself.

He pushed on with greater speed, though he had no hope of escape. What he wanted was a spot where he might hole up, where his attackers could come at him from only one direction. He had just one plan, the simplest one, to sell his life at the highest price possible.

The sounds grew louder, closer. Ray stopped at a huge natural outcropping of rock. Here he'd make his stand. The excitement of being hunted was undiluted by any hint of fear. He'd asked nothing of life but what he could do for himself. He lived by muscle and steel and all he'd ever wanted was to go down fighting. He made ready his Colt and looked to his knife, the knife that Jim Bowie himself had given to Ray's father.

With pantherish speed Ray whipped around to the source of a suddenly new and louder sound. The posse—lynch mob was a better label—suddenly came into view.

"There's one of those thievin' crooks now!"

"Killing's too good for him!"

Ray had not time to wonder how his ears had played such a strange trick on him. He was sure he'd been followed from directly behind, not off to the east where he now saw the howling, bloodthirsty mob.

The Texan's Colt leaped into his hand. He fired blindly into the crowd. Four shots rang out and four men fell, and then the gun jammed.

He lashed out with the butt of the weapon, and they were on him, over a dozen strong, a murderous wave of smashing fists and a hail of slashing knives. Only the large number of his attackers saved Ray for those first few moments. They kept pushing and falling, getting in each other's way. Bowie's handiwork was well tested that day as men died under its keen blade, gored and hacked. More than one hopeful bounty hunter stumbled off to spill his life on the snow.

But even a man from Texas could not last long against such odds, not after all those exhausting, rationless miles of traveling. It was not long before they bore Ray down to the ground.

Before a knife could be plunged into his throat, however, a howl went up from the outer edge of the mob. They were being attacked themselves, from behind! And it was more than a simple surprise attack causing the hardened fighting men to scream like sheep—it was the bizarre, unholy nature of their attacker. Whatever names the survivors of that bloody scene later called the thing that tore through their ranks, human was not among them.

It was almost human, but in shape only. It had two arms and two legs and stood over seven feet tall. Some said it was topped by a red mane, others by a writhing mass of copperhead snakes, but all agreed the thing had no face at all! Its head, like the rest of it, was an ugly cake of snow and ice. Sod clung in patches like so many obscene growths.

And all over, it fairly shone with a sprinkling of glowing powder that the experienced miners among them swore could only have been gold dust!

The mob, moments before intent on the killing of a single man, was now hard-pressed to defend itself from the nightmare thing of snow and ice. The spawn of the north fought in a maddened fury. Huge, misshapen hands rose and fell like mallets of blue ice, hard as granite. Each time they struck, another man crumpled in a pulped heap of crimson death.

One cool-headed Frenchman had the presence of mind to pull out his revolver. Six shots rang from the smoking .44, and every shot struck home.

"*C'est incroyable!*" the man shouted as he squeezed off his last shot. Blasts which should have at least slowed down the thing's whirlwind destruction had no effect. The heavy caliber shells simply disappeared into the thing's great bulk, leaving holes from which no blood flowed!

Every man of that posse was hard as only the desolate reaches of the Yukon have a way of making the men they don't destroy. Each of them was loath to admit, later, that they had run from a fight. But when it was seen neither knives nor hot lead could stop the monster decimating their number, fear entered their hearts—a fear that ate at their nerves like acid on a wire.

The wire snapped.

A dozen and a half men had closed in on Ray Spear on the cold, clear day. Between the Texan's fierce blade-work and the rampaging violence of the monster, only five remained in any condition to flee that frigid, corpse-littered glade. Of those five, two died within a year, victims of their own horrid memories of that day.

The frightened shouts faded into the pine forest. Two figures stood in the midst of that scene of carnage: a puzzled Ray Spear and a silent, emotionless, faceless creature of snow and ice.

Ray eyed the unmoving monster, and as he did so the expression of bafflement left his features. There was a mutual, unspoken understanding between the human and the preternatural hulk. Soundlessly, with a pathos in its dragging step, the creature turned northward to the land of cold and howling winds, a land to which it was now irrevocably tied.

This time they truly parted for the last time, and Ray bade the strange, sad thing a final farewell.

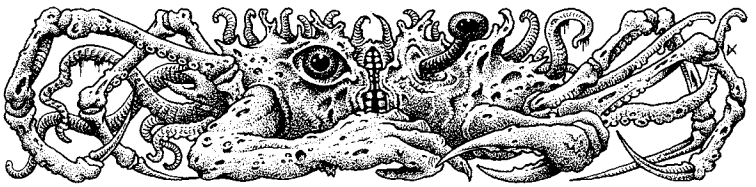
"So long, pard. And thanks. You kept your promise, all right."

About "They Only Come Out at Night"

It would seem natural, even inevitable, that Ithaqua should be connected to the legend of the Abominable Snowman, and Derleth came close to connecting them in "The Thing That Walked on the Wind." It is something of a surprise, then, that when he got around to assigning servitor races to the various Old Ones, he gave Lovecraft's mi-go, the fungoid crustaceans from Yuggoth, to the service of Hastur. One can only speculate that he did so on the basis of the mention in "The Whisperer in Darkness" of Hastur and the Yellow Sign. If anything, though, Akeley implies these vague items are associated with a cult inimical to the Yuggoth-spawn. On the other hand, the same story makes it quite clear that the mi-go are devout worshipers of Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, and Azathoth.

Of course Lovecraft in no way considered the Outer Ones mere henchmen for Nyarlathotep. But if one is committed to the servitor race idea so beloved of Derleth and Lin Carter, and one is determined to ignore the clear links to Nyarlathotep, Azathoth, and Shub-Niggurath in "The Whisperer in Darkness", wouldn't the best choice for the Outer Ones' master be Ithaqua? The reason for this is simple: Lovecraft pointedly identified the Yuggoth-crustaceans with the Himalayan Abominable Snowmen. Derleth's assignment of the Outer Ones to Hastur instead might make some sense if we recall that in "The Thing That Walked on the Wind", he made Ithaqua himself a mere lackey of Hastur. In that case, one might still expect Ithaqua to be the direct head over the mi-go, one of Carter's Lesser Old Ones.

In any case, the present tale, which first appeared in *Spawn* #2, Fall 1975, does make clear the connection between the Yeti and Ithaqua, filling an abhorrent gap. Of course, the Snowmen are not linked here with the crustacean denizens of Yuggoth, but you won't hear any complaint from me. I always thought that link was far-fetched anyway!



They Only Come Out at Night

by Randy Medoff

No doubt you have, at one time or another, heard tell of the fabled "Abominable Snowman" of the Himalayas, or the "Yeti", as the local sherpas call them. Perhaps it was only something casually hinted at during the countless ghost stories whispered 'round a campfire one chilly August eve, or a newspaper's passing mention of a mysterious set of footprints discovered amidst the snowy Himalayan wastelands.

I do not doubt that this sort of thing tends to stir one's curiosity; for who can help but wonder what strange creature (or clever hoax) lurks behind these mysterious suggestions of what has been termed by a few credulous scientists as the "missing link?" Of course, the average layman will not trouble himself to dwell on such matters for long, but always will it be among *my* foremost concerns: for how can I ever forget the strange and frightening events surrounding the death of my friend and colleague Lazarus Garvey; events which leave me in doubt of my own senses?

I.

Garvey and I were colleagues at Miskatonic University: I a professor of archaeology, Lazarus a linguist. The last job he'd held previous to his untimely death was translating some ancient and singularly rare tomes from the University Library's collection for anthropologists working under Miskatonic's auspices. In his spare time, Garvey's interests leaned toward inexplicable phenomena: UFO's, psychic occurrences, monsters and freaks of nature, and other such nonsense. Yet he was a very reserved fellow—perhaps even timid, and thus I was nothing less than astonished when, shortly after the University announced its plans to finance an expedition to Mt. Sarn'a in the Himalayas to attempt to shed light upon the "Abominable Snowman" controversy, he burst rudely into my office without warning.

"Paul," he exclaimed, "have you heard the announcement? The University is going to—"

"Sponsor an expedition to the Himalayas," I completed. "So I hear. Rather interesting project, don't you think?"

"To say the least!"

"But what are you so excited about?" I asked. "*Surely* you aren't thinking of going?"

"That's just it—I *am* going—"

"But why? What's in it for you?"

"There's more in this Abominable Snowman story than meets the eye, Paul. In those books I've been translating I've come across—more than once—mention of the Yeti—a race of half-man, half-beast creatures hidden in the high altitude wastelands of the Himalayas—and who, supposedly, are the degenerate remnants of a vastly ancient Asian civilization known to legend as Shamballah—"

"What's the gist of all this?" I interrupted.

"Well, you know that I've been interested in this Snowman legend for a while ... and for the first—and perhaps only—time I'm given the opportunity to investigate it first-hand." He paused, then added bluntly, "I want you to come along, Paul."

"You've got to be kidding."

"Not at all. You see, I know all too well that you are a skeptic's skeptic when it comes to the Yeti—or other such phenomena; indeed, the proverbial 'doubting Thomas.' Anyway, I spoke with Bainbridge—he's heading it up, you know—and he agreed that we need someone like yourself in case any evidence should be uncovered which would appear controversial to the public; you, the nonbeliever, would provide corroboration."

He certainly had a point there, and I was a bit curious about the whole affair. Nevertheless, I insisted, "Look, Lazarus, even if I *wanted* to join you, I certainly couldn't afford to miss several weeks of classes." But he was ready for me.

"We both know you've got a sabbatical coming up. And don't tell me the research doesn't interest you."

I was cornered. I bit my lip pensively, then nodded. I suppose the prospect of an adventure did hold a certain attraction.

II.

There's a strange thing about Mt. Sarn'a: It, like many of the Himalayan mountains, is decorated by countless snowfields. But Sarn'a is also the victim of an omnipresent wind, often quite strong, such that if a man were to see something in one of those fields, then turn his head for a moment, that something might well be buried beneath a foot of snow when he glanced back. Not unlike the ever-shifting sands of the Arabian deserts, I

pondered, as our party plodded across one of those fields at an altitude of close to 6,000 feet.

Our six-man crew was led by a seedy Bhutanese sherpa who had been hired with great difficulty and a large sum of money. Upon reaching the village of T'llya at the foot of Mt. Sarn'a we had spread the word that we were looking for a guide to climb Sarn'a, and were immediately shunned by the townsfolk, undoubtedly worried that we would expose their Abominable Snowman legend as nothing more than a farce. At last, however, we managed to hire a man from one of the outlying farms whose crops had recently suffered and who needed the money rather desperately.

By early the next evening, as we prepared to pitch tent in a snowfield at about 10,000 feet, it became obvious that the native's superstitions were starting to get the best of him: I watched as he approached Garvey and demanded the money he'd been promised upon completion of our expedition. My colleague looked surprised, and asked in his best Bhutanese (we'd acquired a smattering of the language during our brief stay in T'llya) why the sullen guide wanted the fee *now*, before our quest was over. The sherpa replied in muttering tones that he would go no further with the party without being paid up front. Garvey was plainly worried by this untimely and blunt request; he turned and called for both meand the other four members of our campaign. When we arrived, he hastily explained the predicament.

"Tell him he can't have his money until the expedition's finished, like we agreed," suggested Bainbridge.

"He's all we've got," I argued, "We don't want any trouble, Laz—give him the money."

To our disappointment (although to no one's surprise), it was discovered the following morn that the sherpa had vanished without a trace. But not by any means was that our only discovery of the new day: After scarcely ten minutes of hiking, we chanced upon a set of vaguely humanoid tracks in the snow. The prints were plainly those of a loping quadruped, removing from my mind any possibility of these being Yeti tracks, as all sightings of the Snowman in the past had indicated a bipedal gait, like a human. The credulous Garvey refused to accept my theory that these tracks had been made by a bear, arguing that the hot rays of the dawn sun had taken their toll on the prints, melting and altering their shape, until they *appeared* to be quadrupedal. So much for my wholesome skeptical influence.

As neither I nor Garvey would give in to each other's theory, we resolved simply to follow the tracks and see where they led, while one man photographed and measured them at regular intervals. Our path proved to be a difficult one, climbing over icy peaks and across rugged fields, trudging through knee-deep snow and crawling past harrowing crevasses, slith-

ering over precariously thin ice and creeping across outcropping ledges in pursuit of the omnipresent footprints.

At one point in the afternoon, Garvey, who had been using his binoculars almost constantly since the tracks were first sighted, suddenly craned his neck forward, mouth agape in astonishment, and gasped.

"A Yeti! Good Lord, Paul—a Yeti!"

I raced to his side, tore the binocs from his hands, and peered into them, following Garvey's pointing hand.

There certainly was *something* out there, I admitted, but at this distance it wasn't safe to judge what it was.

My colleague, though, had already made up his mind and was trembling in excitement.

"What are you so worked up about?" I cried, "You can see from here the thing's a quadruped!" The figure was, however, fast disappearing from sight.

"True ... but it's not nearly as large as a *bear*," he sneered, "The respective proportions are not comparable."

There he was correct, and I was silent for a moment as he grabbed the binoculars from me for one final glance. Then I suggested, "It must be a langur," referring to the Tibetan snow-monkey, which, scientists agree, may have been mistaken for a Yeti at long distance more than once in the past.

"I would agree with you but for one thing," my colleague confessed, "—that 'langur' had no tail."

III.

We trekked on through the late afternoon without further incident, and when the bleak Himalayan sun took its leave, we pitched our three two-man tents and ate an unappetizing supper.

Afterward, as Garvey and I lay huddled in our respective sleeping bags inside the tent we shared, my colleague reached into his backpack and removed a carefully wrapped package. He began to unwrap it, remarking, "I brought along a photostat copy of my incomplete translation of Comte d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules*."

"For what purpose?" I queried.

"I seem to recall something about—ah, here it is." He flipped to a certain page and read it quickly to himself.

"D'Erlette hints that the Yeti are prone to roaming about at night, more so than during the day. Doesn't explain why, though."

"Look, Lazarus, I know what you're thinking, but it's much too dangerous for you to go out there tonight—hell, you saw those clouds gathering. We're in for a storm, maybe a blizzard."

He smirked and said nothing more.

I am not by any means a sound sleeper; hence, I was awakened near midnight to see Garvey fully dressed and donning his snow gear. I could see through a small opening in the tent that it had already begun snowing, and from somewhere in the distance came a curious howling or moaning which I heedlessly dismissed as that of a wolf.

For a long moment I lay silent, adjusting my vision to the dim moonlight which barely penetrated the tent's canvas door. Then, realizing that Garvey was about to depart, I sat upright and called out, "Wait just a second, Laz, d'Erlette must have been Bavarian or Alsatian, right? How the hell would he know the alleged habits of Himalayan ape-men?"

Garvey grew defensive. "He had his sources. Marco Polo wasn't the first to penetrate the vastness of Asia, you know."

"Lazarus, are you mad? The storm's beginning—you can't—"

His ears deaf to my warning, Garvey stepped out into the frigid Himalayan night. Leaping to my feet, I hastily pulled my protective garb directly over my nightclothes and raced after my companion. At first I couldn't see anything, as the icy wind whipped snow painfully against my face, stinging flesh already chapped raw by several days of climbing. Each gust hurt like salt rubbed in an open wound. In those first moments I was nearly overcome with pain and despair; I thought of returning to the safety and warmth of the tent ... but I could hardly turn back and desert my friend. I caught a glimpse of him in the moonlight and found myself careening blindly onward, calling his name in vain—for even my harshest cry was drowned out by that mysterious wailing, growing ever louder and sharper as I stumblingly followed Garvey's tracks.

After several punishing minutes I caught up to my colleague and, grabbing him by the shoulders, spun him around.

"Laz," I gasped through the heavy snowfall which all but masked him from my sight, "Come on, you fool! We've—"

"Let go of me, Paul," he protested. "They only come out at night. This is our chance—listen!" He suddenly cocked his ear. "That howling, chanting—the Yeti!"

He tore free of my hold and marched stolidly onward.

"Garvey—if we don't turn back we'll be buried alive in this storm—"

My plea fell on deaf ears; he was nearly out of sight again, and I had no choice but to plod on after him.

With each faltering step the eerie howling intensified, now alternating with periodic bursts of inhuman guttural chants—words that no human throat could issue:

> *Iä! Iä! Ithaqua! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm! Iä! Uhg! Ithaqua nafl fhtagn!*

The rhythm of the wailing was interrupted by a bloodcurdling scream—Garvey's.

I surged forward with renewed vigor, then suddenly halted—for not far ahead, I could just make out through the inhibiting snowfall, as they crossed a moonlit stretch, several hulking, monstrous figures carrying the struggling form of Lazarus Garvey. Instinctively I cried out to my colleague, and as I did so one of the lumbering shapes turned toward me. In that brief moment, sheer terror swept over me as I saw that hellish mutation of man and beast—the ultimate, most gruesome jest of nature. Had I been able to release my fright with a scream I no doubt would have, but something struck me a blow on the head, mercifully sending me into unconsciousness.

I awoke to find myself being carried by four of the same creatures who had hold of Garvey, in front of us. The eight lumbered along in a man-like gait, but occasionally one would release its hold and knuckle-walk in ape fashion (thus the curious footprints, I thought grimly). At long last they halted, still firmly grasping Garvey and me, but standing still and looking somewhat confused. A moment later, however, an unusually strong gust of icy wind blew aside a high snowdrift to reveal a mammoth, curiously lit cave, whence came that horrid chanting. Several of the beasts released their holds and excitedly loped ahead into the cavern, leaving my colleague and me to be rudely dragged by our arms. Twisting my head around, I could see dozens of the loathsome creatures in a mad and repulsive dance, chanting, crying,

Ithaqua nafl fhtagn! Nafl fhtagn! Iä! Iä! Ithaqua e'y'aa-e'ee!

I turned back and looked at Garvey, who, in a semiconscious state, was mumbling almost incoherently. I strained to understand his words.

"They—they call for the Wind-Walker," he muttered, "the Wind-Walker—"

His words were interrupted as a multitude of leathery hands grabbed my colleague and hurled him upon a crude stone altar where others held him fast. Then came the sound of pipes—Pan-pipes—horrible—beautiful—the kind of music only the insane should hear.

The chanting grew louder in my ears—louder—the music—then—Something was coming. Something—

By then I was no longer inclined to trust my own senses, but I could have sworn that in the spaces between the peaks a great shape was outlined in the swirling snow against the stormy sky. That shape was not unlike that of the Yeti who held us captive, only much, much huger: vast, filling the horizon—

In a mad frenzy, I scrambled to my feet, rushing past several surprised Snowmen and toward the cave entrance—toward freedom. I plunged wildly into the nearly waist-deep snow, heedless of the biting, all-encompassing

cold, racing deliriously onward as Garvey's final, most terror-fraught scream froze my blood.

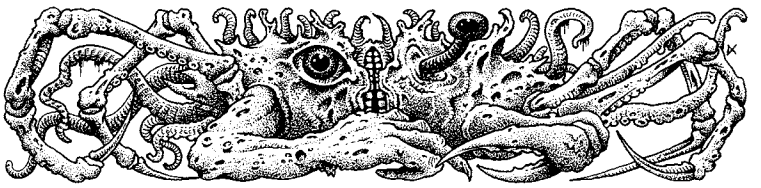
I came out of what the doctors termed a "raving mania" many days later in a New Delhi hospital; from what I have been told, the other four members of our party, upon discovering the disappearances of Garvey and myself next morning, resolved to cut short the expedition and headed back down Mt. Sarn'a. They found me near the foot, nearly frozen to death. Reasonably, Bainbridge and the others had written us both off as goners and were almost as surprised as I was that I had survived. Frostbite was not kind to me, but I suppose I ought to be grateful I survived at all. I let them think poor Garvey had frozen to death after we lost each other. No one was much inclined to search for the body since the storm only got worse. God knows I didn't encourage them. Who knows what they might have found—or, I guess, what might have found them.

About "Footsteps in the Sky"

This well wrought tale of events claustrophobically crammed into the wintry forests of the Russian Counter-Revolution makes canny use of an outsider, an American reporter, as the liaison for American readers. Comtois provides, in the most unobtrusive way, a bit of Mythos mythographical speculation, connecting Ithaqua's Asian origins, as per Derleth, with his American Indian manifestations by postulating that the Wendigo myth (?) crossed the Bering Strait with the ancient Asiatics who became know as American Indians (and who are thus, politically correct shibboleth aside, not quite "native" Americans).

Brief allusions to the arcane subworld of Russian heterodox religion (whole villages of Old Believers) provide a glimpse of a fertile field in which future Mythos authors might well labor. Russian and Eastern European Christianity has preserved a rich medieval mulch of superstition and sectarianism which easily lends itself to development for horror fiction. From this blood-drenched soil, seasoned with incense, have grown sects like the self-castrating Skoptsy and popular neo-Manichaean legends where Satan created the world or the Devil is the brother of Christ. For more information on this intriguing narrative universe, see Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* (the sections "Prehistory of the *coincidentia oppositorum*" and "The associations of God and the Devil and the Cosmogonic Drive", pp. 82-88); J. G. Bennet's introduction to P. D. Ouspensky, *Talks with a Devil*; Leszek Kolakowski's *Conversations with the Devil*; Serge A. Zenikovsky (ed.), *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales* (see "Apocrypha" section, pp. 122-136); Egon Larsen, *Strange Sects and Cults* (Chapter 8, "Twisted Russian Souls", pp. 137-166). Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Noncomformity: The Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia*; Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism,* vol. 1 (Chapter XXVII, "The Minor Church: The Struggle with Radicalism, Doctrinal and Social", pp. 367-374).

"Footsteps in the Sky" first appeared, as by P. D. McBride, in *Chronicles of the Cthulhu Codex* #2, Spring 1985.



Footsteps in the Sky

by Pierre Comtois

The snow started to fall again, tracing intricate patterns in the still night air. Mathias Cordell marveled at the total absence of sound in the presence of so much motion. The temperature had risen a few degrees above zero during the short hours of daylight. The gray skies were a single sheet of unbroken clouds that stretched forever in all directions. Now, however, those same clouds were invisible in the night, with only the large, white flakes that suddenly appeared from nothingness to show that they were still there.

One snowflake found its awkward way to Cordell's eye, forcing him to lower his head. "Damn!" He had to remove his sealskin glove to rub his eye—always an intricate process. Rubbing quickly and replacing the glove fast so as not to leave his bare hand exposed to the chill air longer than necessary, he leaned back against the stone wall and looked to his right.

A line of men huddled with their old Russian rifles against the crumbling boundary until it was lost in distance and snow. The men wore old Russian uniforms and greatcoats, fur caps firmly jammed down over their ears. Most were drawn up in sleep, but a few remained awake, working their frozen rifles. When they spoke, it was in a strange tongue that died in the silence of the storm.

Cordell blew droplets that hung, not yet frozen, from his upper lip and retreated farther down into the recesses of his parka.

The man next to him stirred and turned his head, revealing a dull flap of gold on his collar. "You have never been a soldier."

A cloud of mist rolled across Cordell's eyes as the thick accent indicated a statement, not a question. He shifted his position to face the man, forcing his holster into his side, and said, "So what else is new?" The man looked at him strangely, with a slight cock of the head. A smile came to Cordell's face. "Forget it." Then: "How long have we got till dawn?" He managed to shift his weight and ease the pressure in his side.

The man looked up at the vanished sky. Cordell watched him as flakes of snow came to momentary rest on his face and disappeared.

"A few more hours. I will waken the men soon," the man said, looking back to Cordell. "How will you take notes in this storm? Surely you Americans have not invented waterproof paper?"

Cordell allowed himself a chuckle and said, "Not yet, Colonel. I'll watch the goings-on and get it all down later."

"There will be much to see when the fighting begins, my friend, and you will be down more often than you are up."

"You ought to know."

"By God, you are right, I ought to know. My men and I have been fighting here for several months. If it was not for us, Admiral Kolchak and his Whites would never have had a chance." The Colonel was standing now, warming to his subject. Cordell followed his gloved hand as it pointed to imaginary targets. "It was we," he pounded his big chest "the Czechoslovak Legion, that seized the railroad and gave the Whites a chance to organize. We were the first to fight the damn Bolsheviks and drive them beyond the Ural Mountains."

Cordell took advantage of the pause to say, "But you were originally deserters of the Austro-Hungarian Army"—for a moment it seemed to Cordell that the Colonel stiffened and would have swung at him but then managed to control himself—"and were on your way to the coast to leave Russia by way of the Pacific."

The colonel drew in a chestful of frigid air and said, "Yes, we were taken prisoners of war at first, but later the Czar allowed us to form our own units. Before we reached the coast, however, the Bolsheviks struck and ... complications arose involving our departure."

"So you stayed and allied yourself with the Whites and the Interventionist forces," Cordell concluded.

"Ha!" the colonel bellowed, stooped and clapped him on the back, knocking Cordell off balance. "You Americans can drag information from one like milk from a cow!" With that, he stormed off into the gray, swirling whiteness kicking his sleeping men as he went.

Cordell leaned back against the wall, breathing shallowly, relishing the calm before the intruding sounds of men girding themselves for combat. In another moment he heard the dull shifting of bodies and the clank and creak of metal and leather. A soldier walked by, looking intently down at his rifle as he tried to worry the bolt loose from the frozen shaft. Farther off, he saw another man urinate over his weapon, a thin mist rising from his feet. Cordell stood at last, accompanied by the crack of his joints. He felt for his pistol at his hip and stared into the eddying whiteness beyond the wall, where soon thousands of men would walk warily to the black *taiga* up the river.

* * *

As he stared into the white and gray of the Siberian plain, Cordell remembered the day he was called into the editor's office on the fifth floor of the Maher Building in uptown Manhattan. He had been still riding on the success of his Rupert murder story when Kenneth Streeter at the International Desk called him over. "Cordell," he had said without bothering to remove the cigarette from his mouth, "how would you like to take a little trip?" It was that easy. Three days later, he found himself on a ship bound for Vladivostok, Russia's port on the Pacific. Before he had left, he managed to get hold of every paper he could find that carried stories on the Bolshevik Revolution and the war in Siberia and the Ukraine. By the time he arrived in the port of Vladivostok weeks later, he knew as much about the war as anyone back in the States, except maybe for the War Department.

In Vladivostok, he acquired his first taste of Russian winter with the cold wind and thin covering of snow. Before leaving port, he watched American soldiers debark from his ship, and march in perfect cadence to barracks somewhere nearby. His papers told him to wait, as a courier would be sent to take him to the local White Russian commanding officer. It was not long in coming. A young orderly who could not speak English met him and showed him some orders typed up in English, then led him through the frozen town to the commander's headquarters.

The commander was civil enough, and even shared a glass of cognac with him. Finally, he gave Cordell a railroad pass to Omsk, one of the largest Central Russian cities and headquarters in turn of the counter-revolutionary government.

The Trans-Siberian Railroad was the first thing seized by the renegade Czechoslovak units, and it was along it that the Czechs began the anti-Bolshevik crusade. For three days the monotonous Siberian plains rolled by his window, occasionally broken by patches of thick coniferous forests called *taiga* by the natives. As the miles rolled on, the snow that covered the land grew deeper and deeper and fell longer and longer until he reached Omsk.

He never did get to see Admiral Kolchak, but he did reach as far as the office of General Dovska, the regional commander. The general was very polite, as befitted Czarist nobility, and granted Cordell's request for a position with the front-line troops. Cordell was surprised to learn, after a long four-day march with reinforcements through freezing weather, mountainous drifts and the frozen river Tavda, that the unit he was assigned to was not Russian after all, but Czech. At least the colonel in charge spoke English, which was more than he was beginning to expect.

Upon meeting the mountainous colonel, Cordell learned that the reinforcements he had marched up with would be used for a major offensive

operation to take place in a few days. Not expecting action so soon upon his arrival, Cordell immediately began to question the men with the help of the colonel, jotting down quick notes.

* * *

The snow was falling harder now, creating a gray haze with distance beyond the wall. Cordell passed his hand over the top stones and watched the displaced snow fall on the far side, the small heaps almost invisible on the white on white of the ground.

There was motion to his sides and he saw the Czech soldiers, so far from home, shake the snow from their shoulders and begin to negotiate the wall. Scores of other soldiers were swarming up from the rear, black against the white of the land, and followed their comrades to the distant *taiga*. The thick blanket of snow muffled their movements, and the storm, Cordell hoped, covered their advance. As more and more of the grim men passed him into the grayness, he began to wonder if he had misunderstood the colonel's earlier directions to wait for his return before starting out.

Then, from among the advancing troops, the colonel trudged to Cordell's side, snow whirling and eddying between the two men. The colonel squinted in the breeze, lines forming around his eyes like ice cracking, and said through bearded lips, "I am glad you held up. I was forced to stay longer with one of my units because of a disciplinary problem."

Cordell lowered his muffler and said, "Don't worry about it, Colonel," then, "Which way do we go?"

"We follow the river north, keeping west of Gorodov until we reach the *taiga*—" he paused a moment, rubbing his chin, "about three miles north of the town. Then we 'dig in', as you say, in the forest."

"So we're not going through the town of Gorodov after all?"

"No, the Russian units to our right moving up the Itirsh will capture it. There will be less confusion since my men do not speak the language."

Cordell was disappointed. He had hoped to move through the town and talk to some of the local people. Especially with scare stories of a Cheka "red terror" campaign in the Bolshevik-held areas.

"Come, we must hurry to reach the head of my column. It will not do to have my men leaderless in an encounter with the damn Bolsheviks." With that, the colonel dragged his bulk over the wall, taking a shower of snow and rocks with him. On the other side, he took his rifle from his shoulder and held it in front of him as if it were a pike. A glance behind him sent Cordell over the wall in a bound. The snow immediately in front of the wall and quite a ways before him was hard-packed with the passage of countless

men, men who were still streaming over the wall. "Follow as best you can, my friend, for the damn Bolsheviks will not wait for us to begin the battle."

He said it with such joviality that Cordell wondered whether he wanted to go back to his homeland at all. And the way he kept using the word "damn", as if he thought it an ordinary American word, a common adjective like "dirty" or "sneaky"; well, it was, sort of. Cordell smiled. Should he tell the colonel of his error, or let him revel in his belief in his knowledge of American slang? What difference did it make? A man had few enough delusions out here anyway—why spoil it for him?

Men were all around him now, walking forward instinctively crouched, guns at the ready, bayonets tilted down a bit. The tracks he had been following for the past few hours were now knee deep, and the cracks forming in the settling ice of the Tavda River sounded like gunshots in the silence. More than once, Cordell had thrown himself into the driving snow at the sound, only to have the Colonel pick him up by the collar of his parka. He was saved from humiliation by the sight of dozens of other men lifting themselves from various drifts. Everyone was on edge now. According to the colonel, they had passed the town and were approaching the brooding wood of the *taiga*.

Then the colonel signaled him to his side, and in a cloud of breath pointed to the horizon. "I don't see a thing," said Cordell, lowering his muffler.

"Keep looking; there," insisted the colonel, pointing.

Cordell began to speak again, then stopped. There was something there. But in the thickly driving snow all was gray; then he seemed to see a dim outline, a shade darker than the surrounding gray, dim forms that towered over his head.

"Come," said the colonel, a friendly hand on his back.

In a few steps, Cordell could make out what the shapes were. Monstrous pines stood huge across the land, stretching into the distance on either hand; not too far in this storm. Cordell could not believe he had not seen them earlier, since the boughs were already over his head when the colonel first called him.

Soon the massive boles were all around, great sweeping branches weighted with snow, dipped to the ground. The slight breeze was enough to clear the snow away from the base of the trunks, creating bowls that quickly filled with tired men. It was a fairy tale land that made the war seem remote and unimportant.

The sounds of the men were more audible now in the closeness of the forest; soldiers lay here and there throughout the wood, it seemed, their weapons trained before them, eyes straining to see deeper into the *taiga*. Now and then a rifle shot reverberated among the boles, disturbing the snow higher up in the trees. The men were nervous and Cordell understood

why: The forest had a life of its own. Not a sentient sort of life, but a feeling, a mood. A will of its own. Cordell shook the feeling physically and heard the colonel's voice bellow hollowly, giving orders to his men. Then he approached Cordell and said, "This is as far as we go. Come, we will sit beneath this pine." It was the largest tree in sight; somehow it seemed fitting for the colonel.

"Is this as far as we go?" reiterated Cordell as he followed the colonel.

"For now, my friend; break off some of these rotten branches." He gave one a yank and, though it snapped with little resistance, it proved not to be rotted.

"I thought we were supposed to see some action during this advance." Cordell emptied his arms near the base of the tree.

"We were, but the Bolsheviks must have discovered our plans and pulled back. It has happened before. Maybe the Russian unit on our flank ran into something in the town." The colonel kneeled to arrange the branches. Cordell sat against the curve of the trunk and pulled his blanket from his roll. The colonel hunched closer to the faggots as they blazed to life and turned. "Let us find out about the town, eh?"

With that he lurched to his feet, cupped his hands to his mouth and called off to the right. Cordell recognized the guttural sounds of Russian as they poured from the colonel's throat, then a flurry of answering calls from deep in the forest to his right, behind the tree. At first a few voices answered in chaotic unity, but then only a single one remained. Cordell knew it to be Russian and, with the comparison, was able to pick up the colonel's Czech accent. Then he realized that the disembodied voice was quite animated and repeated often a certain word. Cordell fumbled in his inner pocket for his pencil and pad and listened for the word again. There it was—Ithaqua. The word seemed to be picked up farther back by the other Russians. The colonel stopped abruptly and lowered his hands. He settled around the fire and said, "That unit passed through the town; they said there was no resistance. But there were some strange findings."

"Like what?" Cordell leaned forward eagerly.

"Footprints all over the place and no bodies," said the colonel almost matter-of-factly. "It looks like Cheka doings to me."

"What was that word they kept repeating?"

The colonel turned away his face. "Nothing."

"Nothing? Not the way they were saying it. What word was it?" The colonel's eyes blazed under his massive eyebrows, his mouth a thin line in his beard, but Cordell was not noticing.

"Ithaqua."

The two men's eyes met. For a moment, Cordell thought he saw something there. "Just a Cheka unit, but that is enough."

"I'd like to see the town. Will you take me?"

"I must remain here; an attack may come any time."

"Then I'll go alone. Where is it?"

"Are you Americans all so stupid? You would never find it alone in this country."

"I'll ask directions along the way."

The colonel laughed then. "Ha! You are a stubborn one, my friend. Almost as stubborn as a wife I once ... well, never mind, we will leave in the morning."

The fire crackled.

* * *

The snow had gone with the clouds during the night, leaving the sky for the sun as it traced its short arc across the heavens. Cordell squinted in the light and raised his hand to shade his eyes. He could see the low buildings of the little town of Gorodov just ahead of them. It had taken a bit longer to cover the three miles from the forest to the town than the Colonel had thought. Cordell looked at the colonel's bearded profile as they high-stepped in the knee-deep snow. His face seemed like a thing of stone chiseled in eternal grimness. Was there something in the town the colonel would rather not face? Had he seen once too often the handiwork of the Cheka? Cordell thought it a likely possibility and said, "You didn't have to come to the town with me, you know."

"I know," said the Colonel without turning.

Cordell shrugged and stepped onto the snow-covered road, followed by the colonel. The road was nothing more than a hard-packed path into the town punctuated by an occasional glimpse of wagon wheel tracks. There would be not incriminating footprints here. Hundreds of advancing troops had long since effaced every vestige of them. As the two approached the town, soldiers could be seen walking about or gathered before numerous campfires. The town itself was nothing more than a collection of a score or more of run-down, two-story buildings. Most of the community lived in tiny ramshackle huts outside in the countryside, tending their sparse herds of goats or sheep. Deep drifts of snow were everywhere, with impossible amounts of it heaped high on the rooftops. Cordell marveled that the old buildings had not yet collapsed under the weight.

He could see no sign of the townspeople either in the road or peeking through frosted windows. Surely not everyone could be gone.

Cordell saw that the colonel had one foot on the cracked step of what looked like an old sheriff's office. He hurried over to the colonel as he stepped into the dark of the building. Entering the room, Cordell was blind-

ed for a few minutes by the contrast in the intensity of light from the outside snow and the dim firelight in the room. He closed the rickety door behind him, feeling waves of warmth wash over him as he did so. He heard the crackling of the fire from somewhere in front of him, matched by the creaking of the sagging floor beneath. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he heard a strange voice say something in Russian accompanied by the colonel's name; then the colonel's reply. His eyes had fully recovered by the time the two men faced him and the colonel said, "Mr. Cordell, this is Major Doskolva, commander of this unit; Major, this is Mr. Cordell, an American reporter," he finished in Russian. The major extended his hand and Cordell shook it firmly.

"How do you do, Major," said Cordell, forgetting that the major did not speak English.

The major motioned to an old table as he released Cordell's hand and walked over to a shoulder bag that rested on its surface. In another moment, he had produced an unlabeled bottle of clear liquid.

"Vodka!" exclaimed the colonel, as he dragged a chair to the table.

What followed was an animated two-way conversation in Russian by two men as the vodka was shared liberally between all three.

Cordell tried in vain to catch a familiar word or two during the conversation, but failed and resigned himself to the bliss in the bottle. Then, as the fire in the chimney died down, the major rose and took his coat from a peg behind the door. The colonel had risen also, and said "Come, my friend, Major Doskolva will show us some interesting things about the town."

As Cordell shrugged into his parka and jammed his hands into his gloves, the colonel had stepped through the door where, outside, the wind had picked up once more.

Cordell closed the door shut behind him and waded through the deep snow that had moved with the wind from across the street. A fluctuating whistle filled his hood, with the wind raising stinging clouds of dusty snow from the streets and roofs into their faces as the sun looked impassively on.

The colonel allowed Cordell to reach his side before he said, "Major Doskolva had some interesting things to say," nodding ahead to the major's back.

"I figured that out by myself. What exactly did he say?"

"Well, his unit was to capture the town and sweep northward on our right flank. But upon reaching it, his men found no resistance and, after carefully searching the village, they moved on." Cordell sensed an almost imperceptible pause in the colonel's story, who then continued. "Major Doskolva found that everyone in the town had disappeared, perhaps fearing reprisals on our part, leaving even their newly cooked meals on the tables and fires still burning in their grates. But, strangest of all, everywhere about

the town his men discovered scattered footprints; not the disordered variety left by fleeing or herded people, but well spaced and well formed ones of calm and deliberate leave-taking." The colonel looked sidelong at Cordell for a few seconds then turned away.

"Anything else?"

"Later, upon questioning his men, Major Doskolva heard stories that upon entering the town, the men swore that each footprint seemed tinged with a light, red color, almost like blood, and that the farther they got from the village, the farther apart each person's prints became."

"Farther apart?" Visions of the success of the Rupert murder story danced in Cordell's mind.

"Yes, as the prints of a bounding deer increase in length." The colonel did not turn his head at all this time.

"But with this snowfall only hours old, the villagers couldn't have had more than minutes or even seconds to leave the town before advance elements of the major's units entered the village."

The colonel offered no explanation.

Then a wave of triumph washed over Cordell as he said, "No problem. I see it now. The townspeople themselves, in order to discourage a search, left everything as if they intended to return. Of course, that doesn't explain the strange tinges on the prints, but the people around these parts still harbor strange beliefs, so who knows?"

Then the colonel said almost under his breath, "Yes, strange beliefs." A moment of silence ensued as they still followed Major Doskolva. "What about the distances between the footprints?"

Cordell stopped short, his theory shattered. "That's right. Those spacings. But can we accept the hearsay evidence of some half-educated soldiers?"

"You are taking the word of one in Major Doskolva."

"Oh. I'm sorry, Colonel, I didn't mean ...." He let the sentence fade and the colonel nodded, understanding.

"Then if we didn't do it and the Cheka didn't do it, and the villagers themselves couldn't have done it, then who did? And why?" It was a rhetorical question.

The colonel looked at Cordell and murmured, "Perhaps you have already answered your question earlier." With that, he passed into a narrow alley between two buildings where the major had gone seconds before.

Cordell wondered at the colonel's last remarks. What did he mean, he had already answered his question? Cordell resolved to review in his mind their conversation as he too entered the alley.

Beyond the buildings and the village proper, Cordell saw the two soldiers bending low over something in the deeply driven snow. As he came closer, he noticed that the clear field was dotted by hundreds of footprints

radiating in every direction. Coming abreast of the men he squatted beside the colonel as he indicated the print before them. It was roundish, more like a hoof than a human print. Cordell saw that even a quickly running man could not have left such an oddly deformed impression. Beyond that peculiarity, at the colonel's pointing finger, he saw the faint, almost undetectable reddish halo surrounding the print. For minutes, Cordell did not know what to think, but slowly, unbidden, a chill born of something other than the icy wind crept along his spine. He rose abruptly as much to dispel the odd uneasiness he felt as to stretch his tired legs.

The colonel rose more deliberately to face him a moment, before pointing down-wind, away from the village. "The next print is ... there. A full ten yards from this one, and the next doubtless in the forest another fifteen yards farther on."

Before Cordell could reply, a young officer ran up to them, black against the moving snow behind him. The major stood and relieved the officer of the note he had been carrying.

Cordell and the colonel waited as Major Doskolva read the paper in his hands. In another moment he said something to the colonel. When he had finished, the colonel looked at his feet.

"Well?" asked Cordell, wondering at the colonel's hesitation.

The colonel looked up slowly and said, "Major Doskolva has just received a report that scores of his Russian regulars have disappeared since last night without a trace. Especially in the unit that passed through Gorodov."

"Desertions? The pressure lately hasn't been that great," mused Cordell.

"Perhaps, but after searching their positions, commanders report finding strangely shaped footprints leading from the trenches off into the forest." The colonel looked down again, then threw back his shoulders and stepped off into the direction of the town.

Cordell ran after the colonel, the cold like a solid thing. "Colonel, wait, what's wrong?"

The colonel continued on his way, the major now forgotten in the field. "Nothing, my friend; it is time to return to my units."

"Listen, Colonel," pleaded Cordell, "I know how you must feel about all this. But the Cheka doesn't discriminate between ordinary people, soldiers, or even nobility. Look at what they did to the Czar and his family up at Ekaterineberg."

Cordell was not prepared for the sudden halt of the colonel and even less for his next comment. "You do not see at all, do you?"

Cordell was puzzled. "See what?"

"You think all this is merely another murder for you to write about. You are not in America any longer. You are in the Old Country; and here the old ways still cling. Yes, the old beliefs, too, live in the forest, the moun-

tains, or the steppes." He stopped there, his body visibly relaxing. "Come, let us go back."

Cordell was not sure what the colonel had spoken of in those last few minutes, but he was sure that it had something to do with his sullen behavior in the last few hours. All the way back to the Czech lines, Cordell reviewed their conversation, seeking a clue to the colonel's new disposition. Earlier he had said that Cordell had already answered his question regarding the perpetration of the disappearances. What had he said? Something about strange beliefs. Yes, that went well with the colonel's final comments about the Old Country and old beliefs. Certainly he was not trying to foist superstition on him? Yet the strange circumstances surrounding the whole episode lent themselves to it. Then it hit him: Did it all have something to do with Ithaqua? Yes, that was when the colonel had first begun to behave strangely. Cordell decided to keep his conclusions to himself, though. After all, he could be wrong and he did not want to be made into a laughingstock with these crazy ideas.

* * *

When the two men at last returned to the Czech position, the wind had almost abated and the soldiers actually began to look comfortable. Countless fires burned warmly in the many bowls of drifted snow and trenches had been dug from the frozen ground. Cordell and the colonel settled down near their large tree after the colonel had deftly relit the fire. Cordell reached in his coat for his pad and pencil and began catching up on his journal as the colonel received a few reports from his officers.

Suddenly, the colonel shot upright and asked an officer a series of sharp questions. Cordell had torn himself away from his entry as the colonel finished his questioning.

"What's the matter?" asked Cordell.

"This officer reports the discovery of many bodies heaped deeper in the forest." He looked off beyond the line of men in the trenches, as if trying to pierce the thick woods and see the bodies from where he sat.

"They might be the bodies of the townspeople!" exclaimed Cordell jumping to his feet.

"Yes, perhaps." A hint of animation came to the colonel's lips as if, Cordell thought, he anticipated the fulfillment of some hope.

"Come, we will see this atrocity."

Cordell kept himself from jumping for joy at the prospect of coming to the conclusion of the mystery, as he gathered himself together and followed the colonel, the officer, and a small detachment of men as they all marched into the dim forest made dimmer now by the setting sun.

"Say, Colonel," said Cordell, "maybe we ought to wait till morning." The lengthening shadows had suddenly dampened his adventure-seeking ardor.

"It will only take a few minutes. My officer says it is just beyond this stand of trees." Once again Cordell thought he sensed anticipation in the colonel's response. As if it was something he had to do, one way or the other. Cordell thought back to his earlier cryptic remarks and, suddenly, he felt himself weighed down by some gigantic force. A giant hand seemed to impede his forward motion, as if trying to keep him back. Separating him from the others, he thought abruptly. Then he ran to catch up. Had the others felt it also? If they did, their faces refused to register it.

The forest grew darker toward dusk as the small procession waded its way through the needle-strewn snow; the trunks marching slowly by in nightmare procession. The Czech soldiers moved their heads nervously from side to side, fingering their cold rifles. Finally the officer halted and pointed to a black and white heap in the center of a small clearing; bunches of dried grasses ringed the mound, poking through the snow that had not been blown away in the earlier wind. It seemed to Cordell that even the elements shunned the forest.

The party had stopped at the sound of the officer's voice and the motion of his arm as he pointed, and now the colonel advanced slowly on the strangely flat pile. At first, he had approached slowly, almost reverently, in a sort of crouch, his head leaning far forward of his body. His rifle dipped low to the ground. He reached the pile and looked closely, more closely than he needed to, thought Cordell. After a few minutes the colonel straightened and Cordell moved into the clearing. He had awaited only the unspoken desire of the commanding officer to inspect the site first.

The soldiers had spread to different points around the clearing, eyes keenly peering in the darkening wood for sign of the enemy, the hems of their greatcoats dusty with snow. A soft sigh of wind moved the trees to song, the opening in the roof of the forest showing brightening stars. The sky and the trees, blue on black. Cordell thought he had better take a quick look so they could leave fast.

For some time, he had realized that the black in the white was that of bodies heaped together and covered by a thick veil of snow. He stopped at the rim and saw the shoddy clothes of the villagers lying in grotesque mounds. He tried to observe the faces of the people to cement their reality in his mind, if only to certify their existence. It was then he noted something strange. The clothes were lying in heaps placed together, trousers to shirts, shirts inside of coats, stockings in their boots, all lying about like carelessly thrown bodies, except that the clothes were empty. Cordell looked up as the queerness of it struck him. Even the Cheka would not have bothered to be so meticulous, even if they had had the time, which they had not.

"No footprints," said the colonel.

Cordell's head snapped to the side, and he realized that the colonel had been looking at him all the time. Quickly Cordell looked around the clearing and saw no footprints except those leading back to their position ... those they had formed.

The colonel stepped forward, just inside the repelling heap. Cordell watched him with morbid curiosity. The colonel was poking at the upper sets of clothes with the toes of his boot, shaking loose the snow that had lodged in the crevasses of the folds. With a high swing of his leg, the colonel threw over, almost to Cordell's feet, a shower of those topmost clothes. Cordell jumped back instinctively, still watching the colonel. The big Czech stood amid the riot of dark raiment, silhouetted against the snow at his back like some guardian spirit pointing at Cordell's feet. Cordell at last looked down at the scattered pieces of clothing and saw brass buttons peek around folds, markings of rank on some of the shoulders and a Russian rifle lying stark against the snow. Cordell looked up slowly, recognition in his eyes. "The uniforms of the deserters from the Russian units."

The colonel laughed then, not long: half out of amusement, half pity. "My friend, do you not yet see? Those men did not desert, just as the villagers did not run away. They were literally spirited away." The colonel picked his way from the heap to the edges of the clearing. He stared hard into the gloom of the surrounding forest, as if searching for something, then said, "You said one time that people in this part of the world still believed in strange things. That is true. There are some things that will never change, so long as one man yet believes in them, they will survive.

"In my country, some people believe in a thing called Orzuti. Most people, of course, do not, but those that dwell in the wooded mountains do. So they build things to ward him off, things like houses of the dead where sheep are sacrificed. And some say it works." He continued to stare.

Everything fell into place now, thought Cordell, but how could he believe any of it?

The colonel continued.

"My village deep in the woods of my homeland built these things for thousands of years, and still did after I had gone. Whether or not the things worked to keep the Orzuti away, I do not know. But I do know that to acknowledge his existence by saying his name aloud would bring him surely to your door. For this reason, no man ever spoke the name of Orzuti aloud.

"I suspect it is the same here in Siberia. That this Ithaqua is a cousin of the forest spirit in my homeland."

Cordell said, not believing he was treating the whole thing seriously, "Yes, I covered a story in Canada many years ago where my guide, a Monsieur Defago, spoke of an Indian deity called the Wendigo. The Indians,

he said, sometimes built funeral scaffolds against it. Perhaps these beliefs were carried over from Asia to North America in prehistoric times across the Bering Sea land bridge." A pause. "So you think that the villagers must have used the thing's name in vain, so to speak, and it whisked them away?"

"Yes."

"And the soldiers the other night, too?"

"Yes."

"Hey, wait a minute, I said his name then. Why didn't he come after me?" Cordell felt relieved that he had dispelled the story so easily.

"One must say his name aloud and in belief to summon him. You did not, and still do not, believe Ithaqua lives."

Suddenly, it flashed through Cordell's mind. "Wait a second, you just used his name. Twice now! And obviously, you believe—"

"Exactly. For too long I have shied away from it, but I cannot long stand by as the creature destroys my men and those of the Whites."

Cordell circled the clearing in the opposite direction from that of the colonel. The dark trees wheeled in the periphery of his vision as he said, "You're going to conjure up this thing, this Ithaqua, to kill it?" He never took his eyes away from the colonel.

"That is correct, my friend."

"With me here?" Cordell fought a tremor in his voice.

"Certainly; you are a correspondent, are you not?" Although Cordell did not see it, the colonel smiled.

"Yes, but I'm no fool." Cordell desperately wanted to believe that. He was a rational man; there was no such thing as an Ithaqua. It had to be. The alternative was too terrible to contemplate.

"Are we not all fools at one time or another? I, fighting a war that has nothing to do with my country, so far from anywhere? You for risking your life only to acquire a story, as if what we do here is merely a game?"

For many minutes after this last statement, the colonel continued to stare into the woods, occasionally altering his point of view by partial circlings of the clearing. Then, from off in the forest, Cordell heard the familiar sloughing sound of snow slipping from a laden branch. This time, it was terminated with an unusually heavy thump. He glanced at the colonel quickly, in time to see him step between the trees in the direction of the sound.

Instinctively, Cordell followed the colonel, trailing his big footprints in the snow between the trees. At last he saw him ahead, looking down at something. Cordell stumbled up to where the Colonel stood and looked down also. At first, only puzzlement at the naked body before him registered in his mind. Then, as his eyes trailed to the corpse's feet, growing horror and terror supplanted puzzlement. He staggered back, hands outstretched for the support of a tree.

Unbidden, the colonel explained. "This poor soul was one of the villagers. When Ithaqua comes striding across the land, he takes up his victims in his windy arms and carries them off across the world to deposit them again in their own country; hours, sometimes days later. The others are ...."

But Cordell did not hear the colonel's next words as, instinctively, he looked up into the trees where amorphous white blobs hung in broken heaps among the branches. Cordell thanked God he was not permitted to see them in any further detail as the memory of those feet came rushing back to his mind's eye.

A distant swish and thumps from deeper in the woods jerked him back to the present as the colonel concluded, "... leaves them their bodies, but takes their lives."

As if on cue, the wind sighed through the dark trees and the stars seemed to shimmer and fade. The forest protested the rising wind with a flurry of squeaks and rustles. Snow fell from the upper branches and struck Cordell over the head. Startled back to reality, from the unreality of the forest, he ran for the clearing where the string of footprints led into the forest, formed earlier by the small party. Abruptly he realized that he was alone in the clearing except for the empty suits of clothing; the soldiers had managed to slip away. Once again he felt a great weight heavy on his back, forcing him to the ground; he fell to one knee, a hand wrist-deep in powdery, swirling whiteness. He struggled wobbling to his feet; he took one faltering step, quick and strong; lifting his foot mere inches from the ground and slamming it down hard only inches away, just as a man would with an impossibly heavy load to carry. The wind was a howling whirlwind now. Snow and needles stung his face; loose clothes whipped themselves about his feet, seeking to drag him down. As he at last fell crushed to the ground, he thought he had lost his wits.

His face was being pressed to the ground; snow and dirt smeared his right side. He lost his fur cap and his muffler threatened to fulfill the promise of its name. Weakly he struggled with it to release its hold. His hair whipped wildly about his head, pricking him mercilessly with pointed ends. The muffler came loose with a jerk that sent him over on his back and he saw.

His eyes were nearly shut against the force of the wind, his eyelashes like black bars imprisoning his vision. Outside those bars struggling to enter was Ithaqua, or what he perceived as Ithaqua. The black trees that rose over his prone body seemed to shimmer and sway as if viewed from underwater; the stars were gone, hidden from sight by a whirling, twisting cyclone of snow, needles, and clothing that swept from the ground to the treetops in a steep ascent and a steep descent. The wind was now pulling and tugging at his clothes and from the midst of that pillar of debris there seemed to emerge a shape.

It bulged and billowed, at the mercy it seemed of the ravening wind. It grew huge and dispersed, reassembled and grew huge again; it had shape and substance, yet he could see the elements of his surroundings through it. Cordell struggled to rise, but succeeded only in pinning his arm beneath his holster. The thing was like a diaphanous cloud seeking to envelop him, and it was then he began to feel a tugging within him, felt himself slipping slowly away, and knew the yawning emptiness of eternity.

In desperation, he found new strength, and with it his pistol seemed to fly to his hand and shouted protesting missiles into the ghostly form. The gun spent itself, with its soundless clicking all that stood between Cordell and the creature. He was slipping, slipping, his mouth open in wordless protest, the whine of the wind in his ears.

Then a gigantic form interceded itself to his side somewhere. He could not take his gaze from the apparition before him. From its throat came a string of gutturals, barked and retched forth like an unclean thing swallowed that must be regurgitated.

> *Iä! Iä! Ithaqua, Ithaqua! Ai! Ai! Ai! Ithaqua f'ayak vulgtmm vugthlaghn vulgtmm. Ithaqua fhtagn! Ugh! Iä! Iä! Ithaqua Iglucks fech'tn! Ai! Ai! Ai!*

And with increased fury, as if in baleful protest, the seething winds increased to such proportions that Cordell's eyes were forced tight shut against the driven snow, pine needles, and dust scoured from the exposed earth.

When at last they opened once more, the trees were trembling and a sharp cracking of splintering wood came through the forest. The debris-filled pylon seemed to settle slowly as the sound of massive trees snapped and creaked like the death rattle of some titanic beast.

And then all was still.

Cordell still sat reclining, supported by one stiff arm, staring ahead along the sight of his upraised pistol, his finger still squeezing the trigger repeatedly.

"Come, my friend, the battle is done." The colonel lifted him to his feet. "The recitation of certain sounds sent the creature back to its prison; for a time at least."

Cordell slowly came to his senses. "Then I didn't just dream it?" he asked dazedly.

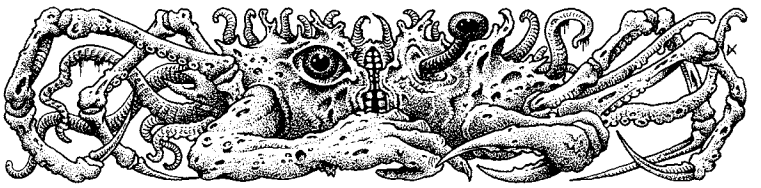
"Perhaps we both did; after all, one man's belief is another's superstition. Who is to say, if another man had been here, he would have seen the same as we, if anything? It is a tenuous thing, belief. Do the old gods really exist, only gone until another believer summons them forth? Like Ithaqua or the Orzuti, one must believe in order to be threatened. Is belief, then, born of fear? To think a being such as man must be at once superior to all other creatures and yet so insecure!"

As he felt the strong arm of the soldier beneath his shoulders, Cordell thought once more about the colonel—was he only what he appeared to be, or was he something more, as Cordell had sometimes sensed when looking into those faraway eyes?

About "Jendick's Swamp"

Joseph Payne Brennan, acknowledged by all as a capable artisan in the stuff of the weird, is usually thought of as an Arkham House, but not a Cthulhu Mythos, author. Generally speaking, the classification is justified, but as with all such classifications, it is not air-tight. It merely places Brennan along a spectrum. In fact, he did write a small number of Mythos tales, including "The Feaster from Afar" (*The Hastur Cycle*, second edition, 1997), featuring Hastur (obviously!), "The Seventh Incantation", featuring Henry Kuttner's Nyogtha (forthcoming in *Acolytes of Cthulhu*, Fedogan & Bremer), and the present tale of Ithaqua, "Jendick's Swamp", which first appeared ten years ago in Charles L. Grant (ed.), *Doom City*, TOR Books, 1987. This book, a sequel to the anthology *Greystone Bay*, was, like it, a "shared world" collection, though Brennan's tale easily stands alone.

You will certainly want to check out Brennan's story collections, including *Nine Horrors and a Dream* (Arkham House and Ballantine Books), *Stories of Darkness and Dread* (Arkham House), and *The Shapes of Midnight* (Berkley Books), as well as his *Sixty Selected Poems* (New Establishment Press, ISBN 0-932445-10-1).



Jendick's Swamp

by Joseph Payne Brennan

At the time, Chris Kellington was only a constable in Greystone Bay; he didn't have much to do. Occasionally he was called out by a farmer whose fences had been damaged by a neighbor's cows. Now and then there were minor thefts—pumpkins lifted from somebody's back lot, a few tools taken from the town truck.

Sometimes he stopped at my place for a chat. If I was hunched at my typewriter, hammering away, he'd merely remark on the weather and stroll off. If I was puttering around, he'd stay and talk.

One afternoon, after I'd finished my writing chores, he came in and sat down. No matter what the weather was, he'd head for a worn and somewhat rickety kitchen chair near my old wood-burning stove. He'd prop his feet on the edge of the wood-box and lean back.

It was late August, warm and sultry. I broke out some chilled apple cider.

Chris sipped appreciatively. "Best cider I've had all summer!" After some routine remarks, he looked up with a quizzical expression. "Kirk, any chance you remember the Jendicks?"

I had to ponder a minute. "I remember some rumors. A sort of inbred, run-down family. Squatters, kind of. Built a big house on a knoll in the middle of a quicksand bog. Lived by hunting mostly. A wild bunch best avoided. Died out many years ago."

Kellington nodded. "You've summed it up fairly well. Wasn't a bog, though; it was the marshes on the other side of North Hill. A treacherous enough place, no matter what you call it. I was in there only once and I was glad when I'd sloshed my way out. I didn't sink in any quicksand but probably I was close to it. It's pretty certain that a number of hunters went in there and never returned."

"What brought the Jendicks and their quicksand swamp to mind?" I asked.

He set down his cider glass. "Funny thing. About a week ago some New York character named Lawton was visiting the Clarksons in the Bay—

cousins, I think. He considered himself a hunter. Brought along a brand-new sporting rifle. Well, he wandered around the back end of North Hill without any luck and was about to give up when he spotted a deer. Spooked it but caught sight again and kept following. Tracked it into the marshes. The deer got clean away; before long Lawton was lost. Trudged around for hours getting soaked up to his belt line and finally glimpsed a house standing on a knoll—he called it a hill. Said the house was a wreck, rotted and moldy-looking, and he naturally assumed it was uninhabited. Well, he climbed up the knoll to rest and dry off a bit, if that was possible. While he was sitting there, he had a strange feeling that he was being watched. The Clarksons quoted him as saying: 'I had the worst sense of impending danger I've ever experienced.' Stood up and turned around and there were two eyes glaring at him from one of the dark window apertures. Eyes like those of a wild animal. But he swears he saw the shadowy form of a man."

Kellington shrugged. "That's about it. He rushed away, back into the swamp, and never turned around. Found his way out by sheer luck. Doesn't know whether he was followed or not. By the time I got the story second-hand from the Clarksons, Lawton had left for New York."

I refilled the cider glasses. "Makes a spooky little anecdote. I imagine a tramp had settled down in the old Jendick house and didn't welcome visitors."

Chris frowned. "Well—maybe. But I've got a nagging urge to check it out."

"What's to check, Chris? A squatter in an abandoned house surrounded by a swamp where scarcely anybody ventures? Sure, you can get yourself half-drowned going in there but what's accomplished? You evict some half-witted derelict and like as not he takes up quarters in somebody's barn and causes real trouble."

"I'd make sure he cleared right out of town. Aside from that, I guess maybe I have a hankering to get a look at that old Jendick house—or what's left of it."

He rearranged his feet on the wood-box and leaned back. "They were a weird bunch, Kirk. You've heard some rumors, but maybe not all. Seems old Jendick was part Indian—Pequot, I guess, though I'm not sure. Anyway, there's a legend that some of the early tribes worshiped a so-called Spirit of the Swamp. I think he—it—was named Ithathaqua. In exchange for sacrifices, Ithathaqua was supposed to guide his worshipers safely through the labyrinths of the swamp and eventually grant them other favors as well. I've heard it said that during a hunt in the swamp, the Jendicks always tried to catch one creature alive—even though wounded—in order to sacrifice it to Ithathaqua."

"And in exchange, Ithathaqua kept them from getting lost or drowned?" I interposed.

"Something like that. Anyway, there might be some clue left in the house."

I shook my head. "The Jendicks don't sound like the kind who kept written records. And even if they did, any journal would be long gone by now—weather, rats, roaches."

"You're probably right," he agreed. "But I'd still like a look in the house before it rots away completely."

I grinned at him. "You always were a stubborn cuss! Well, let me know when you plan to drown yourself and I'll tag along. My current yarn's hit a dry plateau and I need to get away from it for a day or two."

"How about tomorrow, then? Midmorning. Say, ten. I'll bring a Thermos and sandwiches."

"Fine. I'll be ready."

He turned at the door. "Better wear hip boots!"

The next day was overcast and humid. The hip boots were hot and highly uncomfortable, but once we started into the swamp, I was grateful for Chris' suggestion that I wear them.

The swamp was a world to itself. On the north end of the marshland, it was shadowy, nearly silent, filled with the smell of still water and dissolving vegetation. Dense stands of hemlock, spruce, and black ash crowded along narrow aisles slippery with sphagnum moss. Tall cinnamon ferns and tangled patches of nettles clustered around the trunks. In some places the remains of fallen and decaying trees had created little hummocks which rose above the level of the surrounding pools. I recognized a few bird sounds but the only bird I glimpsed was a small green heron which glided away over the glistening water.

Although many of the pools were relatively shallow, the old-time quicksand rumors held us to a slow and hesitant advance.

While we paused as Chris adjusted his shoulder pack, I questioned him in regard to the location of the Jendick house.

"I might as well admit," he confessed, "that I'm trusting largely to luck. I do know that the place is supposed to be situated in the middle someplace and that—at one time at least—there was a stand of black-gum trees alongside the knoll the house is set on."

We slogged along in silence most of the time. The footing was treacherous; our attention was concentrated on the terrain immediately ahead. At one point, I slipped and went to my knees in algae-scummed water. The hip boots helped.

The silence became oppressive. Although sun seldom penetrated the overhead screen of tree branches and climbing vines, heat and humidity increased as the morning wore on.

"Does this devil's morass have a name?" I asked, by way of conversation.

Turning, Chris looked at me in surprise. "Jendick's Swamp, of course."

Around noon, chancing on a cleared and relatively dry patch of ground, we stopped and sat down. Coffee and an egg-salad sandwich revived my spirits a bit.

"We'll stumble on the place soon," I predicted with forced optimism.

"Sure," Chris agreed, "if we don't travel in a big circle."

"Didn't you bring a compass?"

"There's one in the pack somewhere. We've been moving north so far. But the trouble is, I'm not positive about the knoll's location. I *think* it's about in the middle, but I can't vouch for it. And I'm not sure of the size of the swamp. It may have shrunk—or spread—drastically over the years. I think we'll swing toward the northwest. That means we veer left. I don't need a compass for that."

We moved on. Conversation dwindled away. The silence seemed all-pervading and somehow ominous. We plodded through an acre or more where close-growing, creeper-laden swamp oaks proved nearly impenetrable. More than once, we waded through pools up to our waists. Our boots, luckily tight at the tops, kept out most of the water.

As I slogged doggedly along behind him, I noticed that Chris was becoming increasingly hesitant. Frowning, he paused frequently while he peered through the moist, matted tangle of trees and twisting vines which surrounded us.

I feared he was lost but I said nothing. The heat and the unaccustomed exercise were taking their toll, however. My legs ached; I was starting to feel dizzy. I was on the point of suggesting a ten-minute break when Chris stopped and pointed.

"There! To the left, ahead!"

Squinting in the direction he indicated, I saw a line of dark trees which rose slightly above the level of the others around us.

"Look like black gums to me. Let's check!"

Minutes later we pushed our way through underbrush beneath a stand of tall black-gum trees.

Pointing ahead, Chris nodded. "Jendick's house!"

Sprawled on an overgrown knoll before us lay a half-collapsed, ramshackle building which nearly defied description. Rooms appeared to have been added at random with no regard for uniformity. A sagging second story stretched over only part of the first. All windowpanes were broken or missing; two window apertures had been boarded up; the others gaped open. Shingles hung askew alongside patches of loose tar paper. A wooden front door, panels split, hung by one rusty hinge. A green mold, abetted by the damp air of the swamp, lay like a slimy glaze of hastily applied paint

over the entire house. Shaggy clumps of juniper, burdock, and willow saplings crowded alongside the structure.

There was no sign of life, much less occupancy. Save for the metallic chirr of a cicada, far off in the swamp, unbroken silence prevailed.

Chris spoke first. "A few years more and it'll just sink into the cellar—if there is one. Let's take a closer look."

Moving through a barrier of burdock and juniper shrubs, we walked up to a window aperture and looked into a plank-floored dusty room, empty except for a heap of sticks and straw in one corner plus a scattered litter of rusting cans, cracked bottles, and miscellaneous rags of discarded clothing.

What struck me at once—almost literally—was the smell. Part of it was merely the musty pungency of mold and rotting wood, but there was something else—a sickening rancid stink which I could not identify but which I found more repellent that any other odor I could remember.

I pulled away from the window. "What is *that?*"

Chris drew back as hastily as I and shook his head. "I guess some critter crawled in there to die. Maybe it's the combination of mold and maggots!"

Treading cautiously, we circled the house. In the rear we stumbled on some discarded remnants of broken furniture, a split cask, and the nearly liquescent remains of a rotting carpet. Whenever we paused to peer into a window, an overpowering reek drove us back.

"The chances of any written record surviving in that reeking shambles is remote," I observed.

"I sure wouldn't bet on it," Chris agreed.

We made our way to the far edge of the knoll, away from the house, and sat down on some dry ground near a juniper bush. Sunlight had glinted through the overcast sky several times during the morning but now the sky was filled with dark gray clouds again.

Seen from the knoll, the surrounding swamp appeared even more forbidding than when we were actually slogging through it. At a distance, the fetor emanating from inside the house was no longer detectable, but I loathed the mere sight of the sagging mold-covered clapboards.

"After we've rested a few minutes, let's get started out of here," I suggested.

Chris remained silent for a minute or two. Looking out over the swamp, he scrubbed his chin. "Well, it would be sort of a shame, having come this far, to leave without even going inside."

I stared at him as if he had gone insane. "*Inside?* We'd never get that smell out of our clothes—or off our skins!"

He grinned. "Bad, isn't it? But I think after we'd beaten our way back out of the swamp it would be pretty well worn off."

Knowing Chris, I sighed and stood up. "Let's get it over with, then. My stomach is doing flip-flops already."

As we shoved aside the splintered front door, the one remaining hinge fell out and the door dropped to the ground.

Chris smiled wryly. "Vandalism, that is. I'll bring charges against myself when we get back."

As soon as we stepped inside, the smell overwhelmed us. Hoping Chris would hurry, I tried to take only shallow breaths.

We tramped through a succession of grimy, dust-laden rooms. One contained the frame of an armchair, another a ripped mattress, sprinkled with mold. A rear room, whose floor and walls were saturated with congealed grease, we assumed had served as kitchen.

Glancing up a staircase which appeared on the verge of total collapse, we saw gray daylight filtering through a sagging roof.

"We'll skip the second floor," he said. "If the stairs didn't tumble under our weight, the roof would probably fall on our heads."

I sighed with relief. "That's it, then. Let's get out."

"Well, I guess. Wait—" Crossing back through the kitchen, he called to me. "There's a corner door here."

I heard a door creak as I reluctantly returned to the kitchen. Chris stood in front of an open door in one corner. He pointed downward. "We forgot the cellar."

My stomach tightened at the smell which swept through the open door. It was the same sickening odor which seemed to permeate the entire house—only stronger.

"We forgot the cellar?" I repeated. "Let's *forget* the cellar! We're apt to pass out down there."

He was already pulling a small flashlight out of his pack. "Pretty awful, isn't it? But I ought to take a look. Stairs look fairly good. You stay here."

He started down. Shaking my head, I followed.

Once at the bottom of the stairs, the rancid reek all but overcame us. By the light of the flashlight, we saw that the floor of the place was dirt, shiny with spreading snail tracks and gray-green fungus. A cobwebbed open doorway just beyond the bottom of the flight of stairs led into a large room which was obviously the main cellar space.

As we entered, the light picked out a heap of crates and cartons piled in the center of the room. Beyond, near the far wall, stretched a long double row of big vats, interspersed with smaller casks.

The stench here was insufferable.

Chris played his light along the lines of vats. "We'd better look in one of those. There's the source of our sweet aroma."

The first vat was empty, as was the adjacent one, but Chris stood frozen as he directed his light into the third.

"What is it?" I moved to his side, curiosity overcoming my initial hesitation.

The vat was loosely packed with irregular-shaped chunks of bloody-looking gray-white meat immersed in a yellowish liquid which appeared to be some kind of brine.

I stared down at the vat contents for a long half minute before I realized what I was looking at.

When I finally looked up—white-faced, I'm sure—Chris was watching me. He nodded. "I'm pretty sure it's what we think it is."

He flashed his light around the cellar. A two-pronged, long-handled, skewer-like fork hung from an overhead hook.

Taking it down, he probed into the vat.

When he lifted the fork, it held a forearm with the hand still attached. The brine had prevented decay but the flesh looked puffy and discolored.

Chris shook it back into the vat and we went on down the rows.

About a third of the vats and a few of the small casks were partially filled with ghastly chunks and gobbets of human flesh. The last vat at the end of one row was crammed with human bones.

Chris played the light over them and spoke one word which made me shudder. "Gnawed," he said.

"Maybe," I whispered desperately, "they fed—some kind of swamp animal."

Chris shook his head. "No sense kidding ourselves, Kirk. The Jendicks became cannibals at the last. No other explanation."

"But you said the Jendicks died out a long time ago."

"I thought they had. And even strong brine wouldn't preserve flesh year after year—at least I don't believe it would."

I didn't think the time or place was suitable for a discussion on the preservation properties of brine.

"Chris," I urged, "let's get out of this butcher shop! We can talk later!"

"Agreed." He moved toward the doorway.

We were just starting up the stairs when the thing appeared at the top. We both froze, staring upward with shock and disbelief.

It looked human, but barely so. A huge greasy mass of tangled white hair. Wild staring eyes of a rabid animal. Writhing lips around a toothless hole of a mouth. A cadaverlike body, hairy, gaunt, scab-covered. Clothing, a tattered remnant of trousers ending at the knees. A nightmare shape straight out of Goya.

The thing's voice was a high-pitched, half-coherent scream. "Thought ye the Jendicks been all gone, eh? Old Asa ain't! Come snoopin', hah? Ah'll pickle ye both!"

It had been holding out of sight a massive length of tree limb, or trunk, which it now swung into view. The club looked like an oak sapling torn up by the roots. One huge hairy hand circled the base of it.

As it started down the stairs, Chris gripped my arm. "Back into the other room! Quick!"

As we ran into the brine-vat room, the creature's shrill, mirthless chuckle followed us. "'Twon't do ye no good ta hide! Old Asa c'n see in the dark!"

Chris stuck the flash into my hand. "Shine it in his eyes. Give me a minute."

As he groped somewhere behind me, the murderous thing appeared in the doorway. I directed the light straight into its eyes.

It froze, startled and obviously blinded, for a moment. Abruptly, squealing with rage, it flung itself sideways into the room.

At that moment Chris moved up beside me. As I swung my light, I saw that he was holding the long-handled, skewer-like fork.

"Keep it on him!" he warned me.

I quickly swept the light in a half circle but the thing which called itself Asa Jendick had disappeared in the darkness.

"Crawling," Chris whispered. "Lower the light."

As I did so, both of us heard a slight scraping sound somewhere among the vats. Instinctively, we dropped to a crouch. Something hurtled through the air where our heads had been a second before and crashed against the farther wall. I assumed it was a cask. It seemed to have been hurled with the force and speed of an artillery projectile.

I aimed the flash along the row of vats and casks. Before the cone of light reached the far end of the row, something came rushing toward us from the near end. By the time I swung the light back, it was only feet away. In the circle of light it seemed like an impossible apparition materialized from the darkness and the foul, seething corruption of the cellar itself.

Chris dropped something at my feet. "Backpack. Thirty-two."

Holding the skewer fork at the ready, he sprang in front of me to meet the lunge of the crazed creature.

I heard a tearing impact followed by a scream of rage and pain. Chris stepped backward, nearly tripping over me. "God!" he exclaimed in a shocked voice.

My frantic groping closed on the butt of the .32 automatic at the bottom of the pack. Yanking it out with one hand and aiming the light with the other, I saw what had caused Chris' exclamation.

Asa Jendick's huge hands were tugging at the skewer projecting from his chest. It had been driven into his ribcage up to the handle.

As we watched in disbelief, he managed a fierce final tug. The fork came out. Blood poured out of the wound; when he opened his mouth in another squeal of rage, blood spilled out of that as well.

Holding the skewer in both hands, he lurched toward us. I fired the .32 six times without stopping and at that range I couldn't miss, but he kept on coming.

We sprang aside as he stabbed the air between us with the lethal fork.

He fell to his knees, stood up, still holding the bloody skewer, raised his head, and screamed shrilly: "Ithhaqua!"

For just a moment, he seemed to be listening. He dropped, rolled, twitched, lay still.

I held the light on him. Neither of us spoke.

For relief, I looked off into the cellar darkness, away from the last Jendick lying on the fungus-covered floor.

"Kirk!" Chris said suddenly. He stood looking down at the hideous hairy thing.

It appeared to be undergoing some kind of degenerative transformation. The facial skin, matted hair and all, had loosened. As we watched, it slid off, exposing the skull bones. The body skin began to shrivel. Instead of blood, a yellowish ichor began oozing out of the gaping chest wound.

We went on watching, horrified but hypnotized, as the process of decay and dissolution accelerated. Within minutes we stared down at a half-mummified skeleton. Even this, swiftly turning black and desiccated, started to disintegrate.

Chris heard it first and raised his head—a roaring sound in the distance, a sound like a hundred tractors suddenly revved up and rolling fast.

"Let's go!" Grabbing his pack, he ran through the doorway, up the stairs. I bolted behind him.

When we charged out of the ruinous charnel house, through the juniper bushes, across the overgrown knoll, the sky was already black. The roaring sound seemed nearly overhead.

"Swamp's our only hope! Far as we can get!" Chris yelled.

"Tornado?" I yelled back, he didn't answer.

Plunging into the swamp, we ran like madmen. Chris grabbed my arm and pulled me down where dense tangles of shrub and brush surrounded us.

"Too dangerous near trees!" he shouted. "Lie flat!"

A darkness like that of moonless midnight closed on the swamp. The roaring increased, obliterating all else. A mighty wind swept through the swamp. Rain cascaded down. I was aware of toppling trees nearby. Bushes

were torn out by the roots and tossed away. I felt that at any moment I would be scooped up by the wind, pitched and pummeled to death.

I lay prone, arms over my head, as the tornado-like torrent of wind, rain, and sound raged on. Suddenly aware of light, I moved an arm and glanced aside at Chris. He was watching the sky. I looked up.

Etched above, against a background of rushing sulfurous cloud masses, was the huge fiery image of a distorted Indian face, a diabolical face, blazing with fury, filled with the evil of the Pit itself.

It hung there, its flaming outline crowding the sky over the swamp. I felt convinced that the glaring eyes in that malevolent face were fixed upon us.

"Ithathaqua!" Chris gasped.

Slowly, at first almost imperceptibly, the roaring sound began to abate. As it did so, the lurid countenance towering above us gradually faded. Contours of the burning, hate-twisted face became blurred. The glaring eyes turned blank. At length only the jagged yellow outline of a face remained. Finally even this was swept away in the tumult of racing, gale-driven clouds.

Soaked and shaken, we stood up unsteadily. The sky was still black, and though the wind had dropped noticeably, it remained strong enough to fling wet leaves and other debris into our faces.

Our trip out of the swamp was a suspense story in itself. All trails and landmarks appeared to have been torn away. The swamp was flooded. Hillocks and ridges we had traversed on our way in were now under water. The heavy rain never slackened. It was a miracle that we both escaped from that mud-laden watery morass without drowning.

By the time we emerged from the swamp, skirted the marshes, and found our way over North Hill and back to my place, we were at the end of our strength.

After I had started a fire in the wood stove and poured two stiff brandies, we sat down in the kitchen.

Chris scarcely spoke until we had finished one glass and poured a second.

"Well, Kirk, I'm feeling half human again, but I'm too dragged out to talk much. I've been thinking that I ought to do a little research. Meanwhile, I'd be grateful if you kept our little adventure to yourself—at least for a time. I'm hoping the town folks think it was just a random tornado centered around the swamp. If they saw the sky image, it will complicate matters. But maybe even that could be explained away as a freak of lightning combined with funny cloud formations."

I gave him my word. Over a week passed before I saw him again.

He sat down in his favorite kitchen chair and propped his feet on the wood-box.

"As I hoped," he told me, "the natives shrugged it off as an early tornado spinning around near the swamp. Not a soul noticed the sky image." He chuckled. "I guess nobody stayed outdoors to watch cloud formations!"

"You've done that research?" I asked.

He nodded. "I found some information about Ithaqua in an old volume at the Hartford library. A collection of local Indian legends. Ithaqua was supposed to be a sort of swamp demon who granted favors to Indians who made sacrifices to him—both animal and human. In return for blood sacrifices, he would protect hunters in the swamp. And—listen to this—in some cases he would grant unheard-of longevity to faithful worshipers!"

I thought back to that repulsive, bullet-riddled body on the floor of the cellar, quickly decaying before our eyes.

"That was Old Jendick, then?"

"I'm convinced of it. So far as I can figure, he would be nearly a hundred and fifty years old!"

"How do you explain that fiery face looming in the sky above us?"

"In his last extremity, old Jendick called on Ithaqua for help—and Ithaqua responded. Jendick must have been the very last of his worshipers, however, and with Jendick's death, Ithaqua's power immediately started to wane. Ithaqua, you might say, was kept alive by the faith of his followers—and by the blood of their sacrifices, perhaps. When none of his followers remained alive, he himself could no longer exist. The best he could do was to summon up enough final strength for a kind of thunderbolt exit while he glared down at us—boiling with fury but basically impotent."

"What about—what we found in those brine barrels?"

Chris shifted uneasily. "I feel guilty about that. You know, about eight months ago, a tramp was staying in the remains of a shack in woods near the edge of the swamp. Never bothered anybody, so I let him alone. After he suddenly disappeared, I looked in the shack and found quite a cache of new canned goods, crackers, coffee, and so on. Seemed strange to me that he'd leave all that stuff, but I shrugged it off. Now I'm wondering if he wandered into the swamp and ended up as a sacrifice to Ithaqua—and subsequently an occupant of the brine vats!"

He stood up. "I'm also wondering about those hunters of years ago who were supposed to have been caught in quicksand. You'll remember that we didn't see any sign of quicksand, bad as the swamp was in other respects. Maybe those lost hunters were caught by the Jendicks!"

After he left, I regretted that I hadn't asked him what he proposed to do about the pickled human flesh we had found in that charnel-house cellar. I had an answer a month or so later when he stopped by.

"I have an aviator friend at the Hartford airport," he told me. "We took a helicopter ride over the swamp one afternoon. The Jendick house—in fact,

the knoll itself—was washed away. The row of black-gum trees has disappeared. Not a stick of wood visible. The chances of recovering any brine-preserved human remains is gone forever. And I can't honestly say I'm sorry!"

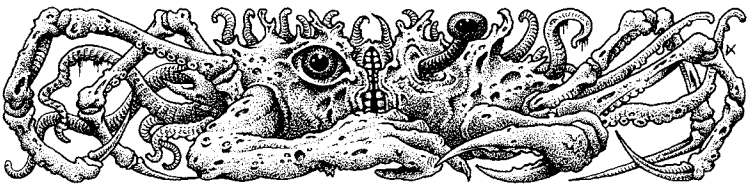
I've tramped through the woods and meadows around Greystone Bay many times since my adventure with Chris, but I never again ventured into Jendick's Swamp. In fact, I've been very active in all movements to preserve the marshland as a wildlife preserve. I'm not protecting it against people so much. It's the swamp. It keeps moving south.

About "The Wind Has Teeth"

Why do you suppose the maledictions of ancient Indian shamans and Egyptian pharaohs possess such potent efficacy that every single Euro-American explorer-transgressor falls prey to them? That is, why are these antique curses effective when, in the same stories (and "The Wind Has Teeth" is only one of a legion of them), the providence of Western religion is seen to be a sham and a delusion, every word of which, once sent forth, returns altogether void? Such tales can hardly be understood as allegories of atheism, of the superannuation of belief in the supernatural. After all, the ineluctable force of the ancient curse becomes equally a burlesque of rationalistic scientism, as in every Hammer Films vampire movie. No, the moral of these stories seems to me to qualify as a precursor of today's literary trend of Post-colonialism. They are tales wherein the subjugated cultures trod upon by Western military, commercial, and missionary imperialists have the last laugh. These stories debunk the West and our pretensions.

They are in a sense literary cousins of Revitalization Movements in colonized cultures, wherein certain disaffected prophets and seers fashion an amalgam of traditional tribal values with chosen elements of Western religion and technology to turn back against the White oppressors. The Ghost Dance and the Cargo Cults would qualify as examples. Here are spook stories in which Western literary genres, already implicitly subversive in wistfully vindicating the lost supernaturalism of Western religion, are turned against Western assumptions, including Western religion, which (as the narrator's prayers in this tale) finally prove useless. Perhaps the best pulp fiction example of the whole trend would be Robert E. Howard's adventures of Solomon Kane.

"The Wind Has Teeth", which otherwise pretty much speaks for itself, originally appeared in Elizabeth A. Saunders (ed.), *Where the Black Lotus Blooms* (Unnameable Press, 1990).



The Wind Has Teeth

by G. Warlock Vance and Scott H. Urban

I.

Autumn is an insidious season.

Unlike winter, which pounces paws-down like a white-pelted jungle cat, or spring, which drives off the rear-guard of snow like a victorious general, autumn creeps up on summer slowly, treacherously. A subtle, sinister season, it enacts the same backstabbing assassination every year and leaves no witnesses. Autumn spreads its infiltrating tendrils through an unremittingly naive summer like a nacreous cancer, and by late September it has all but usurped the year.

At no other time of the year is death so colorful. Chilled breezes plummet through a purple sky, lined with orange and crimson along its western edge. They carry with them the cinnamon smell of decayed and burning leaves. The leaves themselves are tinged with rich brown, pumpkin orange, lemon yellow, and sunset red. They achieve the pinnacle of their beauty only in death.

Like the kaleidoscopic leaves and the hastily covered flower beds, the day was dying, too. A punctured sun, leaking crimson on the horizon, drowned in its own ruddy magnificence. Coolness wrapped its north-wind fingers around outdoor thermometers—not with the mind-numbing cold of winter, but with a soft, vague hinting of the nip of the grave.

The leaves, the flowers, the day—all these were dying.

People were dying as well.

II. 9/21/8-. 11:15 p.m.

"Here, Philip. I thought you might be able to use this."

Startled, Philip Howard jerked back from the window. For a moment, he stared uncomprehending at the brandy snifter in his best friend's outstretched hand. It seemed like something that had no part in a world where

you could say "good-bye" to a companion—and find him dead a half-hour later. Philip forced a small laugh to show that he was all right and accepted the snifter.

"Thanks, Craig. I could use it at that." Philip was content for the moment to sip the liquor and study his companion's features, wondering how two such disparate individuals could form an insoluble bond. Philip considered himself fair and lanky, nonchalant in manner and emotionally distant. Craig Quiller, on the other hand, possessed dark features and an even darker shock of hair. He was quick to rise to passion, but could easily fall into numbing depressions. Linked by their mutual penchant for collecting and creating stories of the macabre and supernatural, they had eventually formed an organization composed of individuals with similar tastes.

"Don't much feel like joining the party, I guess, right?" Craig asked sympathetically.

From the distant corner where they stood, they turned and looked back into the broad lounge. When Craig had initially formed The October Society, he had had the good fortune to meet Benjamin Casprak. Casprak, a retired widower, owned the meat-packaging firm just outside of Durham, Ohio. Although he had removed himself from active management of the company, leaving such details to his oldest son, now president of the firm, Casprak had made his money and then some. A mutual acquaintance had introduced Casprak and Craig, and they had discovered a shared affection for pre-comics-code EC horror comics. When Craig had informed Casprak of his intention to start an organization devoted to literature of the weird and grotesque, Casprak had been willing to donate the use of one of his mansion's rooms one night a week. Casprak's mansion lay outside Durham, on its own acreage a good twenty miles away. The former executive maintained there were certain peculiarities about Durham residents he did not care for.

At the moment, the chairs and couches of Casprak's lounge were occupied by October Society members. Unlike most meetings, when Craig, as secretary and only existing Society official, had to threaten to fire a gun to bring them to order, tonight's gathering had a muted, somber atmosphere. It was not a regularly scheduled meeting; it was, in fact, a wake.

Philip nervously swallowed some brandy, relishing the liquid warmth. "Not going to be much of a party, I'm afraid," he muttered.

"I know," Craig said dejectedly. "I wish they weren't all so downcast. Believe me, I'm shaken by Paul's death more than I can express. Still, I'd like to start a meeting, tell some stories, just to get our minds off it. I'm afraid they'll take it the wrong way, though."

Philip had turned back to the window and was trying to look past the glare into the tangled woods beyond the lawn. "No, don't force it. If the guys want to talk, we'll get around to talking ... eventually."

Craig scrutinized Philip for a while, concerned. A small ridge where Philip's jaw met his skull was dancing in and out. Philip was clenching and unclenching his teeth. Craig put it down as a normal reaction. After all, it had been Philip who had discovered Paul Ansare's mangled corpse last night.

Craig then noted his associate's pupils growing wide, his lips paling, and his fingers turning white against the stem of the snifter. "What is it, Phil?" he asked anxiously. Philip didn't answer and Craig gripped his shoulder. Leaning over and squinting out the window, Craig tried to see what had jolted his friend.

Through his fingers, Craig felt Philip's muscles relax. "It's all right, Craig. It wasn't what I thought it was." He paused, drained his brandy. "At least, I don't think it could possibly have been what I thought it was."

Craig nodded, trying to understand and empathize. "Get you a refill?" he asked, pointing at the empty glass. Philip rather absently handed it to him. Craig began walking toward the open bar which Benjamin Casprak provided to the Society for a token monthly fee. Pulling himself up short, he swiveled back toward Philip and affected a cheery tone. "By the way, Phil, I wanted to tell you—it's Monday. September 21st. It's the solstice. Welcome to the first day of fall."

III. 9/20/8-. 9:45 p.m.

Smirking, Leonard Talbot was circling the room, showing all who would spare a glance his newly acquired, signed copy of Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot*. As Philip Howard entered the room, G. Gordon Gregor, Durham's resident novelist, was describing a proposed film adaptation of one of his novellas. Benjamin Casprak was making the rounds, checking to see that everyone's glass was full and that they all knew where the *hors d'oeuvres* were located.

The twenty-two assembled revelers forgot the chill September night, only a wall away. Wine, brandy, and rum tumbled freely, a liquor waterfall, augmenting the joyous mood and making everyone's voice just a little louder than normal. A five-log blaze crackled in the fireplace, more to spread brightness than warmth.

Philip headed across the room to confer with Craig, passing a small group centered around Paul Ansare. Paul was just coming to the punchline of another insufferably ribald joke. His listeners chuckled appreciatively: Paul's jokes weren't always the most inventive, but one had to admire his seemingly inexhaustible supply.

Paul's low voice, which carried all too well in the paneled lounge, brought Philip up short. "Phil! Hold on there a second! I wanna talk to you!" Philip turned to wait. Although not his favorite Society member,

Philip didn't have anything against Paul personally. Paul probably needed to cultivate a dominant personality and slightly overbearing manner in his real estate development firm.

Listeners drifted away from Paul, who moved to Philip's side and clapped a heavy hand on his shoulder. Philip felt as if his left side had lost half an inch. Maybe just a little too much brandy, he thought wryly.

"Hey, how ya doin', Phil?" Paul asked, baring a toothy smile. "We gonna pop in *Nightmare on Elm Street* tonight?"

"I'm fine, Paul," Philip replied. "No, I think Craig is going to give a short talk on metamorphosis in the work of M. R. James." Philip wasn't surprised to see Paul's face fall momentarily in disappointment; reading wasn't high on Paul's list of hobbies.

"Great," slurred Paul, unobtrusively guiding Philip into an unoccupied corner beside some bookcases. "Look, I got something I want to talk to you about."

Philip had no idea what he and the developer had in common besides the Society, but he was willing to give the other a couple of minutes. "Okay. Shoot."

"Well, Phil, you know, this Society is a fun deal and everything, you know, but not everyone here is a mental giant, if you catch my drift."

Philip couldn't help but chuckle at Paul's wharf-rat stare. "If that's a backhanded compliment, thanks, but we really shouldn't put down anyone else in the Society. I mean, every one of us is an expert or respected member of his or her chosen field."

"Yeah, well, what I meant was, you got more horse sense than a lot of the rest of them. And I think these meetings can be an excellent way to drum up some business—trade ideas—further our own careers. These ghost stories are a lot of fun, but they only go so far."

Philip was beginning to get a bit irritated. "Look, if you're getting bored with the meetings, then for God's sake, don't come anymore. Now look, I've got to see Craig—"

Paul's rather stout forearm shot past Philip's chest, barricading his way. "Hold on, I'm ramblin' a bit, but I've got a very concrete proposal to make you. Something that could help make both of us a lot of money."

Philip drew in a deep breath and stared down his nose at the developer. He didn't encourage the man to go on, but Paul did anyway.

"It's come to my attention that a vast amount of land may shortly be up for sale. With my knowledge of the market and my real estate connections, I'm in a good place to acquire the land." Philip noted how Paul's words underwent a startling transformation as he made a pitch. He could see how Paul had become so successful with such a gruff exterior. "I don't

own this land yet, but I'm already lining up potential investors to join me in this opportunity."

Paul fended off his words with a wave of his hand. "Hold on, hold on. First of all, where is this land?"

"Most of it falls in Durham Woods. You know, the forest that everybody in town calls St. Elmo's Wood? It's prime real estate, let me tell you, *prime* real estate."

"What 're you planning on doing with it?"

"Knowing the area like I do, I've got to say Durham—and our neighbor city Outerville, too—is only going to grow in the future. I believe we're looking at major population growth in the next ten years. Casprak's meat-packaging plant is small potatoes to some of the industries I've heard are considering the Durham-Outerville area. There's even talk of a computer programming firm coming in. The way I look at it, any influx of business is going to mean more people. And people need a place to stay, a place to live, right? So I'm thinking about condominiums on that land. I'm not kidding when I say we could all become rich off this."

Philip's brow was wrinkled with unanswered questions. "Wait a minute. St. Elmo's Wood? Isn't that ... isn't that the old site of the native Ohio Indians? The Itiqua?"

Paul looked puzzled for a moment, as if he couldn't see what Philip was getting at. "Yeah, I guess I've heard of them before. I don't know if that's where they lived or not. What difference does it make, anyway? I mean, last I heard, they were extinct, wiped out. That was centuries ago. I'm talkin' about here-and-now, about something that could make us a ton of money."

Philip was shaking his head, a rueful grin on his face. "Paul, look, I really appreciate your offer, but quite frankly, I think you're asking the wrong man. I know I don't have the kind of money you need to invest in your project. You're probably asking me because I have my own advertising firm in town. But believe me, when the bills are paid off at the end of the month, I barely have enough left over for Kraft macaroni and cheese."

"Won't take much to get you in on the deal, Phil. Yeah, I probably wish you had more, but only a ten thousand dollar investment will buy you into the group. *You* just keep your mind on the profits."

By now, Philip was laughing out loud. "Ten thousand?" His head went back and his voice got louder. *"Ten thousand?"* A hand on his arm and a sharp look from Paul made him remember where he was. He quieted down again. "Look, Paul, if I had ten thousand dollars to simply invest wherever I wanted, I don't think I'd be sitting in this pit of a town."

A sour look grew on Paul's face. "Okay, Phil, but I think you really got more capital than you let on. I'll tell you what. I may talk to some other people here tonight about this deal. But I'm still willing to consider you if

you want to come in. So you think about it, all right? You could be missing out on the chance of a lifetime."

Philip shook his head. "How many times have I heard that line? It's usually printed on an envelope with Ed McMahon's face."

Paul pretended to be abashed. "No, I mean it. You think about it. Look, I gotta go talk to some other folks."

Paul began to turn away, but a nagging thought tugged at Philip's memory. To get rid of it, he called out to Paul, stopping him. "Paul, in that part of St. Elmo's Wood you're talking about—isn't that also where the Old Stones stand?"

Paul mused for a second, trying to recall the topography of the land. The Old Stones were perhaps the only things Durham offered that could be called a tourist attraction, although very few outsiders knew of their existence. A ring of erect stones, perhaps thirty feet in diameter, they stood in the untrammeled silence of St. Elmo's Wood, rather far from town. An unusually deep shade of black, no geologist had yet determined the exact nature of the Old Stones. In addition, no one knew whether they were a natural formation—or whether the Itiqua, a peculiar Native American tribe spoken of primarily in mad Joseph Durham's *The Black Sermons*, had wrestled them into place.

"I ain't exactly sure," Paul replied slowly, "but I think that's where they are." He shrugged, as if to show how inconsequential the matter was. "Of course, they're going to have to come down. That's right where I want to put my condos."

IV. 9/21/8-. 11:49 p.m.

By the time Craig was through refilling Philip's glass, Philip had moved away from the window. Concerned for a moment, Craig at last sighted him standing in front of one of the many bookcases in the lounge. Philip's head was cocked at an odd angle, like a puzzled animal, as he scanned the spines for a particular title.

"What're you looking for?" Craig inquired, holding the snifter out for his friend to take.

Philip waved away the proffered drink, too intent on his search. His eyes passed over novels, anthologies, magazines, and penny dreadfuls while his lips silently mouthed their titles. He paused to shove his glasses back to the bridge of his nose and said to Craig, "You know, sometimes I think our little group has acquired too much material on the supernatural. Trying to find the title you want is nothing short of maddening—" He went back to his search while Craig started to say something about a new filing system.

Before he could finish, however, Philip muttered, "Ah, here it is; I found it." He pulled out a thick, heavy tome with a dark, rich moss-green binding.

Craig recognized the book; it was from his own personal collection, on loan to the Society's library for the others' benefit. "*Collected Short Stories of Algernon Blackwood*," he recalled aloud. Philip didn't reply, merely nodding his head. He was thumbing through the introductory pages, at last lighting upon the table of contents.

"Blackwood had an extraordinary vision." Craig said, trying to elicit comment from his distracted companion. "He imbued Nature with a fascinating, and at times terrifying, immaterial Force. As in 'The Willows—'"

"Yes," Philip agreed in an off-hand way, without raising his head. "I'm trying to recall the details of another of his stories, one almost as famous as 'The Willows.' Coincidentally enough, I believe it also starts with a 'W.'"

Knowing Philip's moods better than Philip himself did, Craig unobtrusively backed away from his friend. It was not that the two never had squabbles—they did, and many times over the most inconsequential of matters—but Craig had learned when Philip wanted to be left alone. This was one of those times.

His index finger trailing down the page, Philip didn't even notice Craig's exit.

V. 9/21/8-. 7:55 a.m.

Luke Matthews stepped through his front door, coffee cup in one hand, unlit pipe in the other. The morning's chill helped clear his head, for which he was grateful—he'd had maybe a *little* too much to drink at the October Society meeting last night. He was glad he had some time before he had to get ready for work, time wherein he could make his peace with the always-troublesome Monday.

Luke took a deep, to-the-bottom-of-the-lungs breath and began to make a mental list of all the things that had to get done that day. At the same time, an excited, shrill voice cut through his thoughts.

"Mr. Matthews! Mr. Matthews!" The voice was young-boy high and slightly out of breath.

Luke turned and saw his next door neighbor's son running up to him. Roland "Rollie" de Witt, clad in scuffed Levi's and a Chicago Bears sweatshirt, skidded to a halt in front of the puzzled adult. "I gotta ask ya somethin'," Rollie blurted out. He had just turned five. Luke wished he could greet the morning with such enthusiasm.

"What's that?" Luke asked, noting that Rollie's fingers were red with chill. His clothes were damp too. His mother must not have warned him not to roll in the dew-wet grass.

"My Dad doesn't smoke a pipe," Rollie explained. "I was wonderin' if I could borrow yours."

Luke smiled a patronizing smile, fingering the briar pipe in his had. "Little young to start smoking yet, aren't you, Rollie?"

Rollie screwed up his face into an expression that said "grown-ups never understand." "I don't want to smoke it," he cried. "I need it to go with my snowman!"

It took several seconds for Rollie's words to penetrate Luke's still-stirring consciousness. Then he leaned back, as if Rollie might be carrying something contagious. "A snowman? In September?" Even though Luke liked Rollie, he couldn't help but snort. "Rollie, there's no snow now, won't be until November at the earliest."

"Is *too* snow in September!" was Rollie's eloquent rejoinder. "You come see!"

The day no longer seemed clear and sharp to Luke. He followed Rollie around the side of his house to the rear, feeling as if he were moving from sunlight into a shadowed dream-realm. The house's shadow enveloped both of them, intensifying the illusion. Luke had a strong notion to jog back inside and start the day all over again.

At last they quit the shadow and emerged in the wide back yard. There was no fence separating Luke's yard from his neighbor's; Rollie often played in both as if he owned each. Not watching where he was going, Luke almost stumbled over a partially uncoiled water hose. His eyes were transfixed by the unnatural scene before him. Coffee slopped unheeded over his cup's rim; his expensive briar pipe slipped between his fingers unnoticed.

To the left and right, cutting across his and the de Witts' back yards, as well as the yards of all the adjoining neighbors, ran an uninterrupted swath of shimmering, glittering snow. The pure white trail *had* been mussed up: A trisectioned snowman, obviously Rollie's handiwork, stood in the middle of the slowly melting path. Rollie's feet had left prints; there were even the remains of a "snow angel", explaining Rollie's wet clothing.

As Rollie stooped scavenger-like and snatched Luke's pipe, interpreting its fall to mean he could use it, Luke realized the snow path was consistently fifteen feet wide with a sharp boundary. No cloud could have left a trail so precise, so exact. A snow-making machine? he thought. No, he would have heard any loud mechanical racket in the night. Not only was the swath consistently wide, it was uniformly deep—about three feet, Luke estimated. It couldn't exist; like the spoor of an angel, it couldn't exist—and yet it did. Luke could feel the freezing cold radiating from the running mound even where he stood, some six feet away.

As Rollie speared the pipe's stem into the snowman's mouth, right below the two Quik-Lite charcoal briquette eyes, Luke came to the aware-

ness that somehow, some way, this was connected with the October Society, and that he hadn't seen or heard the last of the business yet.

VI. 9/21/8-. 4:06 a.m.

"Craig?"

"Wha … what? Who is it?"

"Craig, it's me, Philip. God, I'm sorry, I know what time it is—"

"You're doing better than I am; I don't know what time it is. Umm, what time is it?"

"Christ, somewhere around four, I think."

"Phil, what's going on? What're you calling me at four a.m. for? And what's all that noise in the background?"

"I'm at the highway patrol station—"

"*What the fuck?!*"

"Hold on, hold on, I'm … I'm all right, I just thought I should be the one to call you and let you know—"

"To let me *know*; let me know *what*?"

"Just, just calm down. Uh, on the way back home, I came across Paul Ansare's car … there's been a wreck—"

"So what you're telling me is—"

"He's dead, Craig. Paul Ansare's dead. There's more to it, but I can't go into it over the phone. I'm sorry to wake you up; I thought you'd want to know. I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Sure, sure, fine; my God, Paul dead; I don't believe it. Hell, are you all right? Do you want me to come get you?"

"No, I'm fine, the police are going to drive me home as soon as I finish my report. I know you've got to teach this morning, so I'll let you sleep. I'll talk to you later."

"Okay, Phil, give me a call if you need anything."

"I will. 'Bye."

"'Bye …."

VII. 9/22/8-. 12:11 a.m.

Either Philip had found the information he needed or he had given up the search, because he replaced the Blackwood volume with an agitated gesture minutes after Craig had slipped away. Philip caught up with Craig halfway across the spacious lounge.

"I took a trip in my mind for a bit," Philip said. "I'm back now." He gave Craig an apologetic look. "Sorry I snubbed you."

"No apologies necessary. But take this goddamn drink I've been carrying around for you before it becomes a permanent fixture in my hand."

Philip took the snifter and knocked back better than three quarters of it. "I imagine someone's spoken with Paul's wife today," he said as they continued walking between soft-spoken groups of people.

Craig nodded. "Oh, yes. The police broke it to her, but I had Martin Danforth get on the phone with her immediately afterward and offer to handle all the necessary arrangements. She was very grateful. You know, I didn't get any sleep at all this morning after you called. I was on the phone the better part of the day, calling our members, pulling in favors, trying to make things as humanly comforting for her as possible."

"Good. I'm sorry you had to work so hard, but I'm glad we were able to help in some fashion."

The two had come to the head of the group's table. Near them in the wall was the crackling fireplace. Pleasant tendrils of warmth laved the pair, belying the early autumn morning. The glowing embers threw an orangish cast over them as Craig turned to Philip with a somber countenance.

"When you called last night to tell me about the accident, I remember you saying there was 'more to it.' We haven't really discussed what happened last night—do you feel you can talk about it?"

Philip faced the leaping flames. With a start, Craig noticed the reflective glints at the corners of Philip's eyes. "I'm not quite sure I—" he began.

A voice interrupted his feeble protest. "Phil, please, tell us what happened." Without attempting to, Arianne Sprecher, a journalist and four-year Society member, had overheard the men. "Really, Philip. Look at all of us, moping in this oversized room, claiming we're honoring Paul's memory, and all of us too scared to even say his name. You were the one who found him last night; you're the only one who can tell us about it. Why not get it out in the open?"

Other members had by now overheard Arianne's impassioned words, and they made sounds of agreement. The clamor was not loud, but it was persuasive. Without spoken directions, the October Society members began to gravitate to the long oaken table around which they customarily sat. Tonight, Philip found himself at the table's head, the seat usually reserved for Craig as recording secretary.

Philip made a deprecating gesture. "I confess, I've known all of you on the order of years now. Yet I'm not sure I can tell you what happened yesterday without everyone laughing at me, claiming I'm pulling your legs. You'll think I'm making up a story and smearing Paul's name. I don't want that to happen to me or to the group."

Voices were immediately raised in protest, but Arianne's cut through most clearly and convincingly. "Listen, Phil. The motivating factor for this

group is our appreciation for what most others scoff at. We all love the strange and the supernatural, even though most of us consider it a purely intellectual pursuit. If something out of the ordinary occurred last night, I don't think you could find a more accepting and open group than the one gathered here tonight."

Cries of "Hear, hear!" accompanied the speech.

"All right." Philip spoke with obvious reluctance. "I'll tell you what happened as I perceived the course of events. I've said you won't believe me and I still think that's true, so I won't argue with you afterward or defend myself."

He turned away from the group momentarily and stared into the fire. He seemed to wear a hellish halo with red and gold rays. Losing himself in the flickering fire, his mind slipped the grasp of time and returned to the previous morning. Then he shook himself, as if to lose the mantle of madness, and looked back to the table.

"As you all know, we've lost Paul Ansare. I found him last night, dead by the side of the road." Philip contemplated the fireplace for a moment; how the fire inside seemed to writhe with a curious intelligence, as if it were aware of its own purpose, that purpose being to dance. He wondered what other seemingly unthinking forces were possessed of emotions, desires. "Our regular Sunday night meeting broke up somewhere around twelve-thirty in the morning. We had all said farewell to Benjamin. Paul was one of the first to leave. He lives ... lived in Outerville, as I do, and so was traveling down 36 on his way to the junction with 26 and so on into town."

Philip's eyes became glazed, as if not focused on any one thing in the room. "I was doing a little better than the speed limit to get home as quickly as possible. My wife doesn't like me to be out too late and I don't like to make her worry. Since I was traveling fast and was already tired to begin with, I almost didn't see the accident. I would have missed it entirely, were it not for the fact that my car ... fishtailed at that moment. I'll come back to why I fishtailed in a second. As the car swerved, I recognized in my headlight beams Paul's Celica off the side of the road. It had slid into a culvert, hit a brace of trees, crumpled the front end, and turned on its side.

"I regained control of my own car, although it took me almost a quarter of a mile to come to a complete stop. Praying there would be no traffic that early on a Monday morning, I made a U-turn and slowly cruised back to the accident.

"In the weak light, I could see the beginning of the Celica's skid. The wide, greasy marks stood out sharply on the pavement. Then I saw what had caused him to lose control of his vehicle. *And* what had made my car fishtail. Don't ask me to explain yet. Just believe me when I tell you it was a roadside patch of solid ice."

Open mouths and arched eyebrows met Philip's statement, but if he expected anyone to challenge him, he was disappointed.

"Now, I had made it across the patch, so I know Paul could have made it as well. There was something that had made him slam on his brakes just before the ice. Could it have been the sight of the ice itself? I don't think so. It was perfectly clear, like a layer of glass surfacing the road. No, something else had made him veer."

Tiny beads of sweat stood out on Philip's forehead, either due to his proximity to the fire or the intensity of his recollection. He wiped them off; somebody coughed, then he continued.

"The ice on the road was enough to tell me something out of the ordinary had happened. The morning was cold, but not cold enough to freeze standing water. Of course, all of these thoughts flashed through my mind in a matter of moments; my primary concern was Paul's condition. Within seconds, I had switched off my motor, clicked on the emergency flashers, and stumbled out of my car door."

VIII. 9/21/8-. 1:07a.m.

The eye-aching glare of headlights reflecting off the Celica drummed up a migraine in Philip's head. His dress shoes, worn for the meeting, gave him no traction on the road's slippery surface. Nearly falling several times, he inched to the berm and slid down the short, slick embankment.

Paul's Celica had crossed both lanes and now lay on the driver's side. Philip dropped to all fours in the rime-coated grass, soaking his pants. Muttering prayers, he peered through the windshield to determine Paul's condition. For a moment, a scream welled up in the back of his throat. *Paul's body had no head!* Then an errant breeze blew away some cloud-cover and a moonbeam lit the ravine. Paul's head was still attached to his neck. Philip felt no relief: From the body's condition, it was obvious no life remained.

He refused to accept this at first. Ignoring the cold, the discomfort, and the horror of the scene, he scurried rodent-like to the underside of the car. Using the drive shaft and muffler exhaust as ladder rungs, he clambered up to the Celica's passenger side, now a plateau. The automobile shifted a fraction of an inch, then moved no more. Philip felt it wouldn't overturn—and felt that saying a few prayers to that effect couldn't hurt either. The car's surface, smooth and glossy to begin with, was now covered with a frosty sheen. Philip knew he was more in danger of slipping off the top than of having the car tilt.

As he secured a position on the elevated side and began tugging at the door handle, a tiny but insistent realization broke through his concentration. He was not alone at the accident scene—and whatever else was there

with him, it did not feel as if it were of human origin. He didn't pause in his exertions to investigate the uncanny feeling; he worked harder at the door handle. The passenger side door had buckled when the front end collided with a tree trunk. He feared it wasn't going to surrender to his efforts.

The deep night's wind was picking up with each passing minute, whistling fiercely through the swaying, rickety branches. If wind could be said to have a destination, Philip thought, it seemed to be headed his way. The whistling increased in volume, becoming a howl. The wind possessed a rhythmic quality, as if it were pulsing in and out stentoriously. Like a mystic conveyor, it brought other sounds to his ears: echoes of footsteps, huge and resounding, more heavy than a man's could ever be.

The lights of Philip's car seemed to dim and fade out, leaving him bereft of illumination. Kneeling on the car's treacherous surface, Philip felt as if the ground around the Celica had slipped away, leaving him adrift in a shadowy void. His lower lip trembling, his throat pulsing with sobs that would soon break free, Philip threw his head back. There was some small comfort to be found in the jagged silhouette of the pine tops against the clouds. Even that ease became a portent of evil when the clouds parted once more, allowing the bone-white moon to shine through.

Philip *saw* at that moment, and in the very act of seeing, he made himself forget. Although somewhere in a spider-webbed corner of his subconscious the image would remain forever, he could never again call that sight to the surface. To do so would have been to invite madness. Just then, he realized he was being *watched*, observed by something that had no part in the ordinary, common world. Instead of acknowledging that something *else* was out there, he bent back more furiously to the task at hand. As he did, the clouds slid into position once more, eliminating the moon's glow.

His brush with the inexplicable lent Philip the strength of dread. With an upward tug that almost dislodged both of his shoulders, as well as his precarious perch, he opened the passenger door. The crushed metal screeched raucously, a sound totally at odds with the forest surroundings. It seemed few things of Man had penetrated this far—and those things that had did not last long.

The door swayed into an upright position and held itself there like a sail set to catch a propelling wind. Philip lowered himself into the awkward opening, taking care to place his feet just so. It was an effort not to trample Paul's body in the narrow, cramped space. Philip knelt over Paul's form, still frantically seeking some sign of life. He moaned Paul's name over and over, knowing there would be no response. The gear shift stabbed his ribs. The dashboard pressed against his back. And the steering wheel was just damn in the way. Paul's body was still held in position by the shoulder harness, and it took Philip several minutes to release it. Philip held his fingers to Paul's

neck and wrist, seeking a pulse that would indicate some hope. There was nothing under his fingertips except frigid flesh.

Afterward, Philip could not remember just how he got Paul's body up and out of the crazily canted Celica. Somehow he did, although it took the remainder of his strength. He carefully stretched Paul's corpse on the torn, muddy turf, amid newly fallen leaves. Philip's car headlights were visible once more, and Philip inspected Paul's body. There was an open gash on his forehead, several ribs were clearly crushed, and a leg was broken. But from Paul's pale, bluish pallor, Philip tentatively guessed that Paul had suffered a heart attack just prior to the accident.

Not a single car had passed since Philip had found the accident. He felt as if he had left the rational, work-a-day world and crossed into a primeval countryside inhabited by dryads and satyrs. His isolation was intensified—when he realized, again, he was not alone.

Hair prickled at the back of his neck and his thoughts ran so quickly they tripped over each other. *Jesus, it's the Watcher, the Watcher returned, he's come for me, not just Paul, and it was the Watcher that Paul saw, the thing that caused him to have a heart attack, just before his car veered across the patch of ice into a tree.*

Philip whirled around, wishing he had some weapon in his hands and knowing the most modern automatic rifle would have no effect on whatever he encountered.

It wasn't the Watcher. In a way, it was almost worse.

Paul Ansare stood beside the pummeled automobile, an indecipherable expression on his faintly luminescent features.

"Good Christ," Philip whispered. He could scarcely breathe. He checked at his feet to make sure Paul's corpse was where he had placed it. It was. "My God, what are you? What *are* you?" Crashing waves of faintness washed over Philip's mind, threatening to spill him into blackness. He resisted, but couldn't help staggering backward erratically.

A voice that spoke without words buzzed in his ears like static-filled radio reception. Paul was speaking, but his mouth did not move. It remained frozen in an enigmatic line.

"Philip. I'm glad it was you."

"Paul? What—how can you—"

"If it were going to be one of the club members who found me, I'm glad it was you. I think you'll best understand what's happened to me. You see, I've been doubly freed." Paul sounded meditative, as if now he finally had a chance to think about things he had had no time for in life. "The accident freed me from life, and you freed me from imprisonment."

Philip suddenly realized he was looking *up* at Paul's lambent visage. He'd stumbled and fallen backward on his rear without noticing it.

"I've learned that mankind was not meant for what we call 'civilization.' The life and the flesh are out there, in the woods, in the wild places. The Master taught me this by deliberately causing my death while I was still in the car. I discovered I was released from my mortal body—but that which survives death was trapped in a cage of steel. I came to understand much more while I screamed without a voice, hammered without hands. And then you freed me."

Philip wanted to ask Paul questions: How could the dead man communicate with him? How could he see the Celica through Paul's form? But he could not shape the words.

"Now I wish I'd listened to you earlier this evening. I wish you'd been more forceful in your objections. But the past is as lingering as the autumn wind. And I must go join the Master as the newest hunter in his pack." Paul's head turned away momentarily, as if he were in silent communion with a distant someone in the unlit woodlands. He then continued: "By the way, Philip, you would do well to stay away from this stretch of woods in the future. Warn the others away, too. The woods, and this road, have been claimed by another."

"Paul—" Philip finally managed to stutter, his hands making vague halting motions.

"I've got to leave: The Windwalker calls and his patience is short. Dispose of the flesh as you will. My new companions tell me it makes good eating." A disquieting pause. "Farewell, Philip. Know that we wait for you to join us too."

A choppy gust burst through the twigs, pushing Philip's hair down across his forehead. It licked around the edges of the spectral image and seemed to tear at Paul as if he were a papier-mâché dummy. Shreds of him were flung into the shadows like sere ash. As the rushing wind whittled at him, Paul did not move; his expression did not change.

Philip, too, was mute and immobile. He sat in the roadside slush, watching his former associate disintegrate wisp by wisp, and when nothing was left of Paul, he sat there still, wondering who and what rode on the breezes around him.

IX. 9/22/8-. 1:36 a.m.

"Finally," Philip concluded, "I recovered enough presence of mind to get Paul's body into my car and drive it to the highway patrol station. I think you all know the rest." He folded his hands: a punctuating gesture.

Any other group, at the end of a narrative so bizarre, would have broken into heated babble. The October Society members, however, remained

still and calm, as if consciously mulling some new discovery of science. A log popped in the hearth, a solitary intruder in the silence.

"Windwalker," murmured a pensive voice.

Craig's head darted up. "What's that, Rachel?"

Rachel Carson, farther down the table, shook her head. "I'm not sure. It's something Philip said about Paul's new 'Master.' Paul also referred to the Master as 'Windwalker.' That reminds me of the stories my great-grandmother used to tell me. She was a full-blooded Iroquois. On cold autumn nights—nights such as this—she used to speak of the Wendigo, the Windwalker ... the Bringer of Snow."

"'The Wendigo'!" Craig exclaimed. "That's what you were looking up in the Blackwood book, Phil!"

Philip nodded in agreement, his eyes focused on Rachel. He knew Rachel was an administrative assistant, and he could see the concentration as she searched through her mental files, looking for stories and legends that had been whispered to her in toddlerhood. "The Wendigo is a great Native American deity," she continued. "He—or It—apparently has a great deal to do with the natural elements and the guardianship of the forest. His tales are primarily told in eastern Canada, New England, and the Midwest."

"Itiqua ...," spoke up another member, Lionel Granger. "Itiqua and ... Ithaqua! I wonder if it could be possible!"

"What, Lionel?" asked Philip. "What're you saying?"

Granger, overweight and retiring, found himself the center of attention. He seemed not to notice; his voice shook with barely pent-up emotion. "As you know, I'm a collector of Lovecraft stories and Lovecraftian material. In the body of writing known as the Cthulhu Mythos, there are references to the Windwalker. But his name is more ancient than Wendigo; in the Mythos he is called Ithaqua. He controls the storms, the clouds, the realm of the air. And don't you see—"

"Of course!" cut in Philip, realizing where Granger's line of reasoning was taking him. "That's so close to the name of the Indians who lived on the site of Durham—the Itiqua!"

"Right!" agreed Granger. "The similarity is too close to be coincidental. It might only have been the crazed Joseph Durham's feverish mind that transcribed the name of the tribe from Ithaqua to Itiqua. We might even conjecture that the tribe took on that name to appease their god. They were the followers, or the Children, of Ithaqua, the Windwalker."

As if the heat were leeching the very blood from his form, Philip's face suddenly became albino pale. "And the Itiqua ... the Itiqua worshiped at—" He ran a savagely palsied hand through his damp hair. Craig's hand shot out and grasped his friend's shoulder to steady him.

"Phil, what is it? Damn it, what is it?" Craig tried to convey both reassurance and urgency; the combination was unnerving.

Philip was hurriedly casting his gaze around the assembly, nodding at each member in turn and counting as he did so. His voice, cracking under his breath, was enough to chill Craig. "Nineteen, *twenty!*" Philip finished counting with a cry. "Twenty. With Paul in the Society, we had twenty-two members! We should have twenty-one here tonight!" Again he began his inexplicable attendance count. He leaned over and frantically clutched Craig's coat lapel. "Who couldn't make it tonight, Craig?" he demanded. "Who begged off from this meeting?"

Craig shook his head in confusion. "It, um, it was ... Rick, Rick Wrightson. He said he couldn't make it tonight. Said he had something else to do. Something about a prior engagement."

"We've got to get hold of him. We've got to call his house and make sure he's all right."

The intensity of Philip's voice, the fixedness of his gaze, paralyzed Craig; he'd never seen his friend in such a state. The other members watched with a mixture of revulsion and unquenched curiosity. They alternately moved in more closely and scooted their chairs back away from the table.

"Why call him now, Phil?" Craig asked, puzzled. "It's the middle of the night; I'm sure he and his wife are long asleep by now. I don't want to wake them up—"

A jagged-edged moan broke from Philip's bloodless lips. "Just do it, Craig," he pleaded, "damn it, call him! Call Rick—now!"

Benjamin Casprak wasn't caught up in Philip's hysterical outburst. Acknowledging Philip's serious tone, Casprak retrieved a cellular telephone from a nearby desk and handed it to Craig. "Go ahead," Casprak assured him, "it's all right."

Craig brought out his Society notebook and riffled through to the directory; his less-than-steady finger began to punch out the Wrightson phone number. As Craig finished dialing and put the phone to his ear, Philip faced the others. With breathless, barely intelligible phrases, he began to describe to them what he had omitted from his earlier narrative: his talk on Sunday with Paul Ansare and Ansare's unorthodox business proposal.

Craig was meanwhile engaged in a more-or-less one-sided conversation. On his part, there was a lot of "uh-huh"-ing and head nodding. Finally Craig concluded the conversation by saying, "Very well, Mrs. Wrightson, I can assure you that if any of us hears anything, we'll let you know immediately." He pressed the button that severed the connection.

"Please," said Philip in a voice almost a sob, "don't let it be—"

Craig locked Philip with a leveling stare. There was compassion in his eyes as well. "You know what's happened, don't you?"

Tears began to well up in Philip's eyes. "I didn't know then! I had no way of telling! All I remember is that before the end of our meeting Sunday night, Paul cornered Rick Wrightson and began talking to him. I guess they were talking about the real estate deal; but Christ, for all I knew, they were talking about the latest ball scores! Paul was doing a lot of fast talking and Rick was doing a lot of head nodding, as if in agreement—" Philip shrank in his chair, his features falling in on themselves even as his friends watched.

"Mrs. Wrightson," Craig addressed the remainder of the group, "was not in bed—she was still awake, and very nervous. She said her husband went out this evening to check out some land, some property he was considering buying. Rick told her that, with Paul's unfortunate but timely death, he, Rick, now stood a very good chance ... of making a killing in real estate. He was going to drive out to St. Elmo's Wood ... where Paul had told him the land would be coming available—"

"Right near the Old Stones," Philip finished for Craig in a now-toneless voice. "Near the Old Stones, where Paul, and then Rick, were going to set up condominiums—the Old Stones, where the Itiqua tribesmen spilled the blood of their enemies to worship the Windwalker."

X. From the *Outerville Observer*: 9/24/8-.

> Following a four-hour search yesterday morning, police and volunteers have recovered the body of Outerville resident Richard M. Wrightson. Wrightson had been missing since Monday night. His body was found near the Indian stone monuments in the Outerville-Durham Forest, popularly known as St. Elmo's Wood.
>
> The cause of death has yet to be officially announced. Sources close to the police have informed the *Observer* that the victim died from exposure and shock due to extreme cold. Monday night's low did reach the lower 40's, but there is still some question as to how Wrightson could have met his death from this temperature.
>
> Additional reports from witnesses at the scene reveal further unexplained details. "Sure, it had been real cloudy that night," said Horace Yardley, owner of several tracking hounds occasionally used by police. "But I know there hadn't been any rain or sleet or such. And yet, there was new-fallen September snow melting all around Mr. Wrightson's body."

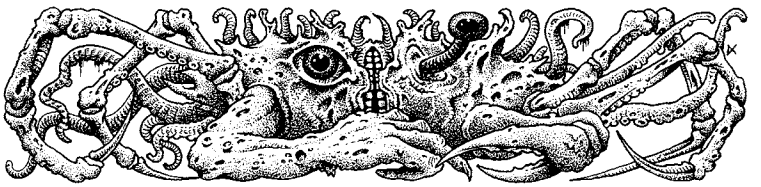
About "Stalker of the Wild Wind"

Though "Stalker of the Wild Wind" is quite original and indeed self-sufficient, those in the know will recognize the intertextual richness of its connection with two Lovecraft tales, "The Temple" and "The Madness from the Sea" (the third sub-narrative of "The Call of Cthulhu"). It is as if the Johansen Narrative had been written by the Prussian U-boat commander Karl Heinrich von Altberg-Ehrenstein.

More importantly, though, Rainey has grasped as few others that cardinal tenet of Lovecraftian technique: One must through the gradual accumulation of mundane detail simulate the world shared by author and reader. It is even more of a challenge to build a convincing world that is already a step removed from that of the reader. The added distance thus gained supplies yet another degree of refraction through which the advancing horror may be glimpsed. The more dimly we see it, in a glass darkly, the more convincing it will be. That is what Rainey has done here, fashioning what first appears to be an air-ace story from the First World War. Then one sees he has gone to all the trouble for the sake of a different sort of story altogether. To jump to the Second World War, it is as if his elaborate narrative world of aerial dogfights and biplanes serves as a broad aircraft carrier from which the story, like a fighter plane, may leap off into the sky.

There is a faint note of ironic distance in "Stalker of the Wild Wind" in that, as Mythos buffs, we figure we have some idea, more than the narrator does, of just what devil it is he has encountered. But here is another respect in which Rainey's tale diverges from the hackneyed stereotype. We might expect the narrator's ignorance to give way at some point to several paragraphs of Mythos erudition, as he stumbles on a copy of the *Necronomicon* (or, in this case, perhaps *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*). But it doesn't. Rather, as Tillich says, the Mystery is preserved as a mystery since it has been revealed but not dispelled. It is no less mysterious for having been manifested. In this way, Rainey's "Stalker of the Wild Wind" manages to justify a phrase from Lovecraft that it might have chosen to use as an epigram: "leaving the sane earth altogether and merging with the unknown arcana of upper air and cryptical sky" (from "The Shadow over Innsmouth").

"Stalker of the Wild Wind" first appeared in *Terminal Fright* #1, November-December 1993.



Stalker of the Wild Wind

by Stephen M. Rainey

My name is Klaus von Moltke. In September of 1918, toward the end of the Great War, I was a Rittmeister, or Captain, in the German Imperial Air Service's Jagdstaffel 15, stationed at St. Mihiel, France, virtually within short distance of the bloody trenches of the Western Front. In those days, the time-honored traditions of warfare were undergoing dramatic changes, due to the development of such weapons as the machine gun, the tank, the submarine and the aeroplane. On the battlefields, more men died in a single skirmish than in whole campaigns a few short years before. In those God-forsaken trenches of mud along the front, hundreds of thousands of young soldiers from both the Allied and Central Powers huddled with disease, rats, spoiled rations, and poison gas, ever obeying their commandants' misguided orders to charge valiantly into "no-man's land"— the scant hundred meters or so between opposing trenches— where they would be immediately cut down by machine gun fire and hand grenades, or entangled in barbed wire should they by some dark miracle gain the far side. Indeed, conditions in these trenches were so horrible that, in their hopelessness, men preferred death by bullet or bayonet to the slow agony of remaining in their strongholds.

So it was that those men such as myself who flew the new machines became a class unto themselves, an elite fighting force who filled the heavens with fire and angry sound, with a fury born of hope that their efforts would help bring a swift end to the inhuman suffering below. Alas, while the aeroplane unquestionably altered the shape of the war, it was the unfortunate fact that Germany's initial air superiority only prolonged the struggle in the trenches, for the Allied machine would have otherwise decimated the Prussian infantry months or years sooner. In the end, severe shortages of equipment, poor judgment from the Central Powers' high command, and the threat of revolution at home finished the war both on the ground and in the air.

But it was on September 13, 1918, the day after the Allies began their offensive on St. Mihiel, that I flew my final mission, and since that day I have

not and will not in any manner board an aeroplane. The fear might be called irrational, for to speak of it openly would place me at a handicap amid the company of sane persons; still, the fear exists, as certainly as the events I witnessed did exist, and no matter its irrationality, the fear of that *thing* is greater that any fear I might harbor of fighting in mud, or of dying in any fashion at the hands of men. Its history is relegated to manuscript so that my lucidity may be acknowledged or discounted only by those who come after me.

On September 13, America made her first great offensive of the war, sending over 600 aircraft, including British and French planes, against St. Mihiel, outnumbering our air force, the Lufstreitkrafte, two to one. Their ground offensive commenced simultaneously, and our forces were crushed by the weight of sheer numbers. Even our superior aircraft could not withstand the onslaught, and I lost many friends that day. In my Fokker D.VII, I brought down four French Spad 13's and one of the new Sopwith Snipes, the British answer to the D.VII, but even then, the struggle was all too obviously futile. During a dogfight, I sustained a deep gash to my right cheek, whether from a bullet or flying shrapnel I never knew. The wound was painful and I lost a disturbing amount of blood, but it was not sufficient to stop me from flying. However, for the rest of that day, I managed only to elude enemy gunfire and avoid colliding with one of the hundreds of aircraft buzzing through a compact airspace. In the end, I retreated to our aerodrome at Metz, just across the German border, to regroup with other survivors, of which there were few, and hurriedly plot a last-ditch counterstrike for the following day. My fellow Rittmeister, Erich Hoffmann, and I divided the four remaining pilots of our squadron into two wings with the intent of launching a raid on the Allied occupation force at dawn.

The morning of the 13th saw our small group joining up with the remnants of several other Jastas and Jagdgeschwaders (large hunting groups) who had also retreated to Metz following the previous day's disaster. All totaled, our number was seventeen, and, of these, we lost two on take-off, due to the damaged states of the aeroplanes. Hoffman's group flew to a level of six thousand feet, while I led my wing in vee formation up to twelve thousand, keeping the rising sun at our backs. The assorted pilots from the other wings, led by a young Oberleutnant named Reisendorf, flew to the northwest, their plan being to swing south and attack from the rear once we had engaged the enemy.

The Fokker D.VII was at that time the finest scout craft ever produced, and my own personal plane, awarded to me upon my attaining the rank of Rittmeister, had seen the downing of nineteen enemy aircraft over the course of four months. Prior to that, during 1916 and 1917, I had flown Albatros D.II's and D.III's in which I brought down twenty-six enemy planes and a dozen observation balloons. By January of 1917, I had earned

the Orden Pour le Merite award, often known as the Blue Max. During my career, I had been shot down twice, once without serious injury, the other behind enemy lines and at the expense of two fingers of my right hand. That downing, in October of 1917, very nearly took my life, but I succeeded in making my way back to our base at St. Quentin, and was returned to active duty a month later.

So you may see, my experience has been one of closeness to death; indeed, the pilots in my Jasta nicknamed me *Schwartz Kater*, or "the Black Cat", a tribute to my having cheated death on so many occasions. Accordingly, since, unlike their French and British counterparts, German flight leaders were allowed to paint their aircraft as they wished, I painted my D.VII black, with red wing tips and tail fin, in order to be recognized by friend and foe alike—much in the same way that the late von Richthofen, the so-called "Red Baron", had painted both his Albatros and his Fokker Dr.I dreidecker bright red.

I must confess that on this last day I felt terrified, for I knew that the chances of returning from this mission alive were less than slim. The clearly imminent defeat of the Fatherland contributed to my feeling of despair, yet I still proudly considered myself a fighter pilot, an ace, and my own will to fight refused to desert me. I allowed none of my terror to affect the course of my mission; however, I recall that, as we flew westward high above the French countryside, I turned to gaze at the rising sun, feeling in my heart that this would be the last dawn my eyes would ever behold.

Then, moments later, I saw the first dark specks appear in the sky over St. Mihiel; only a small number, probably a single squadron, flying at about ten thousand feet. They would see Hoffmann's minor wing below well before they saw mine. I resisted the temptation to dive into an immediate attack and waited until the enemy fighters began to close on Hoffmann.

Evidently, they must have expected my ploy, for half their number broke formation to attack Hoffmann; the rest began to climb, obviously without having yet seen me, but anticipating an attack from above. There were five of them, dark olive bullets with broad, bat-like wings, their red, white, and blue roundels flashing in the sunlight like defiant, fiery eyes. Spad 13's, I saw, probably piloted by Americans. They continued climbing past our old altitude, and I knew that they would attempt to circle to the northeast, hoping to snare my wing from behind. Giving my pilots the signal by waving my right arm up and toward the enemy, I throttled up and pulled back on the yoke, lifting my D.VII into a slow climb, anticipating an intercept at fifteen thousand feet, fortunately with the sun still at our backs.

The maneuver resulted in my flight positioning itself, undetected, directly in front of the oncoming fighters. When their leader saw me, I was already bearing down on him, tracers spitting from the barrels of my twin

Spandau machine guns. A double row of bullet holes appeared in his engine cowl, I noted with satisfaction, before he roared past me. His squadron immediately realized its predicament and split down the middle, one pair veering to the left, the other to the right. I gave a last hand signal, directing my two wingmates to pursue the dispersing targets, while I banked sharply to the left to chase the flight leader. I caught a brief glimpse far below of a dogfight in progress—Hoffmann's wing had engaged the enemy as well.

The leader's plane was already smoking, but he had come about with amazing quickness and was heading toward me by the time I completed my turn. I saw his guns flashing, and heard the sharp ding of a bullet striking my left wing. This was an experienced pilot, I knew, for as he bore down on me, he did not so much as waver from his determined course. I opened fire at a hundred yards, but within two seconds the Spad was behind me again.

The Fokker D.VII was the only aeroplane in the Great War that could climb vertically for a short distance and complete several loops in succession. I throttled forward, pulled hard on the yoke, and roared into a steep climb until the plane was completely inverted, then rolled right-side up, finishing a half-loop that put me above and in pursuit of the enemy. He had already begun to bank to his left, but now, with my advantage of altitude, I dove hard and caught him from behind, opening fire at point-blank range.

I saw the pilot twist around in surprise, no doubt shocked by the ability of my aircraft. He leaned into a sharp dive, but it was too late, for my shots rattled over his fuselage and I saw a flash of flame erupt from the engine. An accomplished aerial marksman, I attempted whenever possible to fire only into an opponent's engine, giving the pilot an opportunity to crash-land and possibly survive. Today, driven by desperation, I loosed another volley, and seconds later the whole foresection of the fuselage was blazing angrily. The poor pilot, realizing he was about to burn, climbed from his seat and leapt into the air, to fall writhing beside his flaming ship. While balloon observers often escaped death via parachutes, fighter pilots had never been issued these life-saving devices. The Spad and its doomed pilot fell quickly out of view, leaving behind only a spiral plume of black smoke that quickly dissipated in the wind.

I had only just glanced back for a sign of the remaining enemy when a loud *thunk* shook me from behind. One of the Spads had circled around and was gaining on me from behind, machine guns crackling. I saw his wingman behind him, banking to intercept me should I attempt to escape. I twisted the stick hard to the left and then back, sending the Fokker into a spiraling barrel roll, which sent a dizzying rush of blood into my head, but succeeded in temporarily shaking the enemy from my tail. I had gained a few seconds before they were back on me, and, having pushed my velocity to better than two hundred miles an hour, I again pulled up into a steep

climb, then applied the rudder hard to the right as the Fokker began to stall. Now, pulling back on the stick, I spun back into a quick dive and straightened out, a maneuver I had learned from the ace Max Immelmann. The two enemy planes were now zooming at me head-on, so I cut loose with my Spandaus, to hear the gratifying *dings* of contact with one of the Spads above the roar of my engine.

This victim was apparently a less hardy soul than his unlucky flight leader. He peeled away to his left, cowl smoking, then went into a straight, shallow dive. I turned to pursue, praying I had time to make a pass before his partner bore down on me again.

I did. My target was steady and true, its pilot seemingly unnerved by my first attack. He looked back and saw me coming, and still did not take evasive action, merely increased the angle of his dive, hoping to outrun me. But my Fokker caught up easily, and I was now able to rattle off a volley that went straight into the Spad's Hispano-Suiza engine. Its propeller went whirling into space, and the plane arced into a slow spin, but did not burst into flames. The pilot at least had the presence of mind to recover from the spin and try to glide his craft to a landing. The last I saw of him, he had leveled his wings and was attempting to bring his nose up. His descent was terribly steep.

I knew I still had at least one immediate enemy with which to contend, and a second later I saw him, coming at me from the right; the sun on his wings betrayed him, otherwise I might have been shot down by surprise. Forewarned, I turned toward him and pushed my nose into a vertical dive that would have torn the wings off virtually any plane but a D.VII. Cold wind burned my face, painfully whipping at the wound I had received on the previous day. Within seconds I had descended five thousand feet, and found myself about to enter the thick of the battle raging between Hoffmann and his quarry. My Fokker screamed into a sharp bank to the right, leveling out at eight thousand feet, now aimed northward, toward Belgium. Glancing back, I saw my pursuer still locked onto my tail but at least half a mile behind. I knew that if I could put some distance between myself and the nearby dogfights, I would be able to turn and attack the Spads without risking a collision with a fellow German.

But it was then that my fortune changed, for to my left I saw a new squadron of planes coming up from St. Mihiel, and their leader, flying a pure white Sopwith Snipe, immediately homed in on my solitary aircraft. Now close to thirty planes filled the sky, for, to the east, Oberleutnant Reisendorf's two flights had appeared to join the fray. I resolved to push ahead for another mile before swinging around to commence a new attack, thus taking advantage of the open airspace to gain altitude. I thought I could hold my own against the Snipe.

It was not to be. This new aircraft, almost a match for my Fokker, closed to within a hundred yards before I'd gone half a mile. I began to roll, dive, and climb sporadically, hoping to throw the enemy off my tail. This pilot, a level-headed, cool Brit, hung back far enough to keep me in view no matter what maneuver I attempted, but was able to fire several volleys at me that made contact. With a loud *thwap!*, a bullet split one of the struts on my right wing, and a dense cluster of holes appeared in the wing disturbingly close to my cockpit. I executed a split-S maneuver, diving hard and rolling into the last half of a loop, sending me back in the opposite direction a thousand feet lower, then repeating the diving turn to head north again at six thousand feet.

But when I looked back, the Snipe was still there, and off to my right the Spad I had previously engaged was closing rapidly. I dove again, hoping to coax even more speed from my ship, but the damaged strut began to quiver and groan, protesting that any additional stress might finally rip the wings from the fuselage. Adrenaline boiling in my veins, I desperately tugged on the yoke at full throttle, risking a fast climb, then a shallow dive, then another quick, shorter climb. I put a little distance between myself and my pursuers, but I still could not achieve a position to engage them in battle.

The Snipe and the Spad continued to maneuver deftly behind me; each time, I managed to break free from their lines of fire and gain more altitude. But my crippled wing would eventually cost me a decisive move, and it seemed only a matter of time now before they had me. A couple of bullets zipped through my tail fin, one of them pinging off the metal rim of the cockpit so that I felt the heat of its passage. Somehow, I wrung more altitude from my engine without losing my lead on the enemy. The altimeter read fifteen thousand, and the air had grown almost intolerably cold. Much higher, and my carburetor would freeze.

Suddenly, I was enveloped by a bank of dark gray clouds that appeared out of nowhere, for moments before the sky had been clear and sunny. I had to consider the unexpected cover a Godsend, for here was my chance to escape my foes and perhaps turn the tables. More than likely, they would climb above the cloud layer hoping to catch me as I emerged. So, despite losing the advantage of altitude, I descended slowly, hoping to come out of the cloud well out of their sights.

Then the veil abruptly vanished as quickly as it had appeared. I found myself flying over dark, rolling hills mottled with stands of twisted-looking trees, with no roads or railroads anywhere in sight. My compass assured me I was still flying north, and I knew I should now be over Belgium, with Luxembourg to the east. A silvery river threaded the highlands several miles to the west, which might have been the Meuse, but the countryside

appeared totally unfamiliar. Far ahead, I could see shadowy, humped silhouettes along the horizon, which looked like tall mountains, but which must have been clouds, since no major ranges lay between here and the North Sea. Most disturbingly, nowhere could I see the first sign of human habitation—no town, nor house, nor church, nor farm.

I turned around to see if I had shaken the enemy fighters. To my surprise and dismay, I had not. Both the olive-drab Spad and the snow-hued Snipe cruised perilously close to my tail. Yet the Allied pilots appeared as struck by the landscape below as I, for they were passing hand signals back and forth, both peering around and about them as if they, too, could not comprehend the transition into unknown territory. Furthermore, when I gazed backward, I received a violent shock, for my eyes beheld, not empty sky or even a solitary, drifting cloud bank, but a mammoth, gray wall of snow-capped rock crested by unnaturally regular, sharply angled peaks, like the monolithic teeth of some continent-sized monster. Vertigo assailed me, for never had I seen anything so huge, not even the Alps. Worse, the sense of unreality that swept over me nearly caused me to lose control of my aircraft. I almost vomited.

The mountain range rose higher than my plane could ever climb, much less have already crossed.

Completely disoriented and shaking uncontrollably from the cold and impact of this bizarre phenomenon, I merely nosed the plane down, feeling that beneath this alien sky I was exposed to some unknown horror that at any moment might lash out and strike me from the air as I would a fly. All thought of eluding my pursuers had vanished; instead, I found a strange comfort in their proximity, as if the fact that there were other human beings here served as a link to the familiar, however chaotic, world that I had left behind.

Neither did they make any move to attack me, no doubt sharing my disbelief and discomfiture. Now, to add to my already shaken nerves, I saw that great banks of dark, rolling clouds had begun to mass overhead, almost like living things converging from all points of the compass. The sun disappeared behind a huge, gray wall of vapor in the east, submerging the awry landscape in almost impenetrable shadow, while to the west quick flashes of brilliant yellow light began to pulsate within the hearts of the clouds, splitting that same shadow with questing, illuminating tendrils. A low, powerful rumble rose above the sound of my engine, gradually growing louder, like but yet unlike the peals of thunder after a lightning strike. This sound was constant, never diminishing or receding, but possessing a weirdly modulated quality, almost as if the deep tones playing counterpoint to each other were becoming articulate.

Even had it been conceivable to return over the top of that colossal range to our rightful airspace, I could not deny a strange, fear-tinged exhil-

aration, the thrill of having discovered some exotic new frontier, if quite unintentionally and with no earthly idea if escape were possible. I determined to press on while my fuel held out. Looking back toward the two enemy pilots, I wondered if they, too, felt the challenge of this newfound mystery. The Brit in the Snipe made eye contact, and offered me a respectful salute. I returned the gesture.

Then my heart almost stopped, for in the distance ahead I saw those huge black masses coalescing like smoke from a vast kiln, slowly twisting and growing with the incredible illusion of sentience. I felt as if I were witnessing some sort of monstrous birth in the sky, for as the clouds began to take on a definite form, deep within their hearts pulsed bright yellow flashes of energy, accompanied by an increase in the rumbling I'd heard before.

To my complete horror, I saw that the amorphous shape in the sky assumed the vaguest outlines of something man-like—a trunk, miles high, with two pairs of vaporous appendages that uncannily resembled arms and legs. The head, if such it could be called—a domed nimbus of swirling smoke—was crested by spidery filaments of mist almost in the shape of a spiked crown—or the horns of a titanic demon.

I merely continued to fly straight on, overwhelmed by the vast and incredible majesty of the thing striding forth in the sky. And stride it did, for those great bipedal columns alternatingly billowed into slow, rhythmic motion, almost gliding, so it seemed, atop a layer of thin, flattened cloud. High above, from where one might expect eyes to be found, a bright, cyclopean ball of energy crackled and blazed, seeming to glare down at our mosquito-like aeroplanes with manifest intelligence.

Mesmerized by the unfolding spectacle, I had neglected to pay my instruments their deserved attention, and I was suddenly forced to take note when a cold blast of air reminded me that I had slipped into a steepening dive. I pulled on the yoke, climbing quickly, but losing airspeed. The Snipe pilot behind me, also focused solely on the phenomenon before us, reacted just in time to pull his aircraft away from a potentially deadly collision.

He waved an apology, which I ignored, my attention now demanded by this nightmarish stalker on the clouds. I quickly banked right, away from the Snipe, veering into a ninety-degree turn that would carry me away from the stratospheric giant, but toward a dark, forbidding skyscape which no longer offered a horizon as a point of reference. Most uneasily, I noted that far in the distance numerous tiny flashings of yellow light split the darkness, which for all I knew might suddenly generate new horrors of their own. Still, I had no choice in the matter, for it was clear to me that this impossible reality had become the only reality with which I could concern myself.

Glancing back, I saw that the Snipe remained close on my tail, but the mammoth stalker already loomed over the straggling Spad with obvious

malevolent purpose. An arm of thick, roiling vapor rushed down toward the tiny aircraft, trailing tendrils of gray smoke; I saw the plane dive quickly, banking right at full speed, then hurtling earthward in a controlled spin. My heart swelled with hope as, for a moment, I thought the pilot might make good his escape. His own maneuver proved to be his undoing, for, with a sudden jerking motion, his wings snapped from their mounts, fluttering away like the torn wings of a butterfly, while the bullet-like fuselage began a long, arcing plummet toward the earth below. A bellowing roar of immense volume shook the air, a thunderous voice that echoed either triumph or fury at the death which might have been its own to impart.

The Snipe pilot must have crossed the brink of sanity then, for I saw him shouting inaudible curses at the monstrous thing on the clouds, and he swung around to attack. I confess that at that moment I shared his insane notion to take the offensive; my remaining hundred rounds or so of ammunition offered a small, illusory measure of comfort, for in the "normal" world, the hard reality of the gun meant that I was not defenseless. So, praying with little faith that the Snipe pilot might somehow survive his mad dash, I turned to follow him, preferring in my heart to die fighting rather than fleeing. But my immediate thought was, what possible effect might bullets have upon a cloud, living or otherwise?

The answer came soon enough. The Snipe climbed quickly toward the towering, spiked "head", its Vickers guns spewing lethal tracers straight into a vast widening chasm that I took to be a mouth. From the gaping maw a brilliant bolt of white light flashed toward the Snipe, outlining it with a hot corona. I thought this to be the end of the brave Brit, but then I saw the plane bank sharply left, still under the pilot's control. He zoomed past me and circled to execute a second pass. Now my turn was coming, and I tightened my grip on the stick as adrenaline exploded in my veins like the burst of a grenade.

The cyclopean eye of fire rolled down to regard me, and in that moment I perceived a terrible cognizance, a passing of awareness between us, that I realized with certainty amounted to a death mark. The stalker loomed above, its slowly converging "arms" threatening to engulf me as I zoomed into my attack. I pressed the trigger of my Spandaus, loosing a long unbroken salvo of fire into the horn-crested mien, determined to empty my last round into it if for nothing more than to voice my defiance. I felt the air turning hot, and the apparition before me wavered as if through a heat-haze. The black nimbus and the burning eye grew to nightmarish proportions, and my gun choked to a halt, either empty or jammed. I practically tore the yoke from the floor as I pulled the Fokker into a vertical climb to keep from slamming into the onrushing visage.

Then the sky was suddenly empty, for I had somehow crested the mountainous head. However, my overwhelmed reflexes were slow to react, and I suddenly found the plane shuddering to a halt, the engine groaning as I neared and reached stall speed. Before I knew it, the alien landscape and its twisted, unnatural trees had appeared before me, spinning dizzily as the plane lost altitude. I barely had the presence of mind to pull slowly back on the stick, waggling it gradually to the left and right and pumping the rudder pedals to level the wings. I came out of the dive at eight thousand feet, headed southward toward the gargantuan mountain range, leaving the behemoth behind.

Now, unable to attack with so much as a gesture, I resolved to take my chances and challenge the impassable peaks looming behind me. It was this direction whence I had come, and this direction which I perceived to be my only chance at salvation. I looked back, wondering at the fate of the Brit in the Sopwith Snipe. For several moments, I could not see him—only the vast and awful silhouette of the cloud-stalker, blocking the entire horizon astern. Then I saw a quick flash of white, and the Snipe appeared just to the west, high above and also heading south, his desperate bravery now perhaps tempered with the wisdom gained following our ineffectual attacks. I began to ascend, only to find the plane's movement sluggish and bumpy, and I realized that the cracked strut had completely given way during my last panicked maneuver. The lower right wing tip, bent just this side of the strut, sagged at a dangerous angle, prompting me to hold the stick as level as possible, for on my first abrupt maneuver I *would* lose the wing.

I was suddenly swallowed by darkness. With a movement that defied whatever laws of physics might still apply in this evil realm, the stalker bore down on me with speed like the wind. From the oncoming wall of black cloud came a roar of exultation, and I realized now that the end must surely be at hand. Even had my wing been whole, there was no way I could outrun death thundering toward me on demonic wings. Having lived so close to the edge for the past few years of my life, and realizing now the inevitability of my fate, I found myself suddenly overcome by a feeling of calm acceptance, my proud Prussian soul prepared to take the final journey with honor. I began very gradually to bank my plane toward the great beast so that I might face it head-on.

Then the most strange and wonderful event happened, which I recognized as a sign of kinsmanship between those who flew in the service of their countries, regardless of their respective states' political stances. The pure white Sopwith Snipe circled near me, its pilot obviously aware of my aircraft's disabled state. As the plane passed close by, the Brit raised a hand in a final salute, and I saw his ship briefly nose down, then roar into a full-power climb, aimed directly at the burning eye of the monster. He sailed

through space like a comet, and his last few tracers spat from his guns. I realized his intent, and shouted a vain plea for him to desist, for I could not imagine that such an attack might for one moment slow the momentum of the cloud-thing.

I recall the Brit's death as it were a dream. The Snipe homed in on that cyclopean fireball with unerring precision, as if the pilot had by some preternatural instinct recognized it as not merely an eye, but a heart. I silently counted down the seconds to impact, and when I reached zero, I held my breath and wished my former enemy a quick and painless crossing of the threshold into God's house. A blinding flash of light seared across my field of vision, followed seconds later by a reverberating *boom* of such force that I feared my damaged wing might be shaken to pieces. It somehow held together, unlike—to my great elation—the stalker on the wind, whose cumulus, billowing form began to come apart before my very eyes, spreading slowly and majestically into countless, seething masses that trailed thin streamers of dark vapor. These disintegrating components slowly unraveled like balls of gaseous fibers, swirling and blending with one another but failing to reshape themselves into their former state.

I think I must have shouted praises to the heavens then, though my memory of these moments is muddled due to the unchecked flow of adrenaline that coursed through my body. I somehow maintained control of my aeroplane, for the moment having completely forgotten about the impassable barrier that lay ahead of me, separating me from the world I'd known before. I was brought back to that terrible reality moments later, when I turned from the scene of death behind me and focused on my aeroplane's heading.

The mountain range was there, now partially cloaked by a thick veil of gray fog, which seemed to grow denser even as I watched. My spirits, so heightened by the destruction of this kingdom's terrible monarch, fell abruptly with the realization that I must prepare myself yet again for a death that I had been spared by the intervention of a newfound kinsman. My Fokker had begun to shudder and lurch erratically as the integrity of the damaged wing diminished, and I knew that all hope must again be reluctantly abandoned. I resolved merely to proceed straight ahead with a flight that would end quickly and mercifully in a collision with the steep, almost vertical plane of rock that jutted cruelly into the sky.

Well before I was to reach that bitter end, my D.VII entered a thick bank of clouds that for many anxious moments I feared might prove to be a new, living extension of that thing I'd left behind for dead. As I flew, the grayness that obscured all vision began to brighten, slowly transforming into a mist almost as pure white as the Sopwith Snipe which had destroyed the stalker. Then, as if by a divine hand, the clouds parted, and I found myself soaring over a wooded, rolling landscape, checkerboarded with fields

and farmhouses, divided by the bright blue ribbon of the Meuse River off to my right. Far ahead, I could see a tiny blotch amid the greenery that I knew to be Tellancourt, and another further east, which was Verdun. The aerodrome at Metz, from which I had taken off some unknown time before, lay about forty miles ahead, and if God's hand held my wing together, I knew I might somehow return alive. I gauged by the sun that it was close to noon.

I landed at Metz, fuel tanks dry, and on touchdown my damaged wing finally came apart. I rolled to a halt outside a deserted hanger, finding no flight crew waiting to greet me. Apparently, none of my flight had survived—though I came to learn from observers on the ground that Rittmeister Hoffmann and Oberleutnant Reisendorf had met their fates bravely, both having taken down large numbers of the enemy—and the Allies were now on the march, all resistance crushed. A few assorted personnel remained at the base, all busily packing what supplies they might, or destroying equipment which could not be evacuated, a category which included, to my utter dismay, my aeroplane. No one was at the moment interested in my ordeal, and had I related even a cursory account of it, my word would have ceased to have meaning or honor among my peers, and surely my superiors would have ordered a court-martial. So, without witnesses or evidence of my experience, which I knew and still know to have been as real as the war itself, I merely fabricated a story of having engaged the enemy and emerged victorious, after sustaining damage that resulted in the destruction of my aircraft. It was a story never to be questioned or even repeated, for just over a month later Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to Holland and the war ended, as did my illustrious career as an aviator.

* * *

Exactly what happened—and where it happened—I have never learned, and probably never will. In these days of widespread air travel, it seems inevitable that at some point, another flyer, perhaps even on some other portion of the globe, might penetrate that mysterious veil between worlds that I and two others did on that day so many years ago. Indeed, during the following World War, and all the conflicts since, where the skies have been filled with fighting machines as never before in human history, who is to say that some who left the earth in their ships, never to return, did not suddenly find themselves flying over an unknown land, only to hear the thunder of some impossible, monstrous giant on its way to deal in death?

While for all these years, as I have said, I have never again allowed my feet to leave the earth, sometimes I awake in the night and find myself reeling through a gray-toned, shadow-choked sky, hearing the pealing voice of the cloud-stalker, and I tremble with the knowledge of what must still exist

somewhere on the fringes of our so firmly perceived reality. And sometimes I see that anonymous face behind the helmet and goggles that offered me a final salute: that of the brave and noble Englishman who went to his death so that I, his enemy, might have a chance at life. More even than at the existence of such a horror as I have seen, I have marveled at the way that man I never knew died, and his salute still haunts me. Every September 13 since that date, I have drunk a toast in his honor, and above all the men and women I have known in my life, somehow I feel that he was my truest friend.

I am old, and am not long bound for this earth. I hope that the keys to God's house will be offered to me at my time, and there I hope to meet that pilot, that we may soar among the clouds together.

Something in the sky does call to me.

* * *

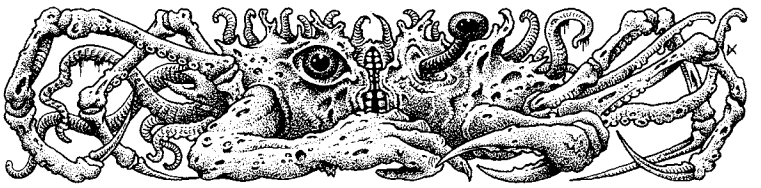
Manuscript discovered among the belongings of Klaus von Moltke, who died at the age of 98, in Heilegenstadt, Germany. Found with the manuscript, an airline ticket in von Moltke's name, dated the day after his death—destination unknown.

About "The Country of the Wind"

I have already referred to the neglected Christian apocalyptic element of the Derlethian Ithaqua myth. Those genes breed true in this story (which first appeared in *Chronicles of the Cthulhu Codex* #6, Autumn 1994), in which the parallel to the modern fundamentalist belief in "the Rapture" seems complete. As in a great host of fundamentalist popular novels (Sidney Watson, *In the Twinkling of an Eye; The Mark of the Beast*; Joseph Birkbeck Burroughs, *Titan, Son of Saturn, The Coming World Emperor, A Tale of the Other Christ*; Salem Kirban, *666*; Ernest Angley, *Raptured*; etc. [See my article "Antichrist Superstar and the Paperback Apocalypse", *Deolog*, vol. IV, #1, Jan./Feb. 1997, deologmail@aol.com or http://www.stealth.net/~deolog]), a dumbfounded protagonist discovers that a great number of people have just vanished, food left in the oven, clothes on the line, crashed automobiles and airplanes, etc., and that the collective disappearance was the result of their having been rapt (caught) up into the sky by a returning god.

The parallel is anything but fortuitous. As it happens, even the god responsible for the Rapture, the biblical Jehovah/Yahve, began very much like the Wendigo legend. Like his Syrian counterpart Baal-Hadad, Yahve was a storm god who rode a chariot of thunderclouds through the sky and speared the hapless with his lightning arrows, fired from his (rain)bow. Even the name Yahve, as one plausible theory suggests, comes from a Semitic root for "to blow (like the wind)." Richard L. Tierney has identified Yahve with Yog-Sothoth (see his *The Winds of Zarr*; *The Drums of Chaos*, forthcoming; and his sonnet sequence "The Legend" and "Yahweh" in his *Collected Poems*, Arkham House, 1981), but the parallel with Ithaqua is quite impressive as well.

Comtois may seem to transgress verisimilitude when his protagonist "happens" to open the one letter that gives the game away to the reader, but it is no gaffe. Rather, the momentary departure from verisimilitude is an interesting turn into metanarrative metaphor. Comtois is calling the reader's attention to the subtext: What the protagonist has found in the old envelope is effectively the collective suicide note left by the vanished town.



The Country of the Wind

by Pierre Comtois

Judson Porter stood with his shotgun cradled in the crook of his arm. It was midmorning on a late autumn day high up in the Vermont hills. The sun had still not quite cleared the treetops as its rays slanted down through the forest at an almost horizontal angle, suffusing the wood, with its yellowing foliage, in the curious orange-yellow glow it took at that time of year. Judson cocked his head to listen, but there was nothing to hear except the soft sursurance of the wind in the trees and the dry rustle of leaves just trembling in anticipation of their fall to the already leaf-matted ground. A tree creaked suddenly and Judson's gaze snapped in its direction, then nothing. He'd set off for some hunting before dawn, leaving the pick-up a mile or so back along the interstate, but hadn't fired his gun all morning; not that he really expected to. Hunting was just an excuse to come out to the forest and enjoy the silence, to breathe the cool, fresh air that came down from the nearby mountains. He'd found this path leading into the forest from the side of the road and felt it as good a place to start as any, and was really beginning to enjoy his walk when it was abruptly cut off.

Before him yawned a gash in the earth that bisected the path. He leaned over and saw the little stream rushing at the bottom in a soundless current. About three feet below the edge of the cliff face were the remains of an old, washed-out bridge, its ancient timbers in a tangled heap at the bottom of the ravine. One stout beam, however, remained more or less in place as it clung to the near side of the gorge and reached over to the opposite side in moss-covered desperation. Judson eyed it, then the other side, where the path he'd been following continued on into the light-spattered forest beyond. Disappointed that such an interesting walk could be interrupted so soon, he determined to at least give the tenuous crossing a chance.

Keeping a careful hold on his gun, Judson slowly lowered himself the few feet to the embedded beam. At last, his foot found firm hold on its soft surface and soon he found himself seeking a comfortable position on the end of the beam. Inching slowly forward, he was satisfied with the beam's firm

seating and quickly crossed to the far side. After a short look back at the way he'd come, he turned and faced the path.

Due to the great many pine trees that dotted the forest here, the floor of the wood was thickly matted with brown pine needles liberally mixed with a variety of leaves. Combined with the browned and yellowing leaves still in the surrounding trees, the sunlight seemed to make the forest glow, and gave the feeling that it should really be late afternoon rather than early in the day.

He was just about to start along the path again when something out of the ordinary caught his attention. Just off the trail, half hidden by some low-slung branches, stood a stele about three feet tall. He reached out and lifted away one of the branches, exposing the stone to fuller view. Judson grunted at the plainness of the object. On it was carved a peculiar five-pointed star. He'd half expected an announcement that the stone marked a state or county line, but there was nothing of the sort. Looking at the star, he decided it reminded him of the warding plaques he'd sometimes seen on barns in Pennsylvania, meant to protect the structures from bad luck. He let the branch fall again and stepped back onto the trail.

As he moved deeper into the forest, the trail narrowed and closed up behind him. He could tell that at one time the path had been a much-traveled roadway. To either side of him, he could still make out wagon-worn ruts, now overgrown with saplings whose trunks were two or three inches in diameter. Farther in, he saw where the banks of the road must have been, and that the larger trees had grown up and worn them away. He remembered the stories he'd heard of old farming communities deep in the hills that had simply died off earlier in the century as the rest of civilization passed them by. Soon he thought he could make out the old furrows of long abandoned fields among the maples, poplars, and oaks that grew off the trail.

Something thumped heavily to the ground off to his right, like the sound of a dull shot in the heavy silence. Judson whirled, aware that he'd instinctively leveled his shotgun in the direction of the sound. Feeling foolish, he lifted the barrel of his gun and peered through the fringe of underbrush at the side of the trail and tried to see what had caused the noise. He'd decided a squirrel must have dropped a chestnut when he saw something deeper in the forest. It was a building of some sort. Festooned with years of accumulated leaves and fallen branches, if it hadn't been for its unnatural, man-made lines, he never would have spotted it.

Judson hesitated and looked around. There was no evidence that anyone had been about the area in many years, maybe even decades. His curiosity piqued, and more than a little desirous for a bit of adventure, he stepped through the shrubbery and slowly made his way among the more widely spaced trees toward the structure as its true nature slowly made itself apparent. As he drew closer, Judson discovered that the building was actually an

old farmhouse. It had once boasted two stories, but the second floor had long since collapsed into the first. The remains of an old well and several outbuildings still stood off in different directions and, as he drew closer, a barn revealed itself standing behind the house.

Judson found what had been the drive that had led from the old road up to the farmhouse. He changed course to take advantage of the easier walking and continued on. A great pine tree towered to his right and, wrapped nearly around it, testifying to the violence of the collision, were the remains of an old wagon, its frame a rotted shambles but no less recognizable, with its tongue extending alongside of and past the trunk of the tree to where the bones of a team of horses lay half-buried in the humus of the forest floor. Judson stopped and rubbed his chin in puzzlement. Clearly, the evidence indicated that the wagon had crashed into the tree with tremendous force, but had the crash killed both horses pulling it as well? It seemed unlikely, but what other explanation was there?

Turning from the strange sight, he went over to the front door of the farmhouse. The door had long since fallen away and one look inside showed nothing of interest save the ruins of the upper floor as it lay in a moldering heap in the center of the house. A few trees had taken root amid the rubble. To the rear of the house, the barn still stood, relatively intact, and Judson was able to push one of the pair of doors open and step inside. Immediately he caught the suggestion of a foul stench that he assumed was the residue of all the animals once kept there, but directly dismissed the idea, for the odor was unlike any manure. The longer he smelled, the worse his body began to react. In no time, his gorge began to rise and he was forced outside again to escape the terrible odor. In the fresh air again, he had the opportunity to turn and notice that his hasty exit had been through the missing rear portion of the barn, whose weed-covered planks and timbers were scattered for dozens of yards all about the rear of the building, as if something had once exploded out of it.

It was while staring at the rubble that he found the colorful ward. Stooping, he pulled the circular plaque from beneath some boards and looked at it. It was as he'd first thought: The plaque bore the same colorful and intricate pattern as the wards he'd seen before on Pennsylvania barns. Also, like the stele farther back along the road, it sported a peculiar five-pointed star, except that this star was more faded, more hastily made, and somehow incomplete. His thoughts were interrupted by the snap of a twig behind him. He dropped the plaque and turned quickly, this time catching sight of a wild-looking dog slinking back into the trees about a hundred yards away. He knew he hadn't imagined things before. He continued to watch the spot where the dog disappeared and presently saw it again as it eyed him in turn. By its feral appearance, Judson surmised that it had once

belonged to someone in the area and had long since become wild. It seemed more frightened than frightening, so he ignored it. Shrugging off the last vestiges of his nausea, he walked back toward the front of the house and up the path toward the old road, pausing again to wonder at the crashed wagon before going on.

Repressing a sense of vague unease, Judson followed the remnants of the old drive out to the road and continued his leisurely walk. Around him, nothing had changed except for the height of the sun above the trees, but he nevertheless felt something was now different than it had been only an hour before. The ancient road began to bend slightly up ahead and as he approached the corner, it widened almost to what must have been its original width. Then, on the side of the road, he saw yet another dilapidated and rotting horse-drawn wagon. This time, its bed was piled high with a family's belongings that had long since crumbled into an almost indistinguishable lump. Once again, he saw the skeletal remains of the horses that had pulled it lying side by side before the wagon.

He hardly had the time to wonder at this new puzzle when he looked up at the road ahead, now visible around the bend, and saw an astonishing sight. The old road was crammed with every sort of wagon, cart, and buggy imaginable, all in various states of disintegration and decrepitude. Some were smashed into trees, some into each other, and others simply stopped in the open, each with its complement of dray animals and, Judson saw as he continued forward in stupefied wonder, the remains of every other kind of farm animal imaginable: cows, chickens, pigs, oxen. It looked to him for all the world like one of those old photos from World War II of roads choked with the remains of fleeing refugees after they'd been hit by attacking aircraft. It all appeared more eerie in the silence of the surrounding forest as he began to thread his way among the ruined vehicles, most of which were half-buried in the leaves and pine needles of decades of accumulation. At last, he emerged from them on the other side and continued down the road, which remained at its original width until it debauched onto the outskirts of what was once a tidy little farming village.

There were perhaps a dozen or so buildings, or what was left of them: a general store here, an eatery/hotel there, a blacksmith's; the rest were an assortment of small homes. Most of the buildings were partially collapsed and some even had full-sized trees growing up from their walls. Everything was covered with a thick blanket of leaves and branches and one house had been completely crushed by a fallen oak. Judson wandered into the center of the village, looking back and forth before deciding to investigate the general store. He could tell it had been a store by the large frames of windows whose glass panes had long since shattered and the broken remnants of farming implements that spilled partially from the door. A board nearly

gave way beneath him as he stepped lightly onto the wood platform before the door and peered cautiously inside, holding his shotgun out ahead of him. Inside, he could see the droppings of various animals on the floor amid the scatter of old merchandise that lay everywhere. An old-fashioned pot-bellied stove sat in the center of the room with its black flume lying in pieces about it. Broken shelving, some still holding a stray can or two, lined the walls. Shattered chairs lay around the stove and the cash register sat on the counter against the opposite wall with its cash drawer sticking out. Judson moved over to check its contents. Empty. He moved down behind the counter toward the rear of the store, where a small screened-off section showed where the local post office had been situated. The neat arrangement of brittle envelopes, stamp pads, and cancellation stamps indicated to him how important the postal supplies had been to the residents who'd hastily abandoned the town. Then it struck him how strange it was that for all the remains of farm animals he saw, he had not seen a single human skeleton. He felt a rising uneasiness until he rationalized it by figuring that if anyone had died, their families would have buried them, of course. Still, why hadn't he heard of such a hurried exodus from this old town from the locals who lived up the interstate where he usually stopped for breakfast and to fuel the pickup? They'd always been forthcoming with the local news before and the old timers who gathered there on Sunday mornings never missed an opportunity to regale a stranger with their knowledge of the area.

A bird cawed somewhere outside and broke his reverie. He looked around the room again and was about to leave when his eye caught something on the table in the postal area. A drawer was still partially open and something white peeked out at him. He leaned over and opened it more fully and found a handful of undelivered mail. Scooping it up, with the vague idea of taking it and dropping it off at the first post office he found, he idly sifted the envelopes. He decided it wouldn't do any harm to open one up. He placed his gun on the counter with the rest of the mail, and selected an envelope addressed to a Miss Fletcher who lived at—Misty Meadows, so that's where he was—and tore it open.

September 11, 1919

Dear Cousin Sophie,

Got your note the other day and as usual, enjoyed hearing from you immensely. It was good to hear of all the news of Misty Meadows, of Judy, Mandy, and Mike and Aunt Eleanor and Uncle Ted and even that queer old couple, the Branfords. Funny how you should mention them again, the Branfords, I mean. About their finding

> an animal in the hills and keeping it locked up in their barn. It's just like them. Remember how, on my summer visits we kids used to go over to the Branford farm to spy? We thought we'd find, I don't know, something queer, but we never did. Do you think Old Moe Jerring was just fooling with us when he used to talk about the strange goings-on of the Branford clan? And what about his spooky stories of the Indian god, Ithaqua? Sure it was foolishness, but like Old Moe's claim that he was half Algonquin Indian, it was fun to imagine that it was all for real. But seriously, Sophie, reading between the lines, I get the feeling that not all is right with you in Misty Meadows. Is something wrong? Anything I can help you with? If so, don't hesitate to write. Friends Forever,
>
> Camilla

Judson grunted to himself, replacing the letter in its envelope. He should have realized he'd learn nothing. He placed the mail inside his coat, took up his gun, and exited the store. Outside, nothing had changed. It was still only mid-morning, so he decided to continue down the old road for another hour or so before heading back. Looking behind him, he spotted the old dog again, except this time he didn't try to hide. He just stood in the center of the street, eyeing him. Judson shrugged. If the dog wanted to follow him, he could, but if it tried anything, he'd find a barrel full of shot to cool his temper. He hadn't gone more than a hundred yards up the road before it began to bend to the left, and soon the gradient increased as well. In no time, Judson realized that he must have missed a fork, because if he continued to follow this road much further, he'd end up at the crest of a tall hill that dominated the town and the valley in which it was located. But why would anyone build a road to the top of a hill instead of going around it? Further thoughts along such lines were soon dissipated in the natural beauty of the Vermont forest as the golden-leafed branches formed a glittering arch over his head. He reached a switchback, turned the corner, and immediately saw that the road became much rockier from the effects of run-off from the hilltop. It was with increasing difficulty that he was able to keep his breath with the steepening ascent. At last the blue of the sky began to predominate behind the thinning trees and soon they gave way completely to the balding hilltop. As Judson cleared the tree line, he had his second surprise of the day. At the rocky crest of the hill stood a tight circle of standing stones that bore an obvious resemblance to certain megalithic structures elsewhere in New England.

Judson had been to North Salem, New Hampshire, where the oldest megalithic site in North America was situated. That one was presumed to have been built by Celt-Iberians, but this one didn't seem at first glance to be anything like it, nor as old. As he approached more closely, Judson could see that the circle was composed of four huge stones standing on end to a height of over nine feet and an equal number of two-foot-high stones spaced between them. In the center of the circle stood a much broader stone that could have been used as an altar; but as Judson looked closer, he saw that it wasn't an altar at all, but some sort of capstone. It had been pushed aside, revealing a black opening into the rocky crest of the hill. In the morning light, he could just make out what might have been stairs leading downward. From the look of it all, the work had been done a long time ago. *But what*, he wondered, *had been kept down there?*

Judson shook his head. What in the world was all this doing on a hilltop outside Misty Meadows? Judging by the amount of growing scrub, the site had not been visited at least since the town below had been occupied. He shaded his eyes and scanned the surrounding countryside. There was the town ... he could just make out some of the buildings peeking from the canopy of trees. Around about were more hills, most a good deal higher than the one he was on. He studied the receding forest as it lay like a multicolored carpet over the rounded Vermont hills. Then Judson decided he could have a better view if he stood on the capstone and clambered up. From there, he could almost see straight down the rather steep hillside. He turned slowly, inspecting the hill from every direction, until he faced the far side, where his gaze was immediately arrested by the sharp contrast of white against the dulled hues of the woods. He took his hand from his eyes and squinted for a better look, but it didn't work; all he could see was that dog nosing around near the spot. At last, he hopped down from the capstone, frightening the dog with the sudden motion and sending it scampering away to a safer distance. He passed through the circle of standing stones to the edge of the hilltop and stopped. At his feet, strewn along the face of the hillside, was a field of discarded bones, thousands of them. They were thick nearby, but further out, scrub and grasses obscured them with years of slow growth. His first thought was that someone may have once performed animal sacrifices on the hill, maybe Indians, but as his eyes roamed over the bones they began to notice something in particular. Carefully, instinctively respectful, he negotiated his way a few feet downward until he was able to stoop and pluck up a skull from the collection at his feet. It was clearly human. Looking more closely about him, he could see half a dozen more. A strange feeling came over him and an atavistic fear spurred him back up the hill and back within the circle of stones, the sharp crackle of dried bones in his ears as his feet knocked them aside.

As he fell back against the capstone, a stray breeze mussed his hair, the only wind he'd felt all morning. For a moment, it seemed to soothe him and calm his nerves, but then a strange odor began to permeate the hilltop and again his gorge began to rise. Judson suddenly remembered the smell that he'd encountered in the barn. He began to retch, violently and completely. He propped himself against the capstone and wiped his mouth. The breeze had become a wind in a few minutes, and the once-blue sky had clouded over into a featureless gray. The trees of the forest below began to whip and toss, and soon he was nearly blinded by the flying grit and debris that seemed to focus around the circle of standing stones. Through narrowed eyes, he saw what looked like a wind-blown path open up among the trees along the distant hillsides. It was as if the wind blew in a stronger current there than elsewhere in the valley, and created an effect that looked for all the world as if some massive, invisible creature was shouldering its way through the encumbering woodland. A low whining caught his attention and when he looked around, he found that the dog had come within the stone circle with him and now huddled, shaking at his feet. The fear that had seized Judson a little earlier returned with renewed strength as he saw that current of air push a path directly for him.

Fear turned to panic as Judson backed away from the unnatural phenomenon and made to dash from among the stones. Just as he did so, he was buffeted by the rising wind, and forced back toward the capstone. Again he tried to leave, and again he was driven back. Against all reason, his mind began to accept the seemingly impossible—that some supernatural force was at play and refused to allow him escape from the hilltop. He looked over his shoulder in the direction of the hills, which now seemed sinister and brooding, silent accomplices to the unfolding dire event. The current of air reached the base of his own hill and the trees along the tree line began to shudder as though in fearful anticipation of its arrival. With increasing violence the blasts of wind whipped the trees to and fro, shearing their foliage and sending leaves and twigs flying skyward in a cloud that gathered overhead, focusing around the megalithic circle.

Blinded and stung by the flying debris, Judson fell back against the capstone, lifting his shotgun out before him in a useless defensive gesture. His arm was over his eyes and when he noticed a definite change in the timbre of the howling wind, he lowered it a bit and gasped. He was now in the center of a small cyclone whose twisting, leaf-filled turbulence completely obscured the surrounding landscape. Slowly, horribly, before Judson's disbelieving eyes, the wind began to coalesce and visibly slow, although his hair and clothes continued to be whipped about.

He began to see eyes—thousands of eyes—and he felt without knowing that these were the eyes of the vanished townsfolk, of the Indians who

once lived in the hills, even of ancient Celts who'd been marooned on a strange, empty continent. They communicated volumes of suborned purpose, of enslaved desires, of resisted actions, at once refused and accepted—a love-hate relationship of ecstatic union between two opposing forces. And they wanted him to join them.

A sudden yelp from his feet enabled him to drag his eyes from the fantastic sight as the dog was lifted from the ground at his feet and whipped into the cyclone. Judson took one instinctive step forward to help, but found he was frozen to the spot by invisible, windy hands. He heard the dog howl with such terror and pain as he'd never in his most fearsome nightmares imagined. He watched in horror as the fear-maddened creature, thrashing wildly, was carried into the whirling maelstrom and suspended in the air a short distance from where he stood. Instantly the wind was filled with flying fur, and then with a sticky red mist as the dog was stripped of flesh, layer by layer, until Judson could see its still-pulsing vital organs against the white of its skeletal structure. After a few seconds only naked, scoured bones remained suspended before him, and then they were discarded to fall to the hillside below.

Unbidden came the vision of such a wind descending upon a small farming community, stripping horses, oxen, men, and women of sanity, flesh, and life. Although escape had certainly been attempted, none had been possible.

The thousands of eyes whirled round him now in an ever-tightening spiral. Each unearthly stare was at once a threat and a promise of joy. They awakened in Judson an impossible, alien yearning for the wild, free sky and for the spaces beyond it. His soul ached to join itself with that of the Wind-Being, and to roar and scream and laugh and moan among the crags of Earth's highest peaks, and to brush the stars in his eternal flight. As he stepped forward toward the circling eyes, primal instinct asserted itself. Without knowing, he raised the shotgun, still gripped in his right hand, into the vortex of eyes so that gun and arm were engulfed up to his elbow. As Judson was lifted off his feet, from somewhere a distant explosion sounded, and then echoed and re-echoed until it became an unendurable, assaultive roaring. Judson was hurled backward upon the capstone and flooded with wave upon wave of inhuman psychic agony. As the maelstrom faded and the pain began to subside, the man opened his streaming eyes and laughed with insane glee at the sight of the blackened stump where his right arm had been a moment before.

* * *

The doctors and nurses at the country hospital had been very kind to Judson and, upon his awakening, had explained how a motorist had found him lying by the side of the highway and had brought him directly to the hospital for care. They had spoken of a fever and of his delirium, which had scarcely been surprising given his terrible injury. They had hoped he would be able to tell them how his arm had been severed and its stump cauterized, but Judson had professed complete ignorance, unable himself to decide as to the reality of the terrible images which still groped and tugged at his mind.

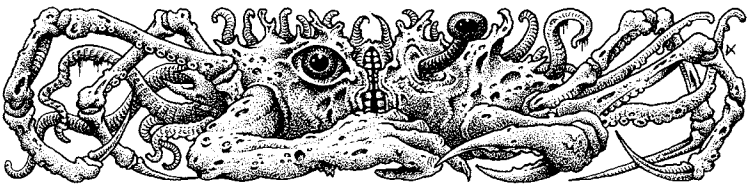
He raised his right arm and looked at its bandaged stump. He put his hand to his aching head and found that it, too, was bandaged. Maybe a board had fallen on it while he had been investigating one of those old houses and he had only imagined all the rest?

One day the doctor who'd been treating him entered the room along with an orderly and two nurses. They chatted amiably for a few minutes as they arranged their instruments on tables about his bed and one of the nurses adjusted the elevation of his bed to a more comfortable position. Soon they were ready and the doctor asked Judson to lay his injured arm on the table extension that jutted over the side of his bed. He did so, and the doctor reached over to a tray held by a nurse standing close beside Judson. He plucked a pair of small scissors and began snipping carefully at the bandages around Judson's right arm. Little by little the bandages began to fall away until at last the limb lay exposed, its skin grafts still newly pink and the scars still—then Judson caught sight of something at the end. He gently pulled his arm from the doctor's grip and looked more closely at the stump. The scar tissue began to move and weave, and from amid the wrinkles emerged a conglomeration of eyes, hungry eyes that seemed to devour his flesh, picking up where they had left off even as he watched. He screamed once, frightening the nurse near him into dropping her tray of utensils while the others stiffened in shock. Then, faster than anyone could anticipate, he grabbed a scalpel from where it had fallen on the bedside, and thrust it downward toward his throat, which had turned raw with the force of his continuing screams. To his mounting horror and panic, the orderly stopped his arm at the very moment of his self-destruction, while a circling wind seemed to come up out of nowhere. His screams turned from simple terror to sheer, mind-snapping pain . . . .

About "Wrath of the Wind-Walker"

Jim Ambuehl, a Minnesotan, has been involved in Lovecraft fandom for many years, during which time he has been honing his fiction-writing skills. Many of his stories (some under the wacky pseudonym "Lew Cthew") have appeared in *Etchings & Odysseys*, *Cthulhu Codex*, and other venues, and his "Shadow of the Sleeping God" will appear in the forthcoming *The Tsathoggua Cycle*. A collection of his tales, *Correlated Contents*, many like this story set in the imaginary Braving-Laren area, should be available from Mythos Books (c/o David Wynn, 218 Hickory Meadow Lane, Poplar Bluff, MO 63901). Ambuehl is also an encyclopedic archivist of Cthulhu Mythos fiction, and your editor has not hesitated to draw upon the deepest wells of his occult erudition in compiling the present series of Mythos anthologies.

Though "Wrath of the Wind-Walker", which appears here for the first time, is something of a tribute to August Derleth's seminal Ithaqua story "The Thing That Walked on the Wind", there is also a tip of the hat to Lin Carter's "The Acolyte of the Flame" (see the projected Chaosium collection *The Book of Eibon*) and Richard F. Searight's "The Sealed Casket" (*Weird Tales*, March 1935; also in Necronomicon Press' collection *The Sealed Casket and Others: Collected Stories and Poems: Two*, ISBN 094088-485-2). In fact, "Wrath of the Wind-Walker" ends the way "The Sealed Casket" *should* have!



Wrath of the Wind-Walker

by James Ambuehl

I. The Survivor

Revenge is a dish best served cold, or so the Spanish say, and nowhere is the truth of this maxim better borne out than in the unreported story of Professor Jonah Winslow, late of Royceton University. It is altogether fitting, even an understatement, to call it a chilling tale.

My name is James Joseph ("J.J.") Hanley, reporter for the *Braving Bulletin*. I had received from my editor what first seemed a routine assignment for a human interest column. I was to interview Professor Winslow at his residence just outside the nearby farming community of Laren. Like the shunned hamlet itself, which most think has more than enough to hide, the man was reclusive. Or at least he had been. But now he had a story to tell. It seemed that it was his idea, not my editor's, to do the interview. I discovered this only once I arrived at the old Winslow farmhouse, a rambling, ill-kept structure on the edge of Laren. His forebears had been farmers in the town, local barons, really, who valued the privilege of education which a hard-striving life had denied them, and made sure their young scion Jonah would not be similarly deprived. His education had taken him to some of the finest seats of learning in Europe and instilled in him a love for archaeology as well as a wanderlust to pursue it. Some of this background my own spadework had revealed, the rest disclosed by the man himself.

As the gaunt and wizened figure of Professor Winslow greeted me in his foyer, I noted how his appearance as well as that of the interior of the old house matched that of the exterior perfectly, a matched set of shabby genteel relics. I also noticed, and it took no particular investigative acumen, the large number of exotic souvenirs from many a research trek, his own or others, but probably his. The place was festooned with them, as if the man were operating an antique shop or a museum. This feature impressed me but did not surprise me, given my host's profession.

A third thing I noticed, though it may sound ludicrous for it to be remarkable in what some characterize as the Minnesota tundra, was how cold the place was. Colder in a subtler, more penetrating way than in the open air, and this inside a house whose radiators were audibly whistling with the effort of keeping the frosty air at bay. But there were other ways of doing that, and the old savant poured me a liberal glass of brandy after indicating a well stuffed if threadbare easy chair in front of his raging fire.

"You may know, Mr. Hanley, that it is my custom to shun the light of publicity. My expeditions have been carried out more to satisfy my own curiosity than to make my reputation among scholarly colleagues. And yet that is not the principle reason for the obscurity of one particular venture of which I have now decided to speak. Yes, Mr. Hanley, I will answer both questions presently: why it was kept secret, and why I am silent no longer. As for the latter, the story must be told now if it is ever to be told, since I am the last who can tell it, and I fear I shall not be available for the task much longer. As for the former, you will shortly deduce the reason."

Anyone whom I may allow to read this notebook will have thought it odd that I have bothered to polish the style of this account beyond the brief notes I took at the time. I have decided to write it out in connected form here despite the fact that I realized almost immediately that I should never be able to report what the professor told me. It was a tale most would decry as fabulous fodder fit for tabloid scandal sheets and hoax-mongering rags. I would make my apologies to my editor but write up the story anyway and "publish" it only here. After hearing it, I felt I owed it to Professor Winslow at least to set his story down in writing and thus make it possible for it not to die with him. Whether it will ever reach a wider audience I doubt. But at least I have allowed its echo to resound one more time.

II. The Temple of the Winds

I will tell you (began my host) the tale of an expedition which yielded the most spectacular discoveries of any in which I ever participated, and which I have nonetheless kept as quiet as I could. It was early in my career, the ink on my doctoral diploma scarcely dry, and I lacked both the institutional backing and the patience to go through the proper channels to arrange it. Besides, I knew that with official backing came control by those whose money came with strings attached. So I used a disproportionate amount of my family trust to hire a rather dubious group of men to accompany me on an expedition deep into the jungles of Cambodia. They were neither the typical crew of interested scholars nor of obedient, long-suffering native bearers. I was unwilling to wait out the shifting squalls of political unrest which plagued war-torn Cambodia, or, as it was called at the

time, Democratic Kampuchea, so, in order to afford protection from the rapacious Khmer Rouge butchers, I had been forced to hire a gang of mercenaries at least as skilled with guns as with tools and gear. And for all the precautions, we made it most of the way to our goal without incident. And the goal?

While pursuing my graduate studies on the Continent, I had, contrary to the owlish advice of my research directors, "wasted" quite a bit of time studying some of the earlier and long discredited writers on the subject of Asian and Pacific ruins. Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires*, Colonel Churchward on Mu, LePlongeon, that sort of thing. There were persistent hints, drawn seemingly from independent sources but nowhere corroborated by modern field research, suggesting the survival in inner Asia of the most outlandish cult. Have you heard the old joke about the missionary who preached to the Eskimos of the dangers of Hell's fires—and they asked him how they could get there? Just so, the legends told of an anomalous jungle cult worshiping a god of snow and ice, concepts which one would have thought lacking from their very language and world view!

What made me take the whole business seriously, however, was the occurrence of the same themes in an indisputably ancient record, something called the *Eltdown Shards*. Ah, to tell you the truth, I'm surprised you've heard of them. They are, as I suppose you know, ancient metallic fragments of various sizes that form a piecemeal record inscribed in some proto-Semitic tongue. The scholarly mainstream dismisses them as an imposture, like the similarly named Piltdown man hoax, despite the fact that Carbon 14 dating makes them blasphemously old. Far older than there should have been *Homo sapiens* loping along the planet. And that is why they are ignored. They give the lie to the rules of the conventional game, and those who are presently winning the game do not relish changing the rules. But, as I say, I was young in the field and had no reputation to worry about preserving, though I suppose I should have been more concerned about building one.

Thus it was that I decided to look for the cult, or for its remains, for the *Shards* hinted of a temple where the god of snows and winds, whom some called Avaloth and others called by another terrible name, had deposited his treasures. He held the keys of the treasuries of heaven, the legend said, and while comparative mythology would suggest this must denote the heavenly storehouses of the snow and even of the stars, often such myths were protective euphemisms for the fantastic treasuries of very real gold and gems the priests had extorted from their bullied flocks through many generations. It was this part of my theory which enabled me to interest my crew of paid adventurers, some of them local natives, others known to certain museum officials of my acquaintance as suppliers of certain exotic items legal and illegal. I intimated to them the possible existence of a store of trea-

sures should we locate the ruins. Leaving the precise arrangements somewhat vague, I simply hoped I could bring back enough relics to prove the truth of my reports, whatever plunder my associates might feel entitled to appropriate. Oh yes, I know how disreputable it all sounds. And, believe me, I am not defending it.

Let me spare you the travelog. You have guessed that we must have found the vine-clad set of ruins I sought, for Cambodia is rich in their like. Only these were not precisely ruins. At first I was not sure we had even found a man-made structure. What seized our attention was what first appeared to be a strange outcropping of naked rock amid the jungle, strange I call it because it was white. What sun rays penetrated the green canopy glinted off the mass with surprising brilliance. Closer examination suggested the impossible, the absurd: It was *ice*. An ice-encrusted building of compact rounded stones, as a matter of fact. The whole structure was veiled with streamers of vaporous fog which unfurled eerily as the surrounding heat made some of the frost sublimate directly into restless steam. I think most of us imagined ourselves the victims of some lesser-known type of mirage. Were we so sick of the heat and sickening humidity that our tired minds supplied the refreshing cold we coveted?

Daring to touch the frigid surface with cold-blighted fingertips convinced us that what we were seeing, and feeling, was no dream or hallucination, unless simple hallucination had already given way to complete delusion. As we spread out and surrounded the edifice, things only got less explicable. *Voices* could be heard from within the deep freeze. As might be imagined, the voices had the distressing sound of deep shuddering from the cold. But that shivering, teeth-chattering sound had a sort of fantastic and doleful *cadence* to it, and it *repeated*. We all looked at each other, as if seeking assurance that at least we were all sharing the same madness. And then one man of our party, more foolhardy than the rest, ventured into the opening, for the ice shroud was not complete. There was a door, and one could see from it how a foot-thick layer of ice overlay the black stonework below it, as if it were an intentional and permanent structural design. What sort of beings might congregate within? I was ostensibly the leader of the expedition, however unorthodox a venture it was, so I shortly regathered my wits and hastened to catch up to the man who was making his way cautiously inside.

There was actually a ceremony in progress. Here was all the evidence I required to know whether old legends spoke truly or not! Here before me were no ruins, no relics, no vestiges or fossils—but the rumored cult itself! In some small measure I felt as Schliemann must have felt when his spade lay bare sleeping Troy. Indeed, we were all so dumbfounded, surrounded by impossible realities, that we were momentarily oblivious of the strange and fearful impression our advent must make on those assembled for the rites.

The last thing I was thinking of before I beheld all eyes turning in the inner dusk in our direction was how the scene resembled the biblical scene of the Day of Pentecost, when the house in which the apostles sat was suddenly filled with the sound, though none of the felt force, of a mighty wind. The interior of the rock igloo was echoing almost painfully with raw, wild sounds of the screaming wind, though not a candle flame flickered unduly.

The chanting stopped abruptly, changing to urgent exchanges in a language none of us, in all our studies or travels, had ever heard. The worshipers began a few tentative steps in our direction. I thought I glimpsed one seated figure, on a dais raised above the general level, somewhat removed from the congregation. He remained enthroned. But then my attention was seized by the sudden fusillade of gunfire without! My initial assumption was that my latent fears had been justified; that some trigger-happy thugs in our party had flown off the handle. Wheeling about, I rushed the few feet back to the portal and stuck my neck out. Retracting it like a frightened turtle, I realized what had happened. Despite our vigilance, we had been clandestinely followed by a Khmer Rouge patrol. Their savagery, I am sure you know, was unmatched even by the semi-legendary Tcho-Tchos of neighboring Burma. Needless to say, a bloodbath ensued in which most of my men were lost as well as, I am happy to say, just about all of the Khmer Rouge. The wounded among them we summarily executed. Later, when I had the leisure to think of such things, on the long march back, I congratulated myself for having recruited seasoned veterans, not merely strong backs.

You will think me hard-hearted, but among all the deaths the only ones that struck me as particularly tragic were those of the tribal cultists, for none of them survived. They were canny enough to remain within the recesses of their strange fane, huddling about the throne of their leader as soon as they heard the gunfire. None of them fell victim to the Khmer Rouge assault, and probably none would have in any case, as they had after all remained unmolested by their countrymen thus far. No, I am sorry to say it was my own gunmen who, their bloodlust excited by the Khmer Rouge ambush and not yet abated, turned on the natives reacting to the natural apprehension they had of us, in view of the circumstances. Nor can I deny that the treasures of the little temple, which had indeed proved quite literal and material, exerted their own attraction. My mercenaries proved more rapacious even than I had feared.

As the handful of survivors quickly made the circuit of the profaned sanctuary, gathering their blasphemous loot, of which I resolved instantly that I wanted none, I examined the fallen forms of those whom my protests had proven impotent to save. I wanted to see if any spark of life or breath remained, and in the process I was startled to observe the physiognomy of

the dead, for they seemed more Caucasian than Mongolian in racial type, their long noses betraying but the merest, recent admixture of local, native blood. Later I was able to remind myself that the phenomenon was not entirely unprecedented, as witness the problematical Ainu people of northern Japan and the extensive collection of mummified, red-haired Caucasian figures discovered in Western Xinkiang in 1993.

My search for lingering life was rewarded in the single case of the hierophant of the cult. He lay before his bullet-splintered throne, his eyes fixed in a state of shock rapidly slipping into final extinction. I kneeled beside him in the widening pool of his own gore, my chest weighted by a burden of sorrow and guilt that could hardly have been greater had I myself pulled the trigger on the old man. He recoiled at my touch, mumbling some strange words that trailed off into a death rattle. It was as if he held a weapon he had lacked the opportunity to discharge—until now. And, having done so, he could let life go.

I sat gazing at his recumbent form, my scientific curiosity taking over again momentarily, and traced in my mind the lines of his remarkable physiognomy. Then I remembered my camera! I retrieved it as fast as I could from my gear and returned to the old priest's side. My lens revealed a hideous transformation. In no more than a minute and a half the wizened form had utterly degenerated in the most loathsome manner. He had not, strictly speaking, yielded to the depredations of rapid decomposition, which itself would have been singular enough, God knows; rather, he seemed to be succumbing to the blackening leprosy of *frostbite*. And in the last moments before mere skeletal stumps remained, I could have sworn his feet, which I had not thought to examine before, had something of the shape of *broad hooves*.

You see why this expedition was never reported to the press. We had trouble enough, given the results, shielding our endeavor from the watchful eyes of the State Department, to say nothing of the Khmer Rouge government. And then there was the profit motive. As I have said, I refused to claim any share of the tainted spoils, even for purposes of research. Displaying any of the artifacts, in view of their origin, was out of the question. My mercenary partners would see to the melting down of the gold, lest dangerous questions be raised about it. But, over their initial reluctance, I was able to photograph pretty much all the plundered objects on the way back to our jumping-off point in Turkey. Here, Mr. Hanley, are a representative set of the photos. You have my permission to publish them if you see fit. Obviously, I am breaking my silence at long last, though even the pictures will ultimately prove little of my story. I suppose I kept the whole miserable business secret as long as I did in hopes I might evade some measure of responsibility for the terrible crime my poor judgment occasioned. At

least, I suppose, I hoped some unnamable providence might thus understand that I sought not to gain either fortune or fame from my deeds. As part of my penance I purposely sought professional obscurity in the anthropology department of an unsung school like Royceton.

And so, I prayed, perhaps I might be spared. But I have abandoned that hope. This sheaf of clippings may hint at why. You are a journalist, a kind of detective. I believe I shall leave it to your investigative instincts to draw the proper conclusions from the evidence. Then, if you feel you have a story, you may feel free to print it, sparing no one, least of all myself.

III. The Death-Walker

Professor Winslow was courteous enough as he bade me rise and escorted me to the door, but his insistence was firm that the interview was over. He judged he had revealed his secret, though I found myself a-swim in unanswered and, I feared, unanswerable questions. They transfixed me as I drove along the unlit rural roads back to Braving. I did not even consider sleep but made a pot of strong coffee and sat up reading the file of news clippings.

It was a mixed lot, and without benefit of the professor's narrative I would have lacked any clue to seeing what most of them had to do with one another. On the whole, I came soon to feel that I was reading through Charles Fort's notes for a new collection of anomalies like his famous *Book of the Damned* and *Lo!* Here were brief notices and extensive studies of bizarre weather phenomena, most of which had altogether escaped me, though I pride myself on staying as current on world news as my time and resources allow. Most of them recounted, without much in the way of examination, stories about local temperature plunges, aberrant harvest failures due to unseasonable frosts in the most improbable places. Some talked of air disasters. Others had to do with obscure cult survivals in far-flung places. Some of these were quite detailed and had been torn from professional academic journals in the fields of anthropology and comparative religion. And still others, a la Fort again, concerned mysterious disappearances and freak deaths.

I made notes on several items I wanted to research further, but four clippings in particular struck me as more suggestively sinister than the rest. They belonged to the category of unaccountable deaths, and I quickly began to believe I knew what Professor Winslow meant to tell me in his circuitous way. For certain factors made me infer that the remarkable deaths were those of the surviving members of his expedition.

One of the adventurers, now financially independent, perished in 1975 while leading some associates on a mountain-climbing venture. In view of the man's skills his tragedy would have been a bit surprising, but by no means mysterious. As often in such cases, the culprit was unanticipated foul

weather. The unusual thing, though, was the precipitousness with which the squall of wind flew up from nowhere, as well as the restricted scope of it. For the rest of the climbers watched in horror as their leader was abruptly dislodged from his perch by a single, immensely powerful puff of chill arctic wind. His struggling form had actually been lifted clear of the mountain, plunging in a steep arc through the frosty air without striking the rocky mountainside along the way. There was otherwise no storm.

Stranger still was the sworn testimony of witnesses and medical examiners that, upon hitting bottom, the body *shattered* as if it had been instantaneously *frozen through*.

Something eerily similar had occurred two years later when another of the men had fallen over the side of his yacht (all the men had become quite wealthy as a result of their ill-gotten gains). Again, that he should have drowned was unexpected, given the considerable athletic prowess and experience of the man, a professional adventurer like his fellows. But, once more, the startling aspect was not the death itself. The incident took place, of course, in sunny summer weather, but the body, once recovered, was enveloped in a thick casing, really a block, of *solid ice*. You can see the trend.

1986 saw the death of a third man. Inclement (which, remember, means "unmerciful") weather was again at the root of the thing. The fellow had invested heavily in an oil operation in Alaska and was on site overseeing some rigging problem when he was all at once swept up, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. The radio had warned of tornado-force winds all the previous day, but they were still supposedly many hours away across the desolate tundra. And again, the icy cyclone which claimed the man was preternaturally circumscribed, localized, snatching nary a shingle from a roof (though, true to the weather predictions, the next morning witnessed hellish fury from the skies across the whole region). Again, there were witnesses to the event. And though all knew how capricious such winds could be, sweeping away a fortified building but leaving a flimsy shanty unmolested, driving a pine needle through a steel wall, none of them had ever seen the like of this. Their boss was pulled apart by the ripping force of the spiraling cocoon which held him. Spinning loops of intestines and internal organs and gore were all that remained of the once-robust man as the cyclone spun itself out and deposited the raw mass almost at their very feet, like, some said, a cat laying a caught mouse at the doorstep. They thought of the phrase "wind-devil" and wondered.

The fourth, and last (a few more men had survived the original battle in the Cambodian jungle but perished in intervening years under unknown circumstances), met his fate five years later while flying alone across British Columbia. The man, a reckless adventurer at all times, was not scrupulous about maintaining appropriate radio contact with the ground, so it was a

while before anyone knew something was amiss. The black box, recovered from the crash site, showed the pilot had frantically sought to communicate in his last moments. His wings had suddenly taken on a shroud of heavy ice and the plane had begun to plummet. At least his fragmentary cries seemed to imply such.

And there was something else. Right at the end he had stammered something about a pair of stars he had never seen before, a pair of purplish stars that seemed to loom up out of nowhere. Some more eccentric commentators on the event suggested a connection with decades-old reports by airline pilots of strange lights following their aircraft. But no one was really in a position to rule out eccentric hypotheses, since the search through the wreckage revealed no corpse. Like the prophet Elijah who had been taken up in a flaming chariot, no trace of him was found, though a radius double the usual width had been meticulously combed. Some who listened to the cockpit recording swore they could detect the echoes of flutes, but more level-headed investigators dismissed this as the simple result of the frantic whistling of the winds through the fuselage of the plane, which must already have been breaking up.

For some reason, perhaps a hunch that they would make more sense after reading the clippings, I turned only now to the file of photos. The artifacts, hardly photographed under optimum conditions, and with the equipment of thirty years ago, were allusive and ambiguous in detail but damnably clear in broad outline. There were stylized depictions, I would swear, of igloos, bas reliefs of the Northern Lights, snowflake designs, and other northern motifs. Carved and chiseled faces suggested nothing of the Asian. Eyes were round, noses straight, brows high. More than a few evidenced distinct expressions of fear and panic. The possible source of those expressions appeared in a few photographed statues somewhat reminiscent, in a prescient way, of the sculptures of Alberto Giacometti, foreboding in their sense of utter alienation and looming menace. This, I knew, must be the ice-demon Avaloth, he that was invoked also by some other name which Professor Winslow seemed curiously reticent to speak. For a god, the figure was depicted with a singular lack of beneficence and majesty, only stark fearsomeness. I resolved to look more deeply into the anthropological aspects of the question, reasoning that, for all his avowed secrecy, old Winslow might possibly have let a few hints drop to his colleagues at Royceton University.

That would wait till the morrow. I turned out the light and rolled over to sleep. Late as it was, though, sleep came reluctantly, barely able at the last to silence my speculations. Winslow had decided he was marked as the next and final victim of whatever inexorable doom had overtaken his fellows. The whole thing sounded too superstitious to credit, and it did not take me long to realize it would never bear publication. But I could hardly

dismiss the evidence of the manner of all the deaths. Any one of them would have been freakish enough, but the pattern of them taken as a whole left little room for blithe dismissal. Though Winslow had said nothing of surviving members of the cult or of the peculiar racial enclave among whom it flourished, I wondered if somehow they had managed to catch up with their despoilers. It seemed fanciful, though hardly more so than the alternative. About this time I finally fell asleep. I refrain from describing my dreams.

IV. Gone With the Wind

Inquiries among the faculty at Royceton University revealed little I did not already know. As it happened, Professor Winslow had not shared his secrets with anyone I was able to find, though a number of senior faculty, hearing my questions, nonetheless shook their heads knowingly as if certain long-standing puzzles now made new sense. I did manage, with their help, to locate certain resources in the university library that provided a few (ultimately useless) clues. An old copy of Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires*, one of the books that had first set the then-young Winslow on his tragic quest, at least supplied the secret name of the ice-god as *Ithaqua*, and a cross reference suggested a possible identification with another polar demon, one Aphoom-zhah, the Cold Flame. Of these the standard dictionaries of mythology knew nothing, but then I guess that is what so intrigued Professor Winslow about the whole business.

A specialist in Oriental religions was able, almost by accident, to shed an additional ray of light on another aspect of the mystery. What was a cult of worshipers of a god of Arctic winds doing situated in the middle of the Cambodian jungle? It turned out that one early theory of the Rig Vedic scriptures place their origins within the Arctic Circle, largely on the basis of the astronomy implied in the Vedic hymns to the sun-god Savitar. Certain references implied the sun to be visible to the original poets for months at a time. Most scholars believed that the Vedic religion belonged to a group of migratory conquerors from the north who swept into India, bringing their faith with them. Could they have originated so far north? No one could say for certain, but the theory was still held to be viable, if not unchallenged. And of course, one would have to conclude the same sort of thing had happened in the case of the sect of Avaloth/Ithaqua. Only it was impossible not to suspect that, given the nature of their frightful totem, the group might well have been the object of repeated persecution, scapegoated as the magical cause of natural weather disasters. Such persecutions would have kept them moving south over many generations.

It was all beginning to make a certain kind of sense, at least on one level. And yet what could one make of the assurances of Professor

Winslow—a man who, despite his morbid preoccupation with a guilty conscience, certainly seemed still to be sound of mind and balanced in reason—that he had found in the steaming jungle of south Asia a stone temple sheathed in a thick coat of ice? And, similarly, there were the bizarre deaths of all the parties to the desecration of that temple. No band of jungle natives, no matter how fiendishly bent on revenge, could possibly orchestrate such phenomena. Had it not after all been somehow the result of the potent malediction of a dying shaman?

Though perhaps a bit more enlightened, I had essentially reached a dead end. I saw no way to be of help to Professor Winslow, not that he had requested any assistance from me. I still believed that any danger he might face would be the self-infliction of a superstitious belief in his inescapable doom, like that of the recipient of a voodoo curse, driven to heart failure by his own fear. But I could hardly even attempt to dissuade him of phantom anxieties, since his own evidence, plus my subsequent corroborations, left little room for any alternative of which I might try to convince him. At length I admitted to myself that I could do nothing but let the matter drop. I made excuses to my editor, explaining that the story was too technical to maintain the interest of the average reader. I returned to my work, covering the run-of-the-mill events of the Braving-Laren environs, not that these are without their own sometimes dark and ominous dimensions.

Thus things stood until one summer day when a note crossed my desk asking that I write up the obituary for none other than Professor Jonah Winslow of Laren, Minnesota, aged 70, trapped in the collapse of his burning farmhouse in the middle of the night. I felt an odd sense of relief at the sad news—a sense, I supposed, of a release of tension, as if the other shoe had at last fallen and I need not strain my ear waiting for it any longer. Still, I felt a pang of genuine remorse, for the old and lonely man had confided his life's great secret to me, passing it on to me, that it not join him in the oblivion of death. Insofar as I recorded his last testament and even kept it alive by my own reluctant belief in his story, I guess I did in fact render him the only aid he had sought.

I speak even now of reluctant but real belief. By now one might have expected mere distance in time to have clouded over the details and made belief seem less compelling, given the tendency of the human mind to gravitate to the familiar and the comforting. But there was one more fact that sealed the matter for me. You see, I was not satisfied knowing Professor Winslow had died by fire. Indeed, his old wooden house was most likely a tinderbox, and many such structures perish the same way every year. And he might have, I suspected, finally have subconsciously done his imagined Fate's work himself by carelessly allowing a fire to burn out of control. But

this seemed odd. The other survivors of the Cambodian expedition had all died by the touch of deadly cold. And had Winslow *burned* to death?

I decided to drive out to the charred ruins of the house. And when that proved fruitless, I looked up the coroner, half ready to hear that, like the crashed pilot, no body had been found. But instead what the man furtively whispered, after I assured him I would never mention his name in connection with the information, was that old Professor Winslow's corpse had been found prone in the cinders of the old house but *rigid and covered with a shell of frost*.

ADDITIONAL CALL OF CTHULHU® FICTION TITLES

THE BOOK OF DZYAN

Mme. Blavatsky's famous transcribed messages from beyond, the mysterious *Book of Dzyan*, the heart of the sacred books of Kie-te, are said to have been known only to Tibetan mystics. Quotations from *Dzyan* form the core of her closely-argued *The Secret Doctrine*, the most influential single book of occult knowledge to emerge from the nineteenth century. The text of this book reproduces nearly all of *Book of Dzyan* that Blavatsky transcribed. It also includes long excerpts from her Secret Doctrine as well as from the Society of Psychical Research's 1885 report concerning phenomena witnessed by members of the Theosophical Society. There are notes and additional shorter materials. Editor Tim Maroney's biographical essay starts off the book, a fascinating portrait of an amazing woman.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 272 pages, $15.95. Stock #6027; ISBN 1-56882-198-0.

THE COMPLETE PEGANA

Lord Dunsany's fantasy writing had a profound impact on the Dreamlands stories of H. P. Lovecraft. This original collection is composed of newly edited versions of Lord Dunsany's first two books, *The Gods of Pegana* (1905) and *Time and the Gods* (1906). Three additional stories round out the book, the first time that all the Pegana stories have appeared within one book. Edited and introduced by S. T. Joshi.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 242 pages, $14.95. Stock #6016; ISBN 1-56882-190-5.

THE DUNWICH CYCLE

In the Dunwiches of the world the old ways linger. Safely distant from bustling cities, ignorant of science, ignored by civilization, dull enough never to excite others, poor enough never to provoke envy, these are safe harbors for superstition and seemingly meaningless custom. Sometimes they shelter truths that have seeped invisibly across the centuries. The people are unlearned but not unknowing of things once great and horrible, of times when the rivers ran red and dark shudderings ruled the air. Here are nine stories set where horror begins, with a general introduction and individual story prefaces by Robert M. Price.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 288 pages, $16.95. Stock #6010; ISBN 1-56882-196-4.

THE HASTUR CYCLE
Second Revised Edition

The stories in this book represent the evolving trajectory of such notions as Hastur, the King in Yellow, Carcosa, the Yellow Sign, Yuggoth, and the Lake of Hali. A succession of writers from Ambrose Bierce to Ramsey Campbell and Karl Edward Wagner have explored and embellished these concepts so that the sum of the tales has become an evocative tapestry of hypnotic dread and terror, a mythology distinct

from yet overlapping the Cthulhu Mythos. Here for the first time is a comprehensive collection of all the relevant tales. Selected and introduced by Robert M. Price.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 320 pages, $17.95. Stock #6020; ISBN 1-56882-192-1.

THE INNSMOUTH CYCLE

The decadent, smugly rotting, secret-filled town of Innsmouth is a supreme creation of Howard Philips Lovecraft. It so finely mixes the carnal and the metaphysical that writers continue to take inspiration from it. This new collection contains thirteen tales and three poems tracing the evolution of Innsmouth, from early tales by Dunsany, Chambers, and Cobb, through Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" to modern tales by Rainey, Glasby, and others.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 240 pages, $14.95. Stock # 6017; ISBN 1-56882-199-9.

THE ITHAQUA CYCLE

The elusive, supernatural Ithaqua roams the North Woods and the wastes beyond, as invisible as the wind. Hunters and travelers fear the cold and isolation of the North; they fear the advent of the mysterious, malignant Wind-Walker even more. This collection includes the progenitor tale "The Wendigo" by Algernon Blackwood, three stories by August Derleth, and ten more from a spectrum of contemporary authors including Brian Lumley, Stephen Mark Rainey, and Pierre Comtois.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 260 pages, $15.95. Stock #6021; ISBN 1-56882-191-3.

MADE IN GOATSWOOD

Ramsey Campbell is acknowledged by many to be the greatest living writer of the horror tale in the English language. He is known to Mythos fans for the ancient and fearful portion of England's Severn Valley he evoked in narratives such as "The Moon Lens". This book contains eighteen all-new stories set in that part of the Valley, including a new story by Campbell himself, his first Severn Valley tale in decades. This volume was published in conjunction with a 1995 trip by Campbell to the United States. Stories selected by Scott David Aniolowski.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 288 pages, $16.95. Stock #6009; ISBN 1-56882-197-2.

THE NYARLATHOTEP CYCLE

The mighty Messenger of the Outer Gods, Nyarlathotep has also been known to deliver tidings from the Great Old Ones. He is the only Outer God who chooses to personify his presence on our planet. A god of a thousand forms, he comes to Earth to mock, to wreak havoc, and to spur on humanity's self-destructive urges. This volume of stories and poems illustrates the ubiquitous presence of Nyarlathotep and shows him in several different guises. Among them, his presence as Nephren-Ka, the dread Black Pharaoh of dynastic Egypt, dominates. The thirteen stories include a Lin Carter novella. Selected and introduced by Robert M. Price.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 256 pages, $14.95. Stock #6019; ISBN 1-56882-200-6.

SINGERS OF STRANGE SONGS

Most readers acknowledge Brian Lumley as the superstar of British horror writers. With the great popularity of his *Necroscope* series, he is one of the best known horror authors in the world. Devoted fans know that his roots are deep in the Cthulhu Mythos, with which most of his early work deals. This volume contains eleven new tales in that vein, as well as three reprints of excellent but little-known work by Lumley. This book was published in conjunction with Lumley's 1997 trip to the United States.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 256 pages, $12.95. Stock #6014; ISBN 1-56882-104-2.

TALES OUT OF INNSMOUTH

Innsmouth is a half-deserted, seedy little town on the North Shore of Massachusetts. It is rarely included on any map of the state. Folks in neighboring towns shun those who come from Innsmouth, and murmur about what goes on there. They try not to mention the place in public, for Innsmouth has ways of quelling gossip, and of taking revenge on troublemakers. Here are ten new tales and three reprints concerning the town, the hybrids who live there, the strange city rumored to exist nearby under the sea, and those who nightly lurch and shamble down the fog-bound streets of Innsmouth.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 294 pages, $16.95. Stock #6024; ISBN 1-56882-201-4.

THE XOTHIC LEGEND CYCLE

The late Lin Carter was a prolific writer and anthologist of horror and fantasy with over eighty titles to his credit. His tales of Mythos horror are loving tributes to H. P. Lovecraft's "revision" tales and to August Derleth's stories of Hastur and the *R'lyeh Text*. This is the first collection of Carter's Mythos tales; it includes his intended novel, *The Terror Out of Time*. Most of the stories in this collection have been unavailable for some time. Selected and introduced by Robert M. Price.

5 3/8" x 8 3/8", 288 pages, $16.95. Stock #6013; ISBN 1-56882-195-6.

All titles are available from bookstores and game stores. You can also order directly from **www.Chaosium.com**, your source for Cthulhiana and more. To order by credit card via the net, visit our web site, 24 hours a day. To order via phone, call 1-510-583-1000, 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. Pacific time.

6021

THE ITHAQUA CYCLE

The Wind-Walker of the Icy Wastes: 14 Tales

Ambuehl, Blackwood, Brennan, Comtois, Derleth, Diezel, England, Linzner, Lumley, Medoff, Rainey, Urban, Vance

Défago turned swiftly and looked at him as though he were suddenly about to shriek. His eyes shone, his mouth was wide open. Yet all he said, or whispered rather, for his voice sank very low, was:

"It's nuthin' but what those lousy fellers believe when they've been hittin' the bottle too long-a sort of great animal that lives up yonder," he jerked his head northwards, "quick as lightning in its tracks, an' bigger'n anything else in the bush, an' ain't supposed to be very good to look at—that's *all*!"

— Algernon Blackwood, "The Wendigo"

The elusive, utterly supernatural Ithaqua roams the North Woods and the wastes beyond, as invisible as the wind. Hunters and travelers fear the cold and isolation of the North. They fear ten times more the advent of the mysterious Wind-Walker. Its malign power haunts their dreams. Its victims shape their nightmares.

Blackwood's "Wendigo" sparked a trail of influences still apparent in horror fiction today. This collection includes that progenitor tale, three stories by August Derleth, and ten more from a spectrum of contemporary authors including Brian Lumley, Stephen Mark Rainey, and Pierre Comtois.

This book is one in an expanding collection of **Cthulhu Mythos** horror fiction and related topics. **Call of Cthulhu**® fiction focuses on single entities, concepts, or authors significant to readers and fans of H.P. Lovecraft.

For a complete listing of Chaosium books and games write click on **www.chaosium.com**

0606-6021CH15.95

Chaosium Inc.