

THE  
HORROR  
FROM THE  
BLIZZARD.

MORTIS  
MENNON.

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FROM THE  
BLIZZARD.**

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## **WARNING!**

This book contains scenes of horror and moderate violence. It is not intended for the easily offended or young children. You have been warned, so if you read on, don't blame me.

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# THE HORROR FROM THE BLIZZARD.

Any scientific expedition to the Arctic expects plenty of risk. However, Dr. Welham of Miskatonic University's survey uncovers far more than the usual geologic and ethnographic samples. In the severe, rock-scouring blizzards of the far north, the team comes across a hideous object from an elder age. A relic that brings earth shattering terror in its wake...

This story is loosely inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's short story, *Polaris*, which was written in 1918. In that story, a modern man is troubled by recurring dreams, gaining in intensity. During these visions, he assumes the role of a sentry guarding the pass against the invading Inutos people from the west. However, under the malign influence of the pole star, the watcher falls asleep. This time, when he awakes, screaming, the sentry wakes as a modern man and realises that he has failed the marble city of Olathoe in the lost land of Lomar.

# CHAPTER 1: RETURN TO ARKHAM.

"Tarleton?" the Chancellor said, raising his bushy eyebrows. "Are you sure? Wasn't he the one...?"

Professor Bamford lifted his glass of bourbon and peered at the Chancellor through its amber depths before swallowing a third of it. He set the glass down on its silver coaster.

"Yes, Robert. That's right. The only survivor of the expedition to Baffin Island back in '16. But the hospital says he was completely cured on discharge and he's had a good long leave of absence. Since then, he's been finishing his research at the University of Texas down at Austin..."

"A complete change from Baffin Island," murmured the Chancellor of Miskatonic University. Even now, the disastrous expedition to Baffin Island was a sore point. Early and terrible blizzards, severe even by the standard of that Arctic island, had completely destroyed the base camp whilst preventing the supply ship from saving the men ashore. However, that didn't explain everything that had occurred. Although those had never been made public.

"Precisely," said Professor Bamford, breaking into the Chancellor's thoughts. "On his release, the hospital recommended somewhere hot and sunny with no chance of snow or blizzards."

The Chancellor sipped some more oak-aged bourbon, appreciating its smoky warmth on a late summer's evening. "I remember now. Young Tarleton was found comatose, wasn't he? Then in the hospital, when he came to, he was raving about something that came out of the blizzards, wasn't he? Do you think it's wise; him coming back here? I mean, Massachusetts is noted for its severe winters. Wouldn't he be happier staying where he is?"

Bamford thought for a moment before replying. He knew the Chancellor was a scrupulously fair man, but considering some of the strange events that had happened around the University in the past, he would be wary about exposing Jack Tarleton to the weird influences in the area.

"Tarleton would be a credit even to such an august institution as Miskatonic University, Robert. As you know, he graduated Salutatorian. He is showing much promise in his field and don't forget he has family in town who can keep an eye on him in case, only in case, he shows signs of any relapse. They're good people – I know them well."

Professor Bamford thought for a moment, thinking about what he had said. "Not that he will relapse. 1916 was three years ago and he's shown no sign of mental instability whatsoever according to my friends at Austin."

"And the hospital said he was completely cured?" asked the Chancellor, looking for confirmation.

"That's right. Dr. Aubrey gave Tarleton a complete bill of health."

Chancellor Robert thought. He finished his bourbon and poured another two fingers into their tumblers. "As you say, Andrew, He'll be an asset to us. But keep an eye on him, will you?"

"Aye, aye, skipper," said Bamford with a smile, referring to the Chancellor's yacht that he kept moored at Kingsport's marina sheltered by its lofty cliffs.

\* \* \*

A week later, a young man crossed the Miskatonic River. He paused on the wide Peabody Bridge, built sixty years earlier, and looked down as the water flowed past. Knowing the city well, he made sure he crossed downstream out of sight of a small island with an evil reputation.

The man was of only average height but he was strongly built. He wore a linen suit, straw boater and carried a silver-topped cane. He lifted his boater and nodded, acknowledging a young woman walking by. The woman smiled, pleased with his courtesy as well as his healthy-looking tanned skin, dark brown hair and intelligent hazel eyes. Eventually, the man turned away from considering the river, before crossing the bridge and carrying on into Arkham itself.

The ancient city had not changed since the young man's last visit. Eldritch brown houses of great antiquity leaned and slumped against each other and hid close-guarded secrets behind narrow, lead-paned windows. Its clustered gambrel roofs still swayed and sagged over attics where smugglers hid from the King's men in the olden days of the Commonwealth. Warlocks and witches, not all of them captured during the Salem trials of 1692, also used the attics and cellars for their black rites.

He turned right walking through the maze of narrow, crooked alleys between the very oldest houses fronting the river and shortly after made his way into the University Quarter. Away from the river vapours, it was lighter here with a more wholesome air. Tarleton checked the time against the clock set in the ivy-clad tower, admiring the ancient brick buildings, mellow in the late August sun. The first of the new term's students were walking or cycling or just standing, chatting and idling in the sun. Late season swifts darted and wheeled in the air, their cries shrill and mournful symbolising the end of summer.

Jack Tarleton walked through the groups of students, checked in at the porter's lodge and then made his way up an old, uneven staircase to the Professor's suite of rooms. The sun shone through the stained glass windows, creating myriad jewels of coloured light on the stone floor and panelled walls. Eventually, Tarleton stood before a door with a plaque screwed onto it. In gilt letters, the plaque said: 'Professor A. G. Bamford, M.Sc.'

Tarleton raised his hand to knock. He felt a sudden chill; his skin broke out in goose-bumps and a quick burst of fear. Worse than the worries he'd had before starting at Austin. This is silly, Tarleton told himself. Professor Bamford was a good friend of the family and wouldn't have recommended his appointment on the Geography and Geology department if Bamford didn't think he was up to it.

Also, it was a late summer's day with a clear blue sky and, before this sudden irrational chill; Tarleton had been perspiring under his suit. No, there was nothing to be frightened of at all. Before he could have second thoughts, Tarleton raised his hand and rapped sharply on the oak panelling of the Professor's door.

"That you, Jack? C'mon in," a well remembered voice told him.

Turning the handle, Tarleton let himself into the professor's study.

It was like turning the clock back over three years to the time since he'd last stood in this room. Apart from fresh piles of paperwork and a few extra books stacked up on the floor, the room still had that air of cosy, dusty neglect he knew so well. Mullioned windows overlooked the quadrangle and one wall was completely taken up with a bookcase.

Three globes stood on top of the bookcase – one showing the features of this world. As always it was turned so the American continent faced the room. The second showed the stars in the heavens. Yet the third, made of some strange iridescent purple material that was neither metal nor stone, showed a world completely unknown to science. It was threaded with dark rivers and mountain ranges surrounding a vast plateau. Some students, of the more irreverent and practical types, thought that Bamford had commissioned it as a jest.

Others, especially those allowed access to the forbidden tomes stored in locked rooms in a cellar beneath Miskatonic's library, shuddered and hinted darkly at a certain world not of this galaxy. A world intimated towards the end of Abdul al-Hazred's tome. Bamford himself kept silent on the subject. All he would confirm was that he found it beneath Yucatan's rainforest in ruins far older than the Olmec civilisation.

Professor Bamford turned away from the bookcase. A student with the build of a linebacker stood and smiled at Tarleton.

"Thank you for your time, professor," the student said politely.

"I'm only glad you've decided to continue your studies here, Webster. As you will be aware, Miskatonic has a policy of supporting scientific expeditions and I know that you will be interested in going to..." Bamford broke off, recalling his visitor. "Come back Thursday; no, make it Friday, and we'll talk further."

With a polite nod to Tarleton, Webster made his way out, closing the door behind him.

Professor Bamford stood and gripped Tarleton's hands warmly. "Jack. I'm so glad to see you again. You're looking good. Austin's been treating you well, I see."

"Yes, professor, but I am glad to be back home. My parents have kept my room for me."

Jack Tarleton's father was a successful businessman who had got rich supplying timber even before the Great War. After the end of hostilities, Royce Tarleton had gone on to make even more money out of reconstruction in Europe. The family lived in one of the grand old mansions on French Hill.

"That's good, Jack. I shan't expect you to do much during your first trimester..."

"I intend to pull my weight, professor."

"... however, teaching our students; collating our displays, cataloguing our archives and such like will form much of your work until Christmas."

Tarleton leaned forwards, resting his arms on his knees, facing the Department Head. "With respect, professor, I did more than that at Austin. I can guess what's been said about me but I can assure you that you need have no fears. I'm completely over my... panic attacks. I intend to be fully involved in the life of the University and if there are any expeditions next year then I would like to be considered. Are there any?"



"Any what?" asked Bamford.

"Expeditions. Where are you going?"

Professor Bamford looked away, out of the window. "Nothing's been decided yet, Jack. Nothing. It's all a matter of securing funding, you understand."

The two men shook hands and Tarleton left. As he crossed the quadrangle, Bamford stood by the window and watched his progress. Tarleton stopped and chatted to Dr. Armitage, the college librarian before carrying on out of sight. To Bamford, Tarleton looked fit and well; a young man without a care in the world and not the desperate, catatonic wreck he had been when the rescuers from the ship made it to that blasted camp in the end.

Bamford smiled. Yes, it was time for young Jack to come home to Arkham.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, after asking Dr. Armitage about library access, Tarleton walked under the archway and out onto College Street. Outside the university precincts, carters and taxi drivers were dropping off boxes and trunks belonging to the students starting the new term. The late afternoon sun was still strong and Tarleton's shadow stretched out before him.

Crossing Garrison Street, Tarleton spotted an ice truck outside a restaurant. The driver swung down from his bench seat, draped his reins over the brake and opened the truck's insulated doors. He placed sacking over his shoulder as cold air billowed out in a wave of condensation. The driver climbed inside and backed out carrying a block of ice.

Tarleton stopped walking, his mind fixed on the ice. Even as the iceman crossed the sidewalk splinters of ice fell from the block, melting the instant they hit the sun-warmed cobbles. Tarleton watched, transfixed as a woman opened the restaurant's door and let the iceman in. The two spoke together in Italian. A minute later, the man returned, stuffing some money into his apron pocket. The iceman then swung back up into his seat, clicked his tongue and his tired looking nag picked up his hoofs and shuffled down Garrison Street to make the next drop-off.

Rooted to the spot, Tarleton still hadn't moved. Ice. Cold, sub-zero ice. The Arctic wastes of Baffin Island. The raw, howling, cutting wind; the land's grey rocks rimed with frost. And then the pure Hell of what came out of the blizzard and into their camp. No, no, no... his mind shrieked.

"Mister..., mister, are you alright? Mister?" Tarleton felt several tugs on his sleeve, pulling him from that nightmare and back into the sunny street. A boy, maybe nine or ten years old, was pulling him towards the restaurant. His mother was standing by the door, a look of concern on her face. She said something in rapid Italian to the boy who replied in the same language.

The boy dragged Tarleton into the restaurant and sat him down at a table with a red chequered tablecloth before running and fetching a glass of water from the kitchen.

"The heat, signor? You felt faint?" the woman asked. Her dark brown eyes looked into his as if searching his soul. She pushed several strands of black hair out of her face as she did so.

Tarleton shook his head. "No, ma'am, not the heat. Something... something came over me. I don't know..." Tarleton's voice tailed off.

The boy brought a glass of water and placed it before him. The boy then stood next to his mother; like hers his big brown eyes staring. Tarleton reached out his hand. Then stopped. His hand shook, a slight tremor at first but then a definite tremble. He withdrew his hand. Condensation beaded the glass. Yet what stopped Tarleton's hand floated on top of the water. Chips of ice. Like little icebergs floating in the Davis Strait. One chip chinked against another and it dipped beneath the surface. A crack splintered the ice.

"Your water, signor," the woman reminded Tarleton, pushing the glass closer. His eyes stared, fixed on those tiny chips of ice. He could almost see the ice-haze on the surface. Straining his ears, he heard the tiny crackle and pop as the chips melted.

He felt a scream rise in his throat. No, no, no. Cold flooded his body and his skin broke out in goose-bumps. For a moment, yet it felt an eternity's age to Tarleton, he was back on that rocky camp on Baffin Island's Cumberland peninsula. That camp where soul shattering horror came one night.

With a cry, Tarleton pushed his chair back away from the table and leaped to his feet. The glass rocked, the ice tumbling like bergs calved from a glacier. Snatching up his boater, Tarleton dashed from the restaurant. He raced along College Street, east towards French Hill. Passers by jumped out of his way and then stopped and stared as the young man ran as if pursued by invisible demons.

## CHAPTER 2: THE FEAST – AND HALLOWEEN.

Calling on his reserves of stability and fortitude, Tarleton pulled up at the junction of Parsonage Street. He stood, gasping, panting, his heart pounding in his chest. A wagon loaded high with tea-chests rumbled past. The carter called to one of his friends on the far side of the street. Normality. Nothing to remind Tarleton of that horror north of the Arctic Circle. Just an ordinary, everyday street scene with people walking to and fro. A group of schoolgirls with their heads together laughing and giggling. Shopkeepers leaning against their door frames enjoying a few minutes quietness.

"I thought I was all right," Tarleton whispered to himself, his mind still shocked by the experience. "I thought I was completely cured. Perhaps it was the shock of coming back to Arkham on top of such a long journey; maybe I should have stayed down at Austin. No – it was just a one-off. The doctors at the hospital told me there might be relapses if I got overtired but they would dwindle with time. No, I need to ignore this incident. Put it behind me."

Saying which, Tarleton tried to reassure himself as he walked along College Street to the higher ground of French Hill. Nevertheless, Tarleton was upset and unnerved by his reaction to something as innocuous as a block of ice.

All the same, he'd never had any problems with seeing ice down in Texas so he was surprised that it should happen now. It could just be the mental association of the Miskatonic University with that disastrous survey expedition. Perhaps he should see 'Old' Waldron, the college doctor, get something to settle his nerves, but on second thoughts, Tarleton rejected that idea. He didn't want his mental health discussed amongst the professors. If any were having doubts or second thoughts then he didn't want to give any of them a handle to find ways of getting rid of him.

Also, Tarleton was glad to be back in Massachusetts. It was home. Sure, he'd enjoyed his time in Texas but Massachusetts was where he belonged. "My family's from Arkham – we've lived here for almost one hundred years and Miskatonic has the best research facilities in the country," he thought.

Looking up from his thoughts, Tarleton saw he was home. He stood before his parent's mansion on the exclusive Saltonstall Street – a large neo-Grecian built some fifty years before. His grandfather had served on the staff of Major-General Benjamin Butler's occupying force in New Orleans and on his return from the Civil War, he had torn down the old colonial and rebuilt in an antebellum Louisiana style.

The house was a gracious, classically proportioned home, freshly whitewashed and it shone brightly in the late summer sunshine. With a smile, Tarleton walked between the gateposts and up the driveway, passing a stand of shade-oaks. He didn't need to knock on the door before it was flung open.

"Master Jack! Welcome home!" Cartwright, the family's old retainer greeted him. He shook Tarleton's hand and guided him into the marble-floored atrium. A double staircase swept upwards to the second floor gallery; another design feature his grandfather had insisted upon. Tarleton's earlier worries were forgotten when he saw his mother sweeping down the

staircase, her skirts swishing as she walked. Although not yet fifty, she had not taken to modern dress and looked like a Victorian matriarch in her black dress with a jet brooch at her throat.

Tarleton sadly realised that his mother had not yet got over the death of his elder brother, Thomas, who was killed by German artillery whilst fighting with Canadian forces at the maelstrom of St. Julien. Thomas had survived the horror of chlorine gas only to be blown up during a counter-attack. A terribly sad end but not unusual in the carnage of the western front.

Thomas had earned the respect of his father and the tears of his mother by not waiting for the United States to declare war but had slipped across the border shortly after the Great War had broken out in order to join up with the Canadian First Division. At the time of Thomas's enlistment, his mother had been upset and had locked herself in her room for a week but his father, although pretending anger, had made no secret that he was proud of Tom.

However, both Tarleton's parents had been equally devastated when the telegram arrived notifying them of Tom's death. That terse note was followed a week later by a letter from the Colonel giving more details and enclosing Tom's few personal effects. His mother had read that letter so many times she knew it off by heart.

Tarleton waited in the centre of the entrance hall for his mother to embrace him. Eventually they broke apart and his mother looked him in the face.

"Are you keeping well, Jack?" she asked. "You look tired."

There was no way he was about to alarm his mother with details of that earlier incident. "A long journey, mother. But I'm very glad to be home."

He just had time to ask about his other brother, Daniel, who was working on reconstruction projects with the American occupying forces in Haiti, before Cartwright led Tarleton up to his old bedroom. Very little had changed. Crossed Varsity football pennants took up one wall, his old baseball bat and catcher's mitt lay on the dresser, where he'd left them before going to Baffin Island... he turned his mind swiftly away; and on the bookcase, rows of books, the gilt writing on their spines sparkling. His trunks had arrived on an earlier train and Cartwright had already unpacked.

Tarleton ran himself a bath, as hot as he could stand, and relaxed. His earlier fear washed away in the steaming waters until it had no more force than a half-forgotten nightmare. A reaction to stress, he told himself. That's all it was.

Giving himself plenty of time, Tarleton dressed for dinner as he knew his parents expected that courtesy and he knew they would have invited business friends and neighbours. One of the undecayed Whateleys, from a different branch of that infamous family; also the Baxters who owned a broker's house in New York together with the Middletons – cloth manufacturers from the mill town of Bolton.

During the dinner, the senior Middleton talked about the illegal prize-fights the workers of that town indulged in. The bouts had died down during the Great War but since demobilisation and the return of the men from the Western Front the fights had started up with a renewed vigour. They regretted that Dr. West had gone onto Boston after the War ended instead of returning to Bolton.

"A very great medic, a big loss to our town, Dr. West had a way with the mill-hands and took such care of them," Mr. Middleton said.

The Middletons had brought their daughter, Olivia, and she sat directly opposite Tarleton. Once there had been an understanding between them. Nothing had been said but both families expected the pair to announce their engagement at some point. But then had come Baffin Island and Tarleton's collapse so their affection cooled. The two had corresponded during his time in Austin, mostly about events in Arkham and mutual acquaintances. Tarleton heard that Olivia had been going out with one of the younger Baxters for part of the time he'd been away but that had also broken up.

Tarleton looked across the silver table decoration in which fruit and vine leaves were artfully arranged. Olivia looked across at him and her lips raised in a little smile. Olivia was beautiful with long ash-blonde hair and pale blue eyes showing her mother's Swedish ancestry. She wore a light-blue silk gown which complemented her complexion to perfection.

Looking at her, Tarleton was reminded of a Nordic Ice-Queen, cold and imperious. He shivered but returned Olivia's smile. In Texas, Tarleton had come to appreciate the southern charms of the Latina girls. Most especially those from the old Mexican families who owned land there long before the coming of the Anglos.

Under Cartwright's supervision, the hired waiters removed the dishes from the fish course and then placed lemon sorbets before the diners to cleanse their palates. Tarleton looked at the small dish of flavoured ice. He shuddered and tried to restrain that sense of overpowering horror which had gripped him earlier in the Italian restaurant. His eyes widened as he watched the others eat their sorbets. Didn't they know what they were eating? Ice – frozen water.

The total soul-chilling cold of frozen ice. Ice from thousands of years ago, ice that had lain undisturbed for millennia, covering long forgotten peoples and realms. Ice spreading with the centuries, burying the world with terrible blinding whiteness, the glaciers expanding crushing civilisation beneath the Arctic floes.

"Excuse me," Tarleton mumbled. He stood, carefully, making sure he didn't draw unwanted attention to himself and left the dining room. He crossed the atrium, opened the front door and stepped out into the grounds. Whippoorwills were chirping in the undergrowth, their familiar, well-remembered song helping to clear Tarleton's mind of its confusion. He leaned against one of the Doric pillars supporting the portico and looked out over the darkened grounds.

Eventually, his breathing returned to normal, his heart slowed. Where had all that nonsense about glaciers and the end of long-lost civilisations come from? The desserts were only sorbets, harmless little dishes. Nothing else. Realising that he was being rude, or at least eccentric, Tarleton took a last breath of night air and then returned to the banquet his parents had laid on. However, everybody was too polite to comment on his temporary absence.

By now, the sorbets had been cleared away and the waiters were serving roast beef with potatoes and steamed vegetables. The rich smell of the roasts filled the room. A waiter poured Tarleton a glass of Merlot and the full-bodied sweet wine helped him relax further. He stretched his legs out under the table. Yes, it was just the stress following the long journey up from Austin and returning back to Arkham.

Tarleton enjoyed the rest of the meal and took part in the conversation with his father and the other men over port and cigars before rejoining the ladies in the drawing room. The men were eager to hear news from Texas. Finally, at long last, the evening ended, the last guest left and Tarleton was glad to go to his room.

He had no nightmares that night.

\* \* \*

September slipped into October. Tarleton was busy at Miskatonic. He taught some classes of freshman students in both geography and geology. His speciality was the ancient igneous rocks of the northern United States and Canada. He collated the rock specimens and photographs brought back by Professor Atkinson from his trips to Mexico and Central America. He imagined the sun warming these rocks, so very different from the barren Arctic wastes of..., no his mind skittered away from those terrible images. Also, he marked papers and did a little research into volcanism and the new theories of plate tectonics.

He spent some time in the library but kept well away from those locked doors leading to the basement. Those subterranean vaults containing, according to repute, those tomes that the Chief Librarian, Dr. Henry Armitage, only allowed certain trusted researchers permission to access. Like many fellows and students, Tarleton had heard rumours as to the names of some of those books but even the boldest students spoke of them only in whispers. Officially, of course, the very existence of these books was denied.

Massachusetts' fall foliage was spectacular and from his room in his parents mansion high up on French Hill he could see the forests in the distance. The vivid reds, oranges and yellows with a dash of plum brightened the vista but as the month progressed, more and more the browns dominated. A clear portent that another New England winter was on its way.

\* \* \*

Halloween was on a Friday that year. That always made that evil day worse. Those more sensitive to atmosphere made sure they kept in good company that day – and especially during the evening and night. The saloons and beer-cellars did a roaring trade as men drowned their fears. The poorer people, mostly Italian and Polish immigrants, kept their children close and whispered about the unholy rites taking place on that unhallowed witch-island on the Miskatonic.

All the same, they couldn't keep an eye on all their numerous children and two small boys, on their way back from school took a short-cut through the wooded cemetery on Hangman's Hill and were never heard of again. Three Polish labourers out late at night delivering things they were reluctant about declaring to the Revenue reported that a light, a hideous greenish-purple light, shone like a wartime searchlight from the hills to the north.

The men had been drinking and many people, especially ignorant newcomers, put it down to the amount of moonshine *slivovitz* plum brandy they had consumed. Especially when they tried to replicate the deep, booming chant they heard as soon as the greenish-purple light hit the clouds. "*Fhunglooi maglaw'naf Cthuloo Rllyh wga'nagel fhtagt,*" was the closest the two men got with the inhuman syllables.

However, those who had lived in Arkham all their lives, especially those from old families living in the area for generations, understood the significance of that misheard chant and crossed themselves.

Tarleton sauntered along College Street to the University. It was a fresh, crisp autumn morning bringing the tang of wood smoke with it. Tarleton enjoyed the walk and, although he noticed the hurrying footsteps and furtive looks of people around him, that didn't spoil his stroll.

Looking up, Tarleton appreciated the beauty of the ivy covering the clock tower. The leaves were a deep rich red, shading towards purple. He walked under the archway, checked his mail at the lodge and then around the quadrangle and up to Professor Bamford's rooms. The door was ajar and so Tarleton let himself in. There was no sign of Bamford himself but an untimed note left on his desk said he would be back in half an hour.

Tarleton moved a stack of papers covering the seat and sat in a well-worn armchair. He placed the papers on top of a book about eastern Anatolia and the Armenian dispersal. The mound was unsteady and the papers slipped off onto the carpet. Leaning over, Tarleton picked them up, leafing through the papers out of curiosity as he did so.

The young man gasped in shock. The University was planning another expedition to Baffin Island next summer. Tarleton collapsed back in the chair, his breath catching in his throat. The papers fell from his nerveless hands, fluttering to the floor. It was as if the last three years had vanished. In an instant, Tarleton was back on Baffin Island.

## CHAPTER 3: BAFFIN ISLAND.

June, 1916.

War had raged in Europe for over two years but as their chartered barque, the *Margarite Ohlsen*, nosed its way north past the fjords of Baffin Island, the war was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. Tarleton and his friend, Arthur Hatley, stood in the bow of the ship; binoculars raised and keeping an eye open for stray bergs. They were sailing up Cumberland Sound, their small ship merely a speck in the vastness dominated by lofty, windswept mountains.

On their starboard side – Hatley still insisted on calling it right just to annoy the sailors – the grey mountains of Baffin Island sailed past. They passed Thor Peak with its towering cliffs and soon after the huge serrated crags of Mount Odin, vaster than the mightiest castle, came into view. Even in summer, their peaks and upper slopes were still white with snow. It was a bleak, austere landscape, rocky and ice bound.

It was a mixed expedition the University had sent out. Historians and archaeologists looking for traces of Scandinavian settlements to prove that Baffin Island was indeed the Norse Helluland – Stone Land as they called it in their sagas. Ethnographers and medical researchers wanted to contact the indigenous Inuit peoples, partly to offer an immunisation programme but also to trace the origins of the legends the people told about themselves.

Geographers wanted to study the glaciers; biologists the Arctic animals such as caribou, Arctic hares and foxes as well as the numerous Ringed and Bearded seals whilst Tarleton himself was more interested in the geology and collecting as many different rock samples as he could.

The expedition was well equipped with no expense spared. A team of cooks and technicians travelled with them, together with handlers to look after the Siberian huskies. The centre piece was a mobile laboratory, prefabricated at Boston containing all the latest scientific equipment.

Tarleton was pleased that he'd been accepted.

The *Margarite Ohlsen* nosed into an inlet set between two rocky outcrops. A crewman sounded out the depths with a plumb-weight but it was a deep fjord. Their skipper, Captain Calderbank, was happy as this natural harbour was safe; unless the wind blew directly from the south-east which it very rarely did. The anchor rattled and the ship slowed to a standstill. The crew climbed the shrouds and, singing a shanty, furled the sails. Boats were lowered and rowed across to a shingle beach in the lea of the foothills of a mountain.

Over the course of the next few days everyone worked hard moving a mountain of stores and getting everything ashore before covering them with tarpaulins; setting up the mobile laboratory hut, as well as the large mess tent and storage structures and then pegging everything down against the ever present wind. Due to the Arctic summer, the men were able to work eighteen hours a day as the sun merely dipped below the horizon.

As soon as all the ground work was completed, the *Margarite Ohlsen* backed out of the fjord and carried on with its exploration of the coast. Captain Calderbank ordered signal flags to be lowered and the squares made vivid splashes of colour against the grey mountains and cloudy skies. All the scientists and crew waved the vessel off.



Only one man would ever see it again.

Dr. Philip Welham of History led the expedition. He was a tall, broad man, now in his fifties, but strong and well able to cope with the rigours of a 'field trip', as he called it, far from the safety of civilisation. During the spring and on the voyage up from Boston, he'd grown out his beard and now looked like a seasoned Viking warrior. He needed only a helmet and axe to look exactly like those seafarers who had landed on Helluland almost a thousand years before.

For himself, Dr. Welham's main interest was in the Inuit tribes of the island's coast and their myths, legends and ancestral beliefs. On an earlier trip back in 1909 to the coast of Labrador Dr. Welham had heard fables about lost cities to the north that had long since been covered by the ice cap. He thought that the legends referred to nothing more than abandoned Norse settlements on Markland, as the Vikings called Labrador, or Helluland and that the 'cities' referred to nothing more than stone built farmsteads or temporary shelters.

However, to the nomadic Inuit, even these structures would have seemed strongly built and over the centuries the scale of the buildings had grown in the Inuit imaginations. However, he relished the chance to delve further into the rumours and maybe establish the amount of interaction between the Viking pasturers and traders and the native peoples before these settlements were finally abandoned.

After making sure that the base camp was well founded and secure, the following day Dr. Welham led a smaller expedition further north up the coast. The men had to detour inland to avoid the fjords which bit deeply into the coast. However, their two Inuit guides, brothers named Chugach and Iluliaq, were very experienced and had spent many summers hunting seals and walrus along this rugged shoreline.

Tarleton attached himself to this trip as he wanted to collect samples of the igneous rocks in order to form a detailed geologic map of this little known area. Arthur Hatley, the biologist, also went in order to survey the Arctic sea birds that used the cliffs for their nests.

The first few days out were perfect. Both Tarleton and Hatley were struck by the desolation of the land. Towering cliffs, their pinnacles covered with snow dominated the scene. Rocky scree tumbled down their slopes. Glaciers, their surfaces slashed by deep unfathomable crevasses pushed down the valleys and into the sea where ice bergs drifted south. Their colours were otherworldly – shades of blues, greys, greens and purples vivid amidst the whiteness and the young men compared the larger bergs with fantastical castles or cathedrals.

And over it all howled the ever present north wind making Baffin Island's summer even shorter and colder than normal for its high latitude. The gales gusted down the mountains and the June days were barely above freezing whilst during the nights the thermometer dipped below ten degrees Fahrenheit.

Apart from low-growing mosses and lichens, there were few plants and the bleak rocky landscape looked inimical to mankind. As the group pushed ever onwards under the shadows of the mountains and cliffs, Tarleton began to feel that they had ventured far beyond the realm of modern man and into the sphere of far older beings. However, despite his misgivings, he carried on with collecting his samples and found some black pre-Cambrian basalts that he believed represented some of the oldest rocks in the world.

Apart from one camp-fire surrounded by seal bones at the head of a fjord they found no trace of any human habitation, present or past and the vast emptiness pressed down on Tarleton's spirits. However, Dr. Welham was not downhearted. As he told the group during one rest break, "Baffin Island is the world's fifth largest island and finding small settlements from a thousand years ago is like hunting for the proverbial needle in a haystack. And a rusty needle at that."

The two guides admitted they had never come across any ruins in the area but as that search was only a part of the reason for the trip, Dr. Welham did not think it was a waste of time.

However, on the fourth day out, the weather closed in. Initial flurries of snow became a full blown blizzard and the party trudged on, heads down, their breath freezing onto their fur-lined hoods. Only the huskies looked like they were enjoying the conditions until one of the sleds hit a rock just under the surface and overturned. The men stopped, righted the sled, fixed and greased its runner and sorted out the dog's tangled traces but it all took time. They broke for lunch in the lee of a glacial moraine before carrying on.

Skirting the edge of the Penny ice cap, the team's progress was next blocked by a glacier. The river of ice was deeply fissured and a bottomless crevasse split it. Carefully, with ropes around their waists and Iluliaq leading, the guides edged out onto the ice. They cast to left and right and tested the surface with their poles. Shaking their heads, the Inuits told Dr. Welham that there was no way over the glacier.

"So what shall we do?" Dr. Welham asked them.

They pointed to the west, inland. "We shall have to go around the ice," Chugach told him.

Tarleton and Hatley looked where the guides were pointing. Over the millennia, the glacier had gouged a valley through the mountains. However, there was a steep uphill slope that would require hard work to traverse. The Arctic wind blasted down through the mountains.

"How long is the glacier? How far have we got to go?" Dr. Welham queried.

The two Inuit looked at each other and spoke in their own language.

Eventually Chugach looked up at Dr. Welham. "When hunting, we stick to the coast – no reason to go inland. I think we go uphill we come to a patch where we cross the glacier."

Dr. Welham thought for a moment. "It's not like we have to hurry back. We're packing plenty of supplies. Let's go on."

Leading the way, Chugach and Iluliaq turned inland and followed the edge of the glacier uphill. The going was steep and the men had to put their shoulders to the sleds to help the dogs but as they climbed the men were rewarded with the most spectacular views any of them had ever seen. In the distance the Davis Strait separating Baffin Island from Greenland stretched pure and clean to the horizon. The waters were a deep cerulean blue speckled with icebergs and ice floes. A whale breached the surface before splashing down. Above them, the mountains soared sheer and tall, grey frosted with white, home to innumerable sea birds wheeling and diving and taking advantage of the short Arctic summer.

Closer to hand, their sleds skimmed over or crunched through the crystalline firn – the ancient snow that had thawed and refrozen many times. In places the firn was harder or softer

depending on the weather conditions.

Despite the cold, the men were sweating as they manhandled the sleds up the hill. By their side, the glacier creaked and groaned breaking the silence like a soul in torment as it slowly slid on its journey to the sea. From time to time Chugach and Iluliaq made forays onto the ice but each time they said that the surface was still too fractured and dangerous to cross.

Onwards and upwards. Tarleton was struck by the idea that they might be the first white men to ever come this far as the old Vikings usually kept to the coast. He mentioned that idea to Hatley.

"As far as you know," said Hatley. "What about the old Inuit legends of long-lost peoples?"

Tarleton laughed. "Oh, those. Every culture has its ideas about vanished civilisations. Look at the Atlantis legends."

Hatley grunted as he helped shove the sled over a particularly steep incline.

"Have you ever read the Pnak...?" Hatley said, before hurriedly breaking off as he saw Tarleton's raised eyebrows. "Oh, just some old book Dr. Welham recommended I read. Part of it was a history about how the tall, grey-eyed men of the cities of Lomar fought and were defeated by the Inutos as the ice age started. Legend has it a watchman in a tower fell under an enchanted sleep.

"Of course, this happened many thousands of years ago and the names and geography have changed since then but, from his reading, Dr. Welham thinks that what is now Baffin Island could once have been part of Lomar. Before the ice sheets covered it all of course," Hatley added.

Tarleton laughed. "It all sounds a bit far-fetched to me. Grey-eyed men of Lomar. I mean, everyone knows there were no civilisations before the ice age. Society hadn't evolved beyond the Mesolithic hunter-gatherer stage by then."

Hatley glanced at his friend as they laboured. "There are some very ancient manuscripts and places in the world that give an alternative view," he said.

Before Tarleton could argue further, the ground levelled out. The huskies took up the strain, the sled surging forwards with a jolt. The mountain flattened out to reveal a vast rocky plateau covered with boulders and debris. The ever present wind had scoured the terrain clear of snow.

"Looks almost like Leng, don't you think, Arthur?" Dr. Welham said in an undertone to Hatley.

Tarleton wasn't sure what Dr. Welham meant by that although he was aware that the professor had visited Mongolia back in 1898, returning in 1913 with Hatley and others and come back with some strange and inexplicable artefacts which he had only shown to a select handful of enquirers. According to University rumour, these were now stored in closely guarded vaults beneath the Library.

"Sarkia fits the bill better, don't you think?" Hatley replied after a moment.

## CHAPTER 4: THE DISCOVERY IN THE CAVE.

By now, the men and dogs were all tired after hauling the heavy-laden sleds uphill and were glad of the chance to rest. Some built windbreaks out of rubble whilst others pitched tents, pounding the pegs deep into the permafrost. They lit camp stoves and held their hands to the fires as they waited for their dinner of tinned stew to heat up. Even though it was June, the north wind made it bitterly cold.

"We'll stay here for the night; carry on tomorrow," Dr. Welham told the men. "Hopefully we'll soon find a place to safely cross the glacier."

Feeling his strength return after eating, Tarleton took his bag and rock hammer and set off to look for interesting specimens. Most of the others also took the opportunity to explore the plateau. Tarleton was chipping off an interesting piece of feldspar for his collection when he heard something over the howl of the wind. Tarleton paused and listened. There it was again. A shout from the far end of the level. He leaped to his feet. Had a polar bear attacked someone? This far from the coast, their guides hadn't thought there would be much threat from the carnivores but it was always possible.

Springing up from the outcrop, turning to face the shout, Tarleton saw a man waving a ski pole in the air. The man didn't seem hurt and the cry sounded like one of excitement rather than fear. The man waved his pole again with more vigour. Other scientists crossed the small plain hurrying over to him. What had he found? What scientific discovery had he made, Tarleton wondered.

Dropping the feldspar into his bag, Tarleton hurried across the rock-strewn plain. Exposed to the full force of the wind, it took Tarleton longer than he expected. The wind's force seemed to rise as if it was trying to push him back – keeping him away from the discovery. The others seemed to be having similar problems. Worse, the wind seemed to be shrieking in his ears in a half-forgotten language. Tarleton couldn't understand the words but he made out their intent. "Go back, go back now," the wind seemed to be saying to him.

Ignoring his fears, Tarleton carried on. Even as he ran, Tarleton noticed that something was strange about this part of the plain. The rocks were mostly white marbles, some veined with delicate reds and pinks. He knew that marble was a metamorphic rock and so not uncommon in volcanic areas but these seemed more like blocks than rocks. Too many were of a similar size and shape and appeared to have unusually squared corners.

If he didn't know better, Tarleton would have said that they'd fallen from a long-toppled tower. Which was absolutely impossible in an uninhabited part of Baffin Island. The most of humanity this plateau would ever have seen was a random Inuit hunting party taking a short-cut around the fjord. No, these blocks – no, rocks his mind amended must have been sand-blasted by grit. A most unusual phenomenon he told himself. He would like the chance to investigate further.

By now most of the other scientists and handlers had reached the site and they were all standing around looking at something on the ground as if hypnotised. Tarleton pushed his way through the group.

The find was worth getting excited about. Even Tarleton, who wasn't an expert historian, could see that. Craning his neck to look, Tarleton knew he was looking at one of the most important archaeological finds of the young century; perhaps it would become the most famous since Heinrich Schliemann first excavated the ruins of Troy in 1871 to '72.

Towards the back of a shallow cave, little more than a hollow scooped out of a rising knoll on the plain, lay three bodies. The cave had sheltered the bodies from the ever-rushing wind. From their positions they seemed to have fought to the death.

The first two were bodies of shorter, more thick-set man who appeared to be some kind of Inuit. Like yet unlike the modern inhabitants of the region. What remained of the desiccated skin on their skulls appeared to have been tattooed. When they died, they wore fur coats and leggings and also simple leather helmets under their hoods. Their robes were embroidered with designs that no-one had ever seen on any modern native design. They resembled stylised octopuses.

One man lay on a round wooden shield and carried a sword shaped length of wood set with razor-sharp obsidian flakes that reminded Tarleton of an Aztec *macuahuitl*. The sharp blackness of the shards gleamed evilly in the half-light. The other held a broken harpoon edged with shark's teeth.

Yet if these long dead corpses were strange enough, it was the third that drew the scientists' attention. The third was of a tall man who would have stood well over six foot in life. He wore a warmly quilted jerkin and trousers, now faded to a dull russet colour which were tucked into boots. Over his jerkin he wore a shaped but corroded bronze cuirass and his skull looked out from under a broken helmet with a crest of feathers running along the ridge. Lying next to his claw-like hand was a slender bronze sword which was thrust through the body of the Inuit-type with the *macuahuitl*.

Yet, even allowing for centuries, maybe millennia of lying exposed in this frozen tomb, the men saw that this corpse was not that of any Arctic native. His long limbs and the shape of his skull showed that the man was once of the Caucasian race. There were even remnants of light brown hair attached to his bony skull.

The scientists looked at the scene with amazement.

"I'm surprised some animal – an Arctic fox – never got them," said one man.

"I guess this proves that this was Helluland then. Looks like this Viking got on the wrong side of these skrælings," said a man called Greavey.

"Skrælings?" the first man asked.

"What the Vikings called the Indians when they reached the Americas. They fought and the Indians drove them out," Greavey explained.

Hatley shook his head. In a strangely high-pitched voice he said, "Can't you see, you fools? Does that man look like a Viking to you? Have you ever seen a Viking with a helmet like that – or carrying a bronze sword?"

"No, this was a man of Lomar – that land that fell beneath the ice after attacks from the invading Inutos from out of the west..."

Dr. Welham stepped forwards. "That will do, Hatley. We've no proof of that yet – it's only speculation. We must carefully record these bodies and then take them back to base camp for analysis. Who's got the camera?"

Hatley was so excited, he wouldn't be quiet. "Look at all these stones? Could this be the marble city of Olathoe itself?" He pointed up at the surrounding mountains. "Are those the peaks of Noton and Kadiphonek that are spoken of in the..."

This time Dr. Welham actually dragged Hatley away from the rest of the group and spoke to him. The wind had got up and was now blowing half a gale and a few flakes of snow came with it. Because of the wind, Tarleton couldn't hear what Dr. Welham said to Hatley.

However, Greavey had fetched the camera from the sled and was busy photographing the bodies in situ and from different angles to get the fullest record of their find. By the time Greavey had finished, Dr. Welham and Hatley returned. No more was said about the lost land of Lomar.

Dr. Welham gathered everyone around. "As you'll appreciate, this is an incredible find. One of international significance. We'll carefully wrap these bodies and take them back to base camp for further investigation." He sent Tarleton and Greavey back to bring up the sleds.

As soon as they returned Chugach and Iluliaq approached Dr. Welham. "Please leave them here, Doctor. Is bad luck disturbing the dead. Let them lie where they fell," Chugach asked, the signs of distress evident on his broad, strong face.

"Nonsense, man. This is a major scientific discovery that will revolutionise the history of the Arctic. Imagine the impact that Europeans reaching Canada sometime during the Bronze Age will have!" He pointed at the weapons carried by the two Inuit-type bodies. "Let alone the knowledge that they fought warlike Eskimos!"

Dr. Welham was excited and wouldn't listen to the two guides' pleas. Under his guidance, the scientists carefully lifted the body of the first Inuit-type – an Inutos – as Hatley insisted on calling it. However, the body was more fragile than it appeared. It had been lying out for millennia and was little more than dust and fibres preserved only by the constant sub-zero air of the plateau.

As soon as it was touched, the corpse crumbled away to dust, leaving only the larger bones like the femurs and skull itself as well as some carved stones and animal teeth as jewellery. Sadly, Hatley lifted up the obsidian edged *macuahuitl* and wrapped it in a blanket.

The body of the second warrior was no stronger and also disintegrated as soon as the scientists tried to move it. Even the harpoon fell to pieces leaving shark's teeth scattered over the floor of the cave.

After those disappointments, there was a debate about the wisdom of moving the European body. It seemed a shame to try and move the remains if all that would happen was that it would also fall to pieces. Maybe because it wasn't of one of their distant ancestors, Chugach and Iluliaq didn't seem as bothered about this body.

In the end it was decided to make the attempt – if only because it might be many years before Miskatonic sent another expedition this way. But sadly the same thing happened. Underneath

its bronze breastplate, the friable body crumbled to nothing, leaving only dust, fragments of cloth and the larger bones.

Hatley removed the cuirass and sword. Examining the weapon, he was excited by markings inscribed on the blade. Showing them to Dr. Welham they considered them like, yet unlike, the very earliest pre-Minoan writings discovered at Knossos and speculated if maybe there were links between the two cultures.

As Dr. Welham and Hatley stowed what was left of their discoveries on the sleds, Tarleton went into the now empty cave. It was like something in the wind was calling him; summoning his presence. Stepping over where the bodies had lain, he made his way to the back of the shallow cave. The place was in semi-darkness as the low Arctic sun never reached the interior. The cave seemed eerie and he wondered what had brought those long-forgotten men here to kill each other all those years ago. Towards the back there seemed to have a slight rock fall and rubble littered the floor.

His boots crunching over the debris, his head bowed low as the ceiling lowered, Tarleton made his way to the back of the hollow. It looked like everyone had already fetched out everything of value. All the same, one of the rocks caught Tarleton's geologist's eye. It seemed out of place amongst the granites forming the bulk of the cave. It seemed like – no it couldn't be, but after what he'd seen anything was possible – a piece of jade.

Moving some rubble that had fallen onto the green stone, Tarleton lifted it up. Blowing grit from its surface, Tarleton was shocked by what he held. So aghast, he cried out and dropped the blasphemous abomination. He would have turned and fled but his shriek had attracted attention. Dr. Welham himself ran into the cave. Spotting the jade on the floor he lifted it up. As he did so, his face went pale – as white as the snowy mountains outside. Dr. Welham's mouth opened and closed before he could speak.

On the face of it, the statue wasn't too horrible. It was approximately a foot tall and of a starved humanoid with long outstretched arms tipped with talons. The figure had wide bulging eyes set too wide in its head and a fanged mouth open in terrible hunger or a soul-blasting scream. Every rib was exquisitely carved. Yet there were too many of them, giving the torso a snake-like appearance. Its legs were long, inhumanly long, as if the figure was striding forwards ready to devour the world.

But there was something about the carving; something deep and terrible that hinted of the benighted frozen wastes beyond the stars. Something inhuman and monstrous about the statue that spoke of worlds and times far, far removed from this.

Dr. Welham looked at it with terror and revulsion and was about to fling the statue away until Hatley entered the cave. He paused and, like Tarleton and Dr. Welham, seemed horrified for a moment. But then his eyes lit up with desire.

He took the statue out of Dr. Welham's nerveless grasp and wrapped the hideous object up in a fold of cloth. As soon as it was hidden, an air of normality seemed to return.

"I wonder if it can be?" Hatley murmured. "B'gnu-Thun; the Soul-Chilling Ice-God. It would fit." He sounded excited.

"Ssh. That's enough," said Dr. Welham, glancing over at Tarleton. He rubbed his mitten over his forehead as if trying to rub away a headache.

The three men left the cave and stepped out onto the wind-swept plain. To Tarleton it seemed that even during their short time in the cave, the temperature had dropped several degrees. The wind had got up and was sweeping down from the icy mountains to the north. Tarleton wrapped his coat tighter around himself and adjusted his scarf over his lower face so that only his eyes peered out.

Chugach and Iluliaq were freeing the sleds and fitting the huskies into the traces. Tarleton was no expert but the dogs seemed nervous and anxious and were playing up making the two guides' work more difficult. Tarleton helped the guides settle the dogs before they set out.

"Mush, mush," Chugach called, cracking his whip, and the lead sled set off down the trail. The huskies bounded away, as if eager to leave the wind-swept plain. To Tarleton's eyes, the weather was definitely getting worse. The mountain tops were now hidden by low-lying clouds and the wind was blowing much stronger. Flurries of snow gusted around them, soon covering the plain in a thin layer of white.

"Looks like it's going to be a bad one," Hatley said to Tarleton as they heaved their sled over a patch of shale.

Tarleton nodded, glad that they were returning to base camp. "What was that all about earlier, Arthur?" he asked over the shriek of the gale blowing straight down the mountain.

"What?" said Hatley.

"Bug-Thing the Ice God. And the land of Lomar or whatever it was."

Hatley looked away as he adjusted a tarpaulin covering the load. "Nothing – just native legends," he said evasively. But he wouldn't meet Tarleton's eye as he spoke.



## CHAPTER 5: WHITE-OUT ON THE TRAIL.

Shortly after this conversation, Tarleton had no time to think further about their strange discoveries. Even going downhill, the blizzard caught them well before they reached the glacier that had forced them inland. A wall of white swept over them. Tarleton had heard of the dreaded white-outs but this was the first he'd experienced. It would be useless as well as irresponsibly dangerous to carry on and Chugach, after speaking with his brother, suggested they stop and wait it out. Accordingly, the team drew the sleds together and the men hunkered down in their lea whilst the huskies curled up with their noses covered by their tails.

The weather on Baffin Island was always unpredictable and at the start of the short summer there was always a chance of a return to winter weather but this snowfall was the worst the two Inuit had ever seen. Quickly the dogs were hummocks underneath the snow and the men were sunk in misery. The temperature dropped still further until their beards and eyebrows were frosted. Even through their scarves it was painful to draw breath.

Yet it was the wind that was the worst. The howling, roaring, shrieking wind that sounded like the call of the banshee. The wind that clutched and clawed and chilled to the bone. The wind dropping the temperature to far below freezing, the wind that would eventually kill unless it eased soon.

The temperature dropped still more and the snowstorm intensified. The two Inuits put their heads together. They said this was the worst storm of the worst winter – far worse than any legend from their grandfather's grandfather time. Yet this was no winter storm. This was far worse. Supernatural. Otherworldly.

For hours the team crouched behind the minimal shelter of their sleds. Yet it was the snow itself that saved them from the heat-sapping wind. Gradually it formed an insulating blanket around the men as they huddled together, saving their lives. They cleared snow away from their faces and sat, lost in their own thoughts until the gale finally blew itself out.

The wind slowed, the shrieks and screams of its banshee wails subsided to a low moan and the snow eased until only the final few flurries fell. With difficulty, their joints numbed by the strength-sapping cold, every muscle seemingly locked in place the men slowly stood, knocking inches of snow from their bodies. They looked about in amazement. Where there had once been a rocky trail leading from the plain, there was now just an expanse of whiteness. Looking up, even the flanking mountains were covered in white snow.

The only good thing was that the sky was a cloudless blue. That cold pure blue only to be found in the high latitudes.

"Blown itself out," said Dr. Welham looking up into the expanse. The men grinned with relief at their survival. Now the snow-storm had ended the air temperature started creeping upwards again. Dr. Welham suggested they brew up and eat. Get some much needed warmth into their bodies. Chugach approached and said that it would be best not to stay here too long. Pointing up at the snow clad slopes, he said there was a danger of avalanches once the Arctic sun warmed up the snow. Respecting the guide's experience, the men hurried their meal and then roused out the huskies from their hollows.

Now the snow was deep and drifts crossed the track. All the men took turns breaking the trail for the dog-sleds to follow, a slow, back-breaking task, especially when wearing snow-shoes. It was a hard slog, exhausting and at times the drifts over-topped the men. Taking his turn, Tarleton wondered how long this snow-field would go on for. It was much harder work than helping push the sleds up hill on the outward journey.

Crashing through a six foot drift, trampling down the loose packed snow, Tarleton rounded a rocky outcrop. He stopped, amazed, and stood, panting with exertion, staring at the vista before him. The thick, fresh snow stopped abruptly. Where he stood was deep snow and then, only a few yards ahead, it was the rocky, wind-swept trail they had come up on the outward journey. Tarleton pushed onwards and a moment later was shaking snow from his clothes onto the rocks.

Shortly after, Chugach broke through the last drift, followed by the first dog team. The Inuit looked around him, equally as astounded as Tarleton had been. The man knelt, crossed himself and said a prayer in his own language.

Dr. Welham was the next through the gap. Like the others, he was stunned by the sudden end of the snow-field. "We must have been right on the edge of the blizzard," he said. Tarleton nodded. It made sense but he'd never seen anything like it before in the harsh New England winters of home.

As soon as Iluliaq came through, Chugach conferred with his brother in their own language before speaking with Dr. Welham. They both looked nervous,

"We should hurry. That one bad storm. Maybe other storms come," Chugach said, backed up by Iluliaq's nods.

It was easier now with just a thin, hard-packed layer of snow gliding beneath the runners, especially as they were mostly going downhill. Tarleton smiled. After that terrible snowstorm, this was the Arctic at its best. The sun shone out of a clear blue sky onto snow-fields of pristine purity. Their breath formed plumes into the crisp but not sub-zero air. Dr. Welham reminded the men to wear their goggles to stop snow blindness.

Behind them, there was a rumble, deep and menacing. A wall of snow slid like a slab down the mountain, crashing onto the trail in a small avalanche. Powdered snow was flung up into the air. If that avalanche had smashed into the expedition as they passed, they would have been killed.

Chugach and Iluliaq swung back to the rear. The two men looked at the piled up snow blocking the trail back to the plateau and conferred together in low tones. Chugach and Iluliaq stared at the mountains dominating the trail and shook their heads. Chugach finally spoke to Dr. Welham. "This is a bad place." He pointed up at the high peaks. "Too much chance of more. We need to hurry."

That was obvious so Dr. Welham cancelled the lunch break and the party hurried on. It was as if the huskies sensed danger as the dog teams leaped ahead, glad to get away from this mountainous place. They strained at the traces and the sleds flew along.

By the time they stopped for the evening, the weather still held good and the expedition camped at one edge of a flat dale far enough away from any risk of avalanches. Whilst

Chugach and Iluliaq tended to the dog teams, Tarleton and Hatley cooked dinner.

A shadow fell over Tarleton. Looking up, he saw a strange Inuit standing by the camp fire. The man held an obsidian edged *macuahuitl* and his fur robes were different from Chugach and Iluliaq's. Although Tarleton was no expert on Inuit culture and design, these robes struck him as being old fashioned. Jet beads adorned them in strange geometrical designs. The wind caught the robes, shifting them. The angles on those patterns seemed wrong, strange, unlike anything he'd ever seen before.

"You have something that does not belong to you," the man said. His English was good but with an unplaceable accent. Not native Inuit, not French-Canadian and definitely not American.

This Inuit was gaunt and hollow eyed. No, Tarleton thought, the man looked starved as if the hunting had been bad this season. His dark eyes glared at Tarleton, glittering like the black volcanic obsidian flakes edging his weapon. The hand clutching the *macuahuitl* was no more than a claw. The tendons and sinews stood out over his bony talons. For a moment, Tarleton thought the newcomer would fall on him and devour him. He shook off that image.

Tarleton stood. "I don't think so. No," he said automatically. He knew that burial sites were sacred places to the native tribes but those three bodies from earlier didn't belong to any known Inuit tribe. They had to have been there for thousands of years. Also, it was a scientific discovery of global importance. Bronze Age Europeans reaching the Arctic? That would turn the scientific world on its head. That was far more important than bowing to native superstition.

The Inuit-type hefted his *macuahuitl*. Tarleton thought the native would attack and his hand reached for the cook's knife. Instead, the man looked at him with a greedy, hungry look.

"I shall come back," the man who looked like an Inuit said. The man stared at him, his eyes feasting on Tarleton's image before he turned away and then walked back across the ice without once looking back. Tarleton watched him go before turning back to tend the camp fire.

Hatley grinned. "Man must have smelled our cooking. We should have offered him some, he was so thin."

Tarleton nodded. Now that possible danger had gone, he relaxed. "Yes, probably just scrounging for something. I'm surprised he didn't try and swipe something on the way out." But that didn't sound right to him. The native hadn't even looked around the camp. He'd just stood by the fire for a while before leaving. It was disquieting and Tarleton felt uneasy by the incident.

Shortly after, the rest of the expedition gathered around. Over dinner, Hatley mentioned the visit. Chugach and Iluliaq looked upset, especially when Tarleton described the old-fashioned robes.

"I wonder how he knew?" Dr. Welham mused. "He must have watched us from up in the mountains."

Shaking off his feelings of unease, Tarleton listened as the men's conversation eventually turned to other matters than the mysterious stranger.

The rest of the journey back to base camp went without incident. Hatley pointed out a huge polar bear that appeared to be following the team, maybe hoping to scavenge food, and as the sleds ran freely over the packed ice the men turned their heads to watch the magnificent creature in its natural habitat.

Above it all, the sun shone from a flawless blue sky; swinging in its arc throughout and dipping below the horizon for only a couple of hours. Caught by the wind, snow made spumes of spindrift off the mountain peaks, spraying it out across the sky. It was a beautiful sight, yet one that was cold and remote and hostile to mankind.

As usual, Chugach and Iluliaq remarked that these conditions were too good to last and they should hurry if they wanted to reach base camp before another extreme blizzard blew in from the north. The guides were correct. On the last day out, the sky clouded over again, thick dark cumulonimbus formed and joined together to blanket the sky. The summits were swallowed up by the low clouds. The wind got up and snow whipped across the trail and blew into their faces.

Chugach cracked the whip and the lead team surged forwards, the huskies as eager as the men to reach the safety of the camp. Caught in the excitement, the following teams raced after the lead. Even so, they made the camp only just in time. The first flakes were tumbling down from the leaden sky now coming quicker and heavier.

Chugach looked up. "This gonna be heavy," he said to Dr. Welham. "I think this last for days."

After seeing to the dogs, the men pounded extra pegs securing their tents into the ground. Tarleton and Hatley had the job of checking the tarpaulins covering the stores. One corner was flapping in the wind, the oil-cloth snapping like a gunshot as the wind caught it. The temperature was also dropping rapidly and the huskies were already taking shelter in the lee of the rocks and tents.

The difference between the wilderness outside and the mess tent was incredible. Heat blasted out from a pot-belly stove, making Tarleton and Hatley remove their thick fur coats at once. Despite the protective walls of ice blocks which had been built, the tent's sides billowed with the gusts making the inside seem more snug and inviting.

"That wasn't too bad," said Hatley as they entered the big mess tent. A man called Cooke, who because of his name had been appointed cook, was stirring a pot of stew on the stove and its savoury aromas filled the tent. It was just as well that Cooke could take a joke and as he enjoyed his job he wore a chef's white toque hat.

All the rest of the scientists were gathered around the trestle table upon which Dr. Welham was showing off the weapons and bones they had recovered from the cave. They were carefully scrutinised and wild theories were passed around the table. The bronze sword and helmet were the subject of much fascination with Hatley insisting that this backed up claims that the long-lost land of Lomar was no mere fable but had been situated around here.

As proof, he pointed to the eroded writing along the blade even though Dr. Welham insisted that they did resemble the earliest known Minoan scripts. That made Dr. Welham incline to the view that maybe proto-Minoans had reached the Arctic at some unknown date rather than there having been a lost land of Lomar.

However, all the men gasped with shock and disgust when he unwrapped the jade statue. Although recognisably humanoid, its starved appearance shocked and horrified the men. Its workmanship gave off an aura of incredible age, as if it was aeons old when the earth itself was young. It seemed, though nobody could explain how, that it was far older than the weapons and bones it lay among.

After feeding the huskies, Chugach pushed his way through the tent flap. He watched the jade statue as it passed from hand to hand. With a gesture learned from his boyhood in the Catholic missions on Labrador, he crossed himself. Couldn't these educated yet foolish white men see how evil that idol was? Why had they brought that, that thing from the bottom of Hell's deepest abyss to their camp?

Chugach swore and pushed his way between Hatley and Greavey who were speculating on the possibility of Minoan trading galleys leaving the Pillars of Hercules guarding the mouth of the Mediterranean. "Perhaps they re-provisioned at the Canaries or Azores?" Greavey was saying whilst Hatley was instead wondering whether survivors from Lomar might have been the ancestors of the proto-Minoans.

"Get rid of it," Chugach said, his voice deep and filled with terror. The scientists all gazed at their guide. "Take it back. You should never have brought it here."

Dr. Welham confronted Chugach. He saw the sheer terror in the man's eyes so he told Cooke to fetch brandy and then offered the glass himself to Chugach. The guide drank it in one. Without being asked, Cooke poured out another.

"Why, what's the matter, Chugach?" Dr. Welham said, soothingly.

"You should not touched it. Some things are not meant to be, how you say, disturbed," Chugach said. His accent had got thicker, emphasising the man's distress.

"Nonsense, man. It's just an old statue; maybe very old. Either way, it is a major scientific discovery. Young Tarleton here thinks the jade may have come from what's now Burma or Siam. Can you imagine the significance of that?" Dr. Welham played what he thought was his trump card. "Once the war has ended, then over the next few years all the major universities of the world will be sending expeditions here. That'll mean more work for you guides. More money..."

Chugach shook his head. "No. No. Will be no more expeditions. Please, Dr. Welham take it back."

Dr. Welham looked closely into Chugach's dark eyes. "No, I'm sorry, I can't do that even if I wanted." A sudden gust of wind buffeted the tent's side making the canvas boom like distant thunder.

Turning to Greavey and another man, Dr. Welham ordered them outside to double-check that the tent was secure. Securing hoods and pulling on mittens, the two left the safety of the tent.

"What do you know about this statue, Chugach? Any legends amongst your people?" Dr. Welham asked. He laid his hand on Chugach's sleeve. The Inuit shook it off.

"Nothing," Chugach replied; but he looked away as he spoke.

"No. You know more than you're saying. Out with it," Dr. Welham insisted.

"This is B'gnu-Thun – the evil Soul-Chilling Ice-God," Chugach replied.

Tarleton shivered. That was the name Hatley had used. Of course, Hatley had picked up the name from Inuit lore, but from the Inuit's lips, the name chilled him to the bone.

The men sent out to check the camp soon came back. "It's blowing a blizzard out there. A total white-out, just like the other day." Turning to Chugach, Greavey said, "weird weather you have up here. One minute it's summer, the next winter."

Chugach shook his head, breaking away from Dr. Welham's gaze. "This is not natural. You should not have took that idol. We should take it back."

Iluliaq spoke to his brother. "It may already be too late," Chugach said sadly. Without saying another word, the two guides pulled on their thick coats and left. The scientist thought their guides had left to check on the huskies. Instead, the two brothers stole some supplies, launched their kayak into the blizzard and then paddled out into the fjord and headed south.

After examining the evil-looking statue, none of the scientists were sorry when Dr. Welham wrapped it up and placed it in a trunk. After dinner, the men wrote up their notebooks or sat about playing cards, chess or just chatting.

Outside the wind howled like a fury, buffeting the tent. Chill fingers of air penetrated every chink in the canvas. From time to time, black smoke billowed back from the stove, making the men cough and choke. At last, the finishing hands of cards were played, conversation stilled and the men unrolled sleeping bags and turned in. More than one found the noise of the snowstorm outside to be comforting.

## CHAPTER 6: THE BLOODLESS DEATH.

Only one man lived to see the next day. The rest were all sprawled in the attitudes of death.

Tarleton woke from a bad dream to the sound of the huskies outside. They were howling, their wolf ancestry very close to the skin now. Their howls reached to the skies, even over the shriek of the north wind. The huskies sounded like they were at the extremities of terror.

Tarleton sat up, wriggled out of his sleeping bag and pulled on his coat and boots. A husky would be a match for a hungry wolf but he wondered if a polar bear had broken into the camp. He picked up a Springfield rifle propped up against a ski-rack and chambered a round before leaving the big tent.

Immediately, Tarleton wondered if he was doing the right thing. At this time of day, the sun had dipped below the western mountains leaving the sky in that strange grey twilight that passed for the Arctic night during the short summer. Without the sun's rays, the air was cold, somewhere in the low twenties. But now the landscape was covered by a total white-out. Snow fell heavily from the grey sky and Tarleton could see only a few yards in any direction.

Worried, he peered about himself. Tarleton debated returning to the safety of the big tent. If he got lost in this snowstorm he could take a wrong direction and wander off into the wilderness and fall into a crevasse or just get lost and die of hypothermia. Or if he blundered into a polar bear without enough time to shoot.

The huskies howled again. Not their usual howl with their muzzles pointed at the moon as their semi-wild natures came to the front. No, these were howls of utter terror. Tarleton made out where the Siberian huskies were calling from. Gripping the Springfield tightly, Tarleton made his way in that direction. Within a few paces, the mess tent vanished into the snow behind him, leaving him alone on the ice. Yet not alone. The wind shrieked around him, ripping at his clothes, as if all the dæmons of hell were out on the ice with him.

Shaking his head at such a fanciful notion, far more worried about the possibility of a polar bear; another grey bulk loomed up out of the white-out. With relief, knowing he wasn't lost, Tarleton made out the stack of stores. By now, the crates were turning into a snowy hummock. Reassured, Tarleton edged around the stores to the lea-ward side where most of the huskies usually sheltered from the wind. Out of the full force of the gale he drew breath more easily. However, the huskies' painful howls were ear-splitting now. Even in the partial shelter, Tarleton noticed it was much colder – certainly no higher than ten degrees.

Shading his eyes from the blizzard with his hand, Tarleton squinted into the snowstorm. There. His eyes snapped to the left. A shape, huge yet indistinct loomed up out of the snow. It clutched a husky in its hands and raised the struggling beast up to what passed for its head. Was that Spruce – one of the strongest of the team? A winner of countless dog-fights and with the scars to prove it on his muzzle and flanks. What Iluliaq called with a smile, "him good dog." The husky was powerless to resist, as weak in the shape's grip as a newborn puppy.

Tarleton, stood stunned for a moment. A strong gust cleared the air for a moment. That was no polar bear that gripped the husky. The shape was tall – phenomenally tall. It was hard to be sure in the swirling, whirling snow but it seemed to be at least twelve or thirteen feet tall. In

general form it was of a man – but a naked man on the far side of starvation. Its arms were longer, far too long, stick-like in their thinness ending in viciously hooked talons. The figure appeared bloodless, drained, blue-tinged, and more dead than alive. Yet it was possessed of a grim, unholy life.

Tarleton couldn't be sure but it appeared as if snow was pouring from every pore on its body, blurring its outline, making it hard for Tarleton to be sure what he was looking at. It was as if this unholy thing was the epicentre of the snowstorm. His Springfield dropped from his nerveless hands. As he watched, horror struck, the creature lifted Spruce up to its head. Its jaws gaped wide, impossibly wide as if the top of its head was coming loose revealing fangs like icicles. It sank its fangs into Spruce and, as Tarleton stared finding it impossible to move, a slight rose flush suffused under the creature's skin.

Then it tossed Spruce's body away. The dog's body arced away before it was lost in the blizzard but in that short space of time it seemed to be no more than skin and bone as if it had been drained of all blood and life. Then the hideous creature stooped and lifted up another husky. This dog had more spirit than Spruce and bit and snapped at the creature but for all the good that did, it was like biting snow. The dog's powerful jaws tore flesh from the creature's arms but the torn meat turned to snow and ice and was replaced instantly. However, the rosy tinge became a cold, cyanotic blue pallor, far colder than the Arctic wilderness. A sickly sight.

The monster's jaws opened devouring the dog, sucking out all its goodness as well as its life-force before tossing its desiccated carcass away. That pinkish tinge, a horrible mockery of life in this sub-zero waste, reappeared under the monster's snow-spraying surface – Tarleton refused to call it skin. Another of the huskies cowered at the monster's feet, its tongue out, tail wagging, begging for its life. That did not save the dog from the terribly starved monster's maw. Again, the terrible shape sunk its fangs into the dog's body and drank deep of the dog's life-force and then threw away the husk where it was lost in the white-out.

Tarleton shook his head. This was nothing of this earth, nothing from any sane universe. Even as he watched, a thin layer of flesh covered the monster's slat-like ribs. Its deep set eyes glowed green as it scanned the snow field. This time it snatched up a dog hiding in its hollow under the snow. When it finished, the creature roared out its anger and despair. The roar merged with the gale's blast.

Tarleton quailed. This was impossible, this was mind-destroying terror. Clinging onto the last vestiges of his sanity, Tarleton dropped to his knees. He couldn't tear his eyes from that shocking figure as it filled out on the life force of the dogs. As he crouched, his hands cast around over the snow for the rifle. One fingertip brushed against the icy barrel. Even that short contact froze his skin onto the metal. With a cry of pain, Tarleton ripped his finger away leaving the skin adhering to the metal. His blood froze instantly, sealing the wound. He had no idea how cold it was now but well below minus ten Fahrenheit.

He raised the rifle to his shoulder. It was hard to see straight as his tears froze onto his lashes and the snow pouring from the creature in all directions confused him. The rifle shook in his hands; Tarleton was only partly shivering with the cold as well as this unmanly fear. Slowing his breathing, trying to calm himself, remembering youthful hunting trips with his father and Uncle Silas to the backwoods of New Hampshire, Tarleton aimed direct at the centre of the snow creature's chest. He couldn't miss, not at this range.



He fired. Together with the gun-smoke, the report was lost in the snowstorm. However, the 30-06 slug ripped into the creature just above where its heart should be. The bullet had no effect. It was the same as shooting snow. Tarleton fired again, this time the bullet tearing through the creature's torso. The snow still pouring from the creature hid the impact. However, as the creature turned to face him, Tarleton saw the tiny hole immediately heal up, but any pinkish hue became that chill cyanotic blue again.

The creature lurched towards where he knelt. Its eyes, impossibly large were filled with the swirling maddening hues of the Aurora Borealis, the northern witch-lights laid over a distant blue far colder than any iceberg. Its arms, long and claw-like stretched out towards him. Its icicle fanged maw stretched wide as if about to devour the whole world. Snow vomited out from its throat together with a sub-zero blast of frigid air far colder than the coldest Arctic winter.

Tarleton screamed and the Springfield dropped once again onto the ice field. A bullet fired out randomly, shooting off into the wastes.

The monster strode towards Tarleton, its pupil-less Arctic eyes filled with witch-light glowed with insane hunger. Its arms reached down ready to pluck him up and drain him of all life in that icicle fanged maw. Unable to look away, Tarleton screamed and screamed again. He was doomed, his body and soul would be sucked dry to feed this Arctic abomination that had appeared from the frozen north to stalk the ice.

Then a husky, maddened with fear, broke from its snow hollow directly beneath the monster's feet. The dog skidded and the monster, its attention broken, snatched up the struggling beast and then tossed the bag of skin and bone into the storm. Yet another husky vanished around the stack of stores which was rapidly losing its distinction and becoming no more than a mountain of white. Changing direction, following the huskies, the monster swept past the stores. Tarleton collapsed onto the snow; his world greyed out and a moment later he fainted dead away.

Something he hadn't done since a boy visiting Aunt Rosie's house under the shadow of the Kingsport cliffs.

\* \* \*

Tarleton came to with the sound of screams and then more rifle fire in the distance. Then a bellow from some inhuman throat, a bellow that reverberated from the storm clouds. He felt dazed and confused for a minute. Surely the events since he'd gone out to check on the huskies had been a nightmare? A combination of cold and stress in this inhospitable wilderness?

Using the rifle as a crutch, Tarleton stood. Even in that short space of time, the exposed parts of his face and ungloved hand felt chilled with frost-numb. If he'd lain out much longer, he might have lost his fingers or even if his life if his core body temperature dipped too low. More shouts and screams snapped Tarleton back to reality. Then some more gunshots. Then a flare, red as a dying sun shot up into the clouds casting a bloody glare over the ice. Another inhuman roar of rage sounded over the blasts of wind.

Snapping back to immediate reality, Tarleton limped back towards the mess tent. As his muscles warmed, his gait became easier. The mess tent loomed up out of the blizzard. Its roof

had been slit and canvas flogged itself into ribbons as the gale caught it. In the middle of the tent stood that ice monster. Even as he ran towards the ruined base, he saw a man, indistinguishable in his furs, lifted kicking and screaming towards the monster's mouth.

The long icicle fangs sank into the man sucking the life and soul from him as rapidly as it had the dogs' before hurling the shell out into the blizzard. Another man met the same fate a second later. This man screamed out his terror, his eyes bulging with abandoned terror. Struggling, the man's hood slipped off. Tarleton saw that it was his friend, Greavey. A man he had messed with, a man he had joked with, a man who had discussed geology with him. A man who would die a horrible death.

The ice-figure had changed. No longer was it on the extremities of starvation, now it had put on weight and, although still thin, it looked stronger and more powerful than before. From what Tarleton could see through the thick driving snow, its colour had improved and was now a hideous pink, a ghastly parody of flesh and blood.

Casually, it slung the dried out body of Greavey away before plucking another man from the ruins of the camp. Greavey's body plummeted onto the ice a few yards ahead of Tarleton who ran up to it and turned his late friend over. The body felt weightless, only skin and bone and teeth. Its skull grinned up at him. Yet another red flare hit the monster high on its thorax before passing straight through and bursting in the sky. More snow swirled around, masking the terrible scene from Tarleton's eyes.

Swallowing his fear, he ran forward. The shattered tent loomed up before him. He stumbled over another body, face down in the snow, tripped but carried on. He passed the snow block wall protecting the tent's sides and in through what remained of the entrance. There was no security for him inside the shambles of the tent.

The ice-monster stood in the centre, the epicentre of the chaos. Dr. Welham crouched before it, his pistol blazing uselessly, the only effect to dull the creature's bloody glow. And then the monster swept Dr. Welham up in its arms, up in the air the scientist fighting and struggling to the last like his Viking ancestors. Like them, Dr. Welham died with his metaphorical sword in his hand.

As the ice-dæmon bit down Dr. Welham fired two shots into its mouth. The creature screamed with rage, the snow-storm emanating from its body declined slightly. But the end was the same. Those terribly sharp icicles bit down and a minute later Dr. Welham's dried out husk was flung away.

The creature's huge dark eyes searched the ruins of the tent. The trestle table was overturned, scientific equipment lay scattered about. Papers and journals swirled about in the icy vortex. Then its eyes fastened on Tarleton. Its arm, now more muscular than before, swept down towards him.

Acting solely on instinct, Tarleton dodged the out flung limb. He jumped over a pile of discarded boots and snowshoes and fetched up against a storage cupboard. Tarleton wrenched open a door. His heart leaped within his chest. Yes, there it was. He pulled out a bundle wrapped in a blanket from the shelf. The object felt heavier and bulkier than he remembered.

A shadow fell over him. Screaming, still clutching that bundle Tarleton rolled away. The talons missed him by inches, gouging the cupboard's surface. He fetched up on his back, his numb fingers tearing at the blanket. The ice-dæmon bulked over him; its maddening eyes filled with the insanity of the Aurora Borealis staring at him from its great height. Tarleton ripped off the blanket. The wind snatched the cover, whirling it away.

In his hands lay that hideous idol. But no longer was it of an emaciated humanoid. Now the statue had taken on a hideous life. It had filled out, swollen with the men's and dogs' life-force. It even had a rotund belly and felt warm in his hands. Gripping the monstrous thing Tarleton lifted it up as an offering to the ice-dæmon. The monster leaned forwards. Its cavernous mouth opened wide, armed with those dagger teeth. A blast of frigid air bellowed out, a jet stream of sub-zero air with the screams of the devoured souls carried on it.

Tarleton half raised the statue like a protective shield. Then his mind caved in under the unearthly horror and stress and he fainted clean away.

## CHAPTER 7: AFTER THE STORM.

Moored out on the fjord, Captain Calderbank leaned on the taffrail. It was cold, far colder than even Baffin Island should be at this time of year and his beard was frozen stiff. He rubbed the tip of his hooked nose, trying to restore circulation. The shoreline had vanished beneath a tempestuous blizzard covering the shore and mountains in a maelstrom of white. Although the *Margarite Ohlsen* was four hundred yards offshore the snowstorm did not reach that far out. Nevertheless, the water was churned up by the storm and the barque rose and fell as the water slapped against its bulwarks.

As the storm blanketed the coast, Captain Calderbank strained his ears. He couldn't be sure but he thought, he was almost positive, that he had heard gun shots. Had a starving polar bear broken into the camp? Or perhaps an attack by hostile Inuit hunters, although that didn't seem very likely. He couldn't recall the last time, if ever, an explorer had been attacked by Canadian Inuit.

Then the storm was lit up red. Flares! Why had flares been fired? Captain Calderbank couldn't understand why the distress flares had been launched. However, he knew that something terrible must have happened ashore.

He made a decision. He turned to the man peering through binoculars next to him. "Launch a lifeboat, Cox. But take no chances, understand. If that storm's too bad then come back. I don't want anyone getting drowned."

The coxswain nodded. Davis was a tough looking ex-whaler who knew the cold polar waters as well as any man alive. "Aye, aye, sir." The Cox blew his whistle and the deckhands swung the nearest boat out on its davits and then lowered it into the choppy water. Another flare lit up the clouds, emphasising the urgency of the situation.

The Cox, Davis, and six men climbed down and a few minutes later, Captain Calderbank watched the small vessel bob its way towards the shore; the oars rising and falling as one. Davis steered it past an ice-floe towards the edge of the blizzard. One moment, the lifeboat was clearly in sight, the next it had vanished into the maelstrom of the snowstorm.

Concentrating on the storm, Captain Calderbank stared through the Cox's binoculars. He was desperately trying to catch a glimpse of the crew, anything to reassure him that they were safe. Long minutes passed, with Captain Calderbank's heart in his mouth. He'd known Davis and some of the crew for better than twenty years and, despite their difference in station, he regarded them as friends. Men he'd laughed with – men he'd bailed out of half the jails between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Montevideo after drunken shore leaves. But for all that, they were good men and he had put his life in their hands more than once.

Distantly Calderbank thought he heard more gunfire. Finally, the lifeboat re-emerged from the storm. Through the binoculars, Captain Calderbank saw the crew's coats were heavy with snow. They rowed back slowly, their strokes showing their weariness. Adjusting the sights, Captain Calderbank could not see any extra men in the lifeboat. He felt deflated.

Cox Davis tied the boat to the hoists and was the last to climb on deck. Davis sketched a salute. "Sorry, sir. We couldn't make it. We tried – God, how we tried. But the winds and the waves kept us off. We couldn't land. It was like there was some force holding us off." Davis shook his head at the memory. "I've never been through anything like it, sir."

"That's alright, Cox. I know you did your best," Calderbank patted the other's shoulder. "Get yourself and the men a tot of rum. You deserve it."

Captain Calderbank returned to the security of the bridge for the next hour. With a suddenness that surprised him, the storm died away to be replaced by the ever present north wind. The snow cleared and scanning the shore, Captain Calderbank saw that the base camp looked destroyed. The clear air and low Arctic sun revealed the extent of the devastation. Yet no men stood on the shore semaphoring frantically for help.

Looking at the water separating them, Captain Calderbank calculated that although choppy it should be possible to land. Ordering the lifeboat to be relaunched, this time Captain Calderbank joined the crew and sat in the stern. The small boat skimmed towards the rocky beach, the men as eager as himself to see what had happened. It must have been a bloody catastrophe, Captain Calderbank thought. Even though the boat must be clearly visible amongst the ice floes, nobody from the shore appeared.

Apart from a stiff off-shore current Coxswain Davis and the crew had little trouble running the boat ashore. As soon as it beached Davis and the others leaped out and drew the boat above the high water mark. As soon as Captain Calderbank stepped out, his boots crunching the shingle underfoot, he was struck by the silence. Apart from the flat whine of the north wind and the calls of the skuas and gulls the inlet lay under a dead silence. The men looked at each other and huddled together.

Even Captain Calderbank felt the eeriness. "C'mon," he said, taking a tight rein of his emotions. Leaving one man to guard the boat, the others made their way uphill towards the camp.

"What's that?" called Davis. He ran away from the group and picked up the dried out corpse of one of the huskies. The dog's body peeled away from the frozen ground and Davis held it out. The body was stiff as a board. All the men gathered around to look.

"*Mon dieu?* What happened?" one of the men, a Quebecois, asked. The man crossed himself.

Captain Calderbank said nothing. The dog's body looked completely drained and mummified as if it had been exposed to the Arctic cold for years rather than one night.

"Looks like an old fur coat," one of the men joked. "Like my mama in Brooklyn wears." Nobody laughed so he fell quiet.

The party carried on uphill. The camp became closer, larger, and clearer. They found the bodies of several more huskies and each corpse made the sailors more and more uneasy. Especially as none of the scientists had yet greeted them. Captain Calderbank unholstered his Colt revolver.

The normally tough ex-whaler gasped with horror when the first human corpse came to sight. Davis knelt by the body, shrunken and dwarfed by its cold-weather clothing.

"What could have done something like this, Davis?" Captain Calderbank asked.

Davis looked away from the body. "I've no idea, Captain, no idea at all. I've never seen anything like this. Ever." The man's voice was softened by grief.

"Polar bear?" said the youngest member of the crew. This was his first voyage to the Arctic. After what he'd just seen, he was going to make sure it was his last.

"No, son, a polar bear would have torn them to pieces," Captain Calderbank told him.

"And a bear wouldn't have killed everyone, sir," Davis reminded his captain. "Even if it was in a bad mood."

"Perhaps most of the scientists are still out rock gathering or egg collecting or whatever in the middle of nowhere," Calderbank mused. Maybe the sailors would be lucky and only two or three scientists had been left behind to suffer this strange and terrible death at base camp.

Captain Calderbank was the first into the destroyed mess tent. Immediately he saw that they weren't to be lucky. Bodies were strewn in all directions. The only movement was the wind ruffling the fur on their coats.

All the dead men were as drained and hollowed as their dogs. What was left of their eyes showed a wide, staring horror as if they knew what was happening was not just their physical death but the destruction of their very souls as well. Captain Calderbank tried to put such a fanciful notion out of his mind but those hollowed out eyes haunted him.

Then came the worst of the horror of that mad day. Another humped mound that used to be a man drew his attention. Captain Calderbank hurried over to the remains of what used to be Arthur Hatley – a man he had laughed and joked with on the outward voyage. Hatley's remains had been savagely mutilated with the corpse's ribcage smashed open and the man's heart ripped out. The chest cavity was empty and the ribs stood out stark and white against the redness of the torso. Fragments of cloth lay about and the snow and grey rocks were splashed with blood.

Captain Calderbank looked away in disgust and shame. It was with difficulty that he kept from vomiting.

"Captain! Over here!" Davis called.

Picking his way through the debris, Calderbank crossed to where Davis knelt. The coxswain turned the man over.

"This one's alive, sir," Davis said. Everyone rushed to see. Out of all the death and destruction one man had survived. A young man seemingly in a deep sleep or dead faint. The sole survivor clutched a repulsive green sculpture of some kind of obese god. It didn't look like any Inuit artefact Captain Calderbank had ever seen. Gently prising open the man's fingers, Calderbank removed the statue.

"That's young Jack Tarleton," Calderbank said, searching his memory. "I wonder how come he didn't suffer the same fate as everyone else?"

Despite a thorough search of the ruins, the sailors found no other survivors. They took the still comatose Tarleton back to the *Margarite Ohlsen* and laid him in the sick bay. Then Captain

Calderbank organised a burial party. The sailors built cairns and held a simple service over the graves.

Finally, the sailors collected any papers or specimens that could be of use to Miskatonic University including that obscene jade statue. The more superstitious thought it should be dropped into the Atlantic depths where it could never be found again. However, Captain Calderbank vetoed that idea. But he would still not have that thing in his cabin.

Using its sails to catch every gust of wind Captain Calderbank backed the *Margarite Ohlsen* out of the fjord and then down the coast of Baffin Island. All of them were glad when the final tip of that nightmare island disappeared below the horizon astern and the barque headed down the coast of Labrador towards the south and civilisation.

Tarleton lay in the sick bay and apart from some moans and delirious cries, he didn't recover. Captain Calderbank was glad to unload him in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as the man's presence was disturbing the crew. After that, Calderbank walked to the main post office and sent a telegram to the ship's owners requesting no more polar trips for a long while.

Somewhere tropical would be preferred.

## CHAPTER 8: THE HORROR FROM THE BLIZZARD.

"So that's what happened?" Chancellor Roberts said at last. "I wondered if it would be...," he lowered his voice and whispered, "B'gnu-Thun, the Soul-Chilling Ice-God that was written about in the Pnakotic Manuscripts?"

Professor Bamford looked up. Although he was no expert; that name didn't sound like anything coming from Inuktun, the language spoken around Labrador or the west coast of Greenland, or Yupik Innu from Alaska.

"B'gnu-Thun?" Bamford queried. "Who or what is B'gnu-Thun?"

"Working here, you must be aware of the legends, Andrew. How the Great Old Ones lived aeons before there were any people before coming to the young Earth from beyond the stars. These Great Old Ones are vanished now – deep inside the earth and under the sea; but their undead bodies told their secrets in dreams to the first men. Some of these men formed cults which have never died waiting for the time when the Great Old Ones will rise again and bring the Earth again beneath their rule."

"Yes, I've heard of these rumours but never gave them much credence. Anyway, before we do anything, Chancellor, shall we get young Jack to the infirmary?"

Chancellor Roberts nodded abstractedly, his mind elsewhere. "Yes, yes, of course." He picked up the desk phone and asked the switchboard to put him through to Dr. Waldron. Professor Bamford heard the Chancellor murmur something about a collapse; yes young Jack Tarleton.

A few minutes later, two white-clad medical students arrived with a stretcher. A quick examination showed that Tarleton was comatose but breathing easily and without any obvious injuries so the two medics carried him away.

"Thank you," said Chancellor Roberts politely to their backs as he closed the door behind them.

"Do we still have the statue that was brought back?" Professor Bamford asked, taking a sip of his drink.

"I should think so, Andrew," Chancellor Roberts said. "That object was the only thing of value brought back from that debacle."

"You know, I never saw any scientific papers written on it? Not even in our own in-house university publication," Professor Bamford commented.

"No. It's not been... comprehensively evaluated yet," Chancellor Roberts said.

Professor Bamford looked at his friend and colleague. "Not even after three years?"

"These things need time," Chancellor Roberts said, evasively.

"Would it be possible to see it?" Professor Bamford asked.



Taking his time, Chancellor Roberts poured out two more glasses of bourbon. "Soda?" he asked.

Professor Bamford shook his head. "You should know by now I don't take soda water. Why don't we take a look at this statue."

"If you insist, Andrew. But I must warn you, it is quite shocking."

Professor Bamford sipped his bourbon. "I'm a grown man, Chancellor. I think I can cope with looking at a sculpture. Even those Dadaist ones from Europe that they call modern art," he laughed.

Chancellor Roberts rang a bell and one of his undergraduates knocked. Professor Bamford recognised him as a man having an interest in occult matters. The Chancellor scribbled on a piece of notepaper, signed it before folding it and sealing it inside an envelope. "Take this to Dr. Armitage with my compliments and ask him to release this exhibit to my custody. It will be for only a few hours."

The man nodded and left. Chancellor Roberts turned the conversation onto other subjects – the political instability in Europe and Russia and then onto the chess club's prospects. It was hard going as both men's minds were on that strange sculpture. Eventually, the young man returned carrying a small padlocked wooden crate. He gently set it down.

"Here you are, sir." He fished a key from his pocket and laid it down on the crate. It gleamed yellow in the afternoon sunlight. "Will that be all?"

"Yes, Herbert, thank you."

The young man left but he looked disappointed not to be invited to stay for the box's opening.

"Are you sure?" Chancellor Roberts asked, waiting for his friend's nod. He crossed to the box, unlocked it and then opened the lid. He rummaged through the protective spills of paper, pulled out an oil cloth and unwrapped it.

Even though he was expecting something ugly, something eldritch and frightening, Professor Bamford stepped back from that hideous jade idol of an emaciated humanoid with its over-large, starving eyes that seemed to stare right through him. Its workmanship was definitely not of Inuit origin and it gave off an impression of extreme age.

"I..., I..., I hadn't expected that, Chancellor. It's quite horrible. And this is the only thing of value that was brought back from Baffin Island?"

"Yes. Apart from a few papers and rock samples, of course."

"It's a shame that abomination was brought back to civilisation," Professor Bamford said slowly. To put some space between him and that image, he crossed over to the window and looked out over the quadrangle. The October light had faded and the sky was covered by thick cumulonimbus. The clouds blocked the sunlight and the temperature was dropping. Those few students still out hurried along the paths.

"Looks like we're due an early snowfall, Chancellor," Professor Bamford mused. "Most unusual. It was so warm earlier in the day."

The Chancellor looked up from repacking the statue. "Unusual, yes. But it will be November tomorrow. Now, when I was a boy, we had some really severe winters. The late fall of 1866 will live long in my memory. We went tobogganing down Hangman's Hill. I fell off and cracked my head against a tree stump. My mother was furious..."

Professor Bamford nodded and said 'yes' or 'no' as appropriate. He looked out of the window as the first flakes sprinkled down. They were already sticking to the lawns and the slate roofs opposite. The slate was the same colour as the low-lying clouds. Professor Bamford shivered. He thought it might be best to take his students essays home with him rather than marking them here.

\* \* \*

Night fell early. The campus fell silent, blanketed under the still falling snow. White fell on white. Snowflakes poured down from the sky and the oldest residents of Arkham compared it with the winter of 1866 which was exceptionally long and cold and the very oldest talked about what they had heard from their grandparents of the winter of 1814.

And still the snow fell, heavily and unceasingly.

\* \* \*

There were only two patients in the infirmary ward. Jack Tarleton and a man named Merrell who had broken his leg during an unfortunate football tackle. Tarleton moaned and stirred before sitting up. He rubbed his forehead, confused by the strange surroundings. After a while, the smell of disinfectant and medicine told him where he was. During the night, the light in the infirmary was kept dim however at the end of the ward, Tarleton saw a desk lamp over by the nurse's station.

He wanted a drink and wondered where everyone was. He pushed the bed-covers down and swung his legs out of the bed. He called out, weakly, through parched lips. There was no response. Tarleton called out again, a little louder. Merrell rolled over, his arm flopped out of the bed and he muttered thickly.

Not wanting to disturb the other man, Tarleton stood and walked down the centre aisle between the beds. He looked up at the high, arched windows of the infirmary. Through the darkness outside, Tarleton couldn't be sure but was it snowing out? Surely not. Not at the start of November, he thought as he padded down the aisle.

"Hello," he called out when he reached the nurse's station. "Anyone there?" There was no answer. He knocked on the door and entered the small room. A small coal fire burned in the hearth and a kettle stood on the grate. A rota chart marked with coloured pencils was pinned up on one wall. A few old arm chairs were scattered around. Tarleton picked up the day's copy of the Arkham Advertiser before dropping it again.

Where was everyone? Could it be they were dealing with a patient in one of the isolation rooms? Wondering, Tarleton left the room and checked the corridor leading to the isolation rooms. Apart from one, which was locked tight, the rooms were open and a glance inside showed they were empty.

Turning around, Tarleton returned the way he'd come. This time, a sudden chill made him notice that the vestibule leading to the quadrangle outside was standing ajar. Tarleton shuddered. A thin skittering of snow had blown in and blew over the black and white tiled floor. Coldness gripped his heart and squeezed tight. Tarleton paused, unsure what to do. Even as he paused a gust carried in more flakes of pristine white to join the rest on the floor. Should he return to the safety of his warm bed and wait for the orderlies to return? But that was a false safety, suitable only for little boys.

The wind howled outside, the gusts stronger. It almost sounded as if there were human voices out there in the cold darkness. Human voices and worse as the wind blew around the rafters and chimneys. Undecided what to do, Tarleton took a step closer to the door and then another. His bare feet chill on the snow covered cold tiles. Reluctantly, Tarleton stood by the heavy black painted door. The wind picked up outside.

Suddenly Tarleton felt fear. Real fear. Worse than looking at the block of ice outside the Italian restaurant earlier that day. He had to close that door, slam it against whatever was on the outside. Slowly, shuffling over the skein of snow, Tarleton approached the door. Quivering with an unspoken fear, Tarleton put out his hand to close it.

The air coming through the gap between door and jamb was sub-zero, far too cold for the first night of November. A blast from the high Arctic wastes. He touched the old wood before the door was thrust open hard. The door smashed back, ripping against the jamb, the wood by its hinges tearing and splintering.

It was what stood in the open doorway that made Tarleton scream. Scream and scream again. A giant figure, like yet unlike a man. Abnormally tall, towering over the cowering man. Impossibly emaciated, hollowed out. Its skin tone a terrible cyanosed blue as the blizzard emanated from its body, disguising yet emphasising its skeletal look, snowflakes pouring from it.

Its long arms stretched out and plucked the screaming man up and lifted him up to its mouth. Despite its stick-thin arms, the creature possessed immense strength and it raised Tarleton up to his mouth as easily as if he weighed less than a snowflake. Its staring, bulging eyes shimmered with all the colours of the northern lights as its icicle-fanged mouth open wide, wider than the gates of hell. Tarleton struggled one last time before the fangs bit down into his body.

Then he was helpless as his very life force was sucked away to feed the monster. Slowly at first as if the monster was savouring his taste and then faster as its endless greed forced it to drink faster. Tarleton saw the white-out fade to grey and then black. The darkness of the interstellar voids where the temperature never rises above absolute zero. Shortly after, his emptied lifeless, desiccated body was tossed away to fetch up against a snowdrift.

His soul though – his soul joined those toiling for all eternity beneath the ice-dæmon's whips in the ice caves of Hrak far below the cold northern wastes of Dreamland's Kadath.

## CHAPTER 9: EPILOGUE.

The storm died down as quickly as it arrived, covering the University campus and western Arkham beneath a thick layer of white, drifts mounded up against the ancient houses yet leaving eastern Arkham untouched. The university's meteorology department was excited and talked about occlusions and rare cold spots forming.

However all that talk died down to a respectful silence when the bodies of Tarleton and the two orderlies were discovered under the snow in the quadrangle. Nobody could understand why the three corpses appeared to be so empty and bloodless.

Arkham's coroner was a local man, who had studied for a while under Dr. Waldron himself, had seen enough curious and troubling cases in his time. Cases that defied any rational, scientific explanation. Especially around the times of Halloween or Walpurgisnacht.

A deputation from the University, led by Dr. Waldron and Professor Bamford went to see the Coroner. In his offices, they had a quiet word explaining that the reputation of Miskatonic University, and by extension the good name of Arkham itself, was at stake. The Coroner looked at the earnest, worried faces of the elderly men before him. This wasn't the first time the University had asked a favour and the Coroner thought it wouldn't be the last.

Yet this was a most unusual case. Three men, all in the prime of life, all mysteriously drained of every drop of blood and all with a look of sheer terror frozen on their faces. And all this during a freak snowstorm.

During his time at Miskatonic, the Coroner had looked at a few of the forbidden tomes in the library. And that was enough to convince him that there were things beyond human knowledge that mankind was not meant to probe too deeply. After speaking with the delegation, the Coroner was happy to put their deaths down to hypothermia.

In his official report, the Coroner stated that in his opinion, whilst the full circumstances of this tragedy would never be known; it would appear that the patient, one John Tarleton, woke up confused, took a wrong turning and wandered out into the snowstorm. Realising he was missing, the two orderlies bravely went outside searching for him. Disorientated by the white-out they too became lost out on the sports field and succumbed to the extremely cold temperatures of that night.

Nothing was said about the bloodlessness of the bodies and nothing was said about their look of extreme terror that proved so difficult for the undertakers to mask. These things were better not mentioned. And nothing was said to the Coroner about the trail of giant naked footprints that walked from the infirmary wing then along to the library. Nor of the splintered door in the archive room nor the smashed open crate and the missing jade statue of a gaunt, emaciated humanoid of non-Inuit workmanship that had been tentatively identified as the Great Old One, B'gnu-Thun, the Soul-Chilling Ice-God.

**THE END.**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Freedom fighter, international mercenary, Riviera jewel thief, jet pilot and gigolo. I've done them all. In my dreams.

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I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

# OTHER BOOKS BY MORRIS KENYON:

Morris Kenyon is rapidly establishing himself as an acclaimed writer of fast paced, exciting thrillers. However, he likes to challenge himself and write in other genres as well.

\* **SLEAFORD NOIR 1:** McTeague's once trusted friend and associate, Wheelan, has broken off part of the older mobster's crime empire around the east Midlands. Far worse, Wheelan has also taken McTeague's much younger second wife, Claire, away with him.

Knowing the rest of his empire will fall away or defect to Wheelan if he fails to act, McTeague sends his trusted and lethal enforcer, Hennessy, to Sleaford to show Wheelan who is chief and to take Claire back home. So Hennessy starts a campaign of violence until Wheelan has no choice but to return Claire. But that is only the start of both gang boss's problems...

\* **SLEAFORD NOIR 2:** One sleepy Fenland town. Two Polish chancers eager to make a fast buck with no questions asked. A group of businessmen with funny handshakes wanting to rake off big bucks from town planning contracts. A neo-Nazi bigot who'll jump at the chance of becoming Mayor as his first stepping stone to total power. His bunch of thuggish skinhead hangers-on. Add a huge, abandoned industrial complex on the edge of town ripe for redevelopment. Put them all together and what could possibly go wrong? Except that matters soon escalate way beyond anything any of these groups expected.

Welcome to Sleazeford...

\* **WAVERTREE CHRISTMAS (SHORT STORY):** Christmas 1855 promises no cheer for Walsh and Finnan. Living by their wits has left them hungry, cold, penniless and living in a freezing attic. With no prospects they are not enjoying any of the festive season. However, Walsh has come up with a cunning idea that may solve all their problems. The only trouble is that his plan involves a long walk in the snow and then helping themselves to someone else's Christmas. Will they carry out Walsh's plan or learn the true meaning of Christmas?

## THE NICU CARAMARIN SERIES FOLLOWING THE ADVENTURES OF A ROMANIAN GANGSTER AND HARD MAN:

\* **WARNING:** These books contain scenes of a sexual nature, graphic violence, strong language and drug abuse. They are not intended for those easily offended or persons under eighteen years. You have been warned, so if you read them, don't blame me.

\* **200 STEPS DOWN:** When his crime boss in Odessa, Ukraine, decides to up his game by getting involved in people trafficking, Nicolae Caramarin must make a choice. Should he turn a blind eye to the horrors he witnesses and carry on being a good soldier for the gang; or take his stand and bring them all down in the only way he knows how?

\* **LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE:** With little choice but to flee his home city of Odessa, Nicolae Caramarin must recover a gang boss's missing valuable painting if he ever hopes to return. He follows the trail to the windy and rainy city of Manchester. There, he soon falls into his bad old ways with the local underworld. But things soon escalate out of control. Who can he turn to for help? Who can he trust? Soon Caramarin finds himself relying on his strength and wits in a battle for survival where just staying free is a bonus.

He follows his misadventures in Britain in the next story in the series:

\* **TWO WAYS OUT:** Having fallen on tough times, hard-bitten ex-con Nicolae Caramarin is lying low. However, he's thinking of going back to the only life he knows – crime. Yet when an old friend asks him for a simple favour, he has no idea of the trouble he'll soon be in. Hours later he's standing in front of a murdered Prosecutor's body – and dead centre in the sights of a group of corrupt cops from Romania's Black Sea port of Constanta.

Only question is how will Nicu Caramarin get out from under and clear his name?