

Phase one completed

Yes, phase one of my getting back into running a regular role playing game has been completed. The group will comeback for more and maybe even complete the journey. I had a wonderful time. My dice rolling was poor, but that helped the group survive for one more day.

This has been a nice weekend. I got to spend some time with my youngest daughter. We were able to tackle our little corgi and get his nails trimmed. He never likes that, so it is an adventure every time. Maybe next week he can have a bath. I don't think he minds that nearly as much, but he is 27 lbs of compact muscle.

Lots of fun this weekend...

Second try...

I know they say that the 3rd time is the charm, but tonight is only my second try. I hope that the gamers will be as ready to play as I am to run this little campaign.

I have been thinking about the many years that I've been away from actually running a role playing game. The rules have changed, the characters have changed, but the game has really stayed the same. It is all about the story and how the players (characters) interact with that story.

That being the case, will my recent years on stage allow me to tell a better story? Will my years of telling stories to my children allow be to tell a better story? I think I may know the answer..

Back in college, I was really into D&D, a friend talked me into being on stage. I was so nervous that I got physically sick after every performance. I vowed never to go on stage again. Some time between then and 1996/97 things changed. I got a job and a family. The pressure of the job actually gave me the confidence to get up in front of people to give them my ideas. My life and my family depended on me being able to do this, so I did it. The pressure of my family, made me realize that some things were much more important than some feelings of slight humiliation. The family allowed me to be me in all situations. So in 1996/1997 I tried the stage one more time. I must have enjoyed it since I've been doing it every year since then...

Now back to gaming. I am now a much more confident person than I was in the early 80's into the 90's. I'm not afraid of making a fool of myself. I know I can tell a story or two. My gut feeling is that I will be able to run the game better than I did before. Should be fun.

It's been a long time...

This weekend should be a fun one. Friday night game night and Saturday night game night. Two game nights in a row. What more could you ask for?

A few good friends will be gathered at taylhis and old-admin's (ok, now he needs a new tangent's name – He doesn't post enough to be known as "Whatever".) house and play a variety of games. We never really know what will be played, but it is usually fun. (Note to self, I do not like PIT ... ☐)

Saturday is the night I'm really looking forward to. After almost 20 years of non game running (1 night teaching the game

was in there, that is why it is almost), I'm going to be running a Dungeons and Dragons game. I'm really looking forward to it. The prep work is done. The back story ready. The Zombies and the other 'Undead' are ready for feasting.

When I started playing D&D back in my college years, the game was almost in its infancy. It and other role-playing games have come a long way from the 'early' days. For the first year, I just played. I always let someone else run the game. But our gamemaster was tired of running and just wanted to play. He asked me to run a campaign or two. I really enjoyed doing it. After a while, the group I played with left college and started going our own ways. Some of us still in the area kept playing. 2 or 3 of us shared the game running duties/experience. During this time I liked running the game the best.

We slowly drifted apart as jobs and or family called us here and there. I ran the game for my girls a few times, only the oldest seemed interested. I flitted in and out of other gaming groups for the next 15 or so years. The game changed and new additions/versions were added. With my family, I never kept up with buying the new material. I played the game and let others run it.

Not all that long ago (just over a year ago if memory serves), I started role-playing again with my oldest daughter and her friends. So this Saturday, I'm going to be running the game for the group. I hope my old skill set is still there. Maybe with the 10+ years of acting experience, that skill set has improved. On top of that, there is a little improv. Should be a good weekend....

Solo Sailing...Almost

Well this is the start of my 3rd week without children at home, almost. I say almost since my darling youngest daughter has come home the first 2 weekends and will be home the 3rd weekend too. I don't run around as often, but the drive is a bit farther now. Sure there are good excuses for all of the home trips, so I won't say too much about that.

I did find it funny/strange all of the young ladies my daughter rooms with have gone home for the first two weekends. I'm kind of glad at that. If I were in that situation, I would hate to be the one left behind on the weekend.

So on to me. What have I done the past two weeks.. Well, same old same old except I was a bit lazy last week. I found a web comic from an artist I enjoyed in my youth, and I've been reading his stuff. It may take me a while to catch up. Anyway I was looking for [this](#), but I found [this](#). Years of comic stories too catch up on. It may be something I will need in my personal library, but so far the web comic is ok. On this site I did find the original comics that drew me to the artist. Back in my D&D college days, I remember reading [Phil and Dixie](#) on a regular basis. Then the Myth series of books that Phil Foglio illustrated. Such fun memories..

It was a dark night...

You are all alone, and there is a light, from what looks like a campfire, in the distance...

That is how the evening started. As I expected, the group of theater regulars were up to the task of playing a character.

In that there was never really a doubt in my mind. The problem for all came when the small polyhedrons were needed (variety of dice for those not in the know). The comments, "Do I use this? No, that one. This one? No the one just in front of that." were in common usage the entire evening.

All of this is common when starting this type of game. There are 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 20 sided dice used in this game. Knowing how and when to use them is a bit of a learning curve. It seems that teenage boys and some young adults are much better at learning this, just like video games. □

Well, I think most of the group had fun. I certainly had fun. It has been than a few years since I ran any sort of game, and I certainly had fun doing it. Thinking on the fly, running people through a part of a world I created are enjoyable to me. But the complexity of the characters, and multiple dice rolling, sometimes slows down the game play. What to do, what to do?

Me, I started thinking of games with no dice at all. There are a few on the gaming market, but the character creation is just as complex if not more complex. How do you determine winners and losers of confrontations without randomizing effects of cards, spinners or dice... How complex do you make your rules?

Well, I'm thinking of just such a game. Role Playing for the actors in all of us, and no dice to confuse the situation. Designing it in my head as I write this. In few weeks, I will be looking for a group of volunteers to run through this game.

For those who want to know the setting. Think current time period, and ghost hunters...

Running a game...

I was given a challenge. To come up with an simple Dungeons and Dragons adventure that could be finished by novice players in one evening (around 2-3 hours).

There are a few ways to go about that.

- 1) Make it so simple, it will not give a good indication of how the game works
- 2) Make the area to be explored very small – again lose some of the way the game works
- 3) Heavy Non-Player (game master run) character guidance – See above.
- 4) Come up with something where the primary objective is straight forward, but allow some side paths that will allow players to make their own choice. But the path to the true objective is easily found if looked for. Do this to make sure as many aspects of game play are introduced. Fights, parleys, retreats, find paths, avoid pitfalls, ect.

And of course don't start with, you all meet in a tavern...

Guess which one I chose?

To make it easier, I also generated some characters with survivable statistics. I know more people who dropped the game just because their character didn't survive the first attack. No overpowering characters, but they aren't slouches either. Given a good selection, they should survive the first adventure (unless they try to combat the dragon).

Those that decide the game is worth playing could continue with the characters they are given for many further games. Those who want to give up the game, can. If they don't like the type of character they have, they can change after the first game.

It has been fun getting back into the swing of running even a game. I was hoping to run a tournament module for some more experienced players in the future, so this should give me a bit of practice to get back into the swing of things.

I do have a tournament module that I designed years and years ago for low level characters , but that is/was an experience in survival. It ran under 3 hours most of the time, but it was because the characters were all killed. Survival to the furthest point in the game was the object. I was told is was a lot of fun for players used to running high level characters to step back and see how well they can survive with the low level again. All the playing experience, with a rookie character for backup...

The next adventure shouldn't be an experience in survival, but it could turn out that way. Make an incorrect decision and oops.

Who's counting anyway?

I've been having a bit of fun writing up an Dungeons and Dragons adventure journal. It is something I wanted to share, but I didn't want them to get lost or take over the main part of my blog. So I put them into different pages. Because I wanted easy access to my posts, I decided to change my blog theme too. This new theme allowed me to post the page links in a side bar and allow easy access. so far so good.

But the one thing i did notice is that the new pages were not included in links to new posts... Hmm, no easy way to indicate a new story line was added. I thought about writing an intro post for each new chapter or page. That seemed to be a bit too much. One or two lines are all that are needed anyway. Since I

have a post that starts the adventure, I'm thinking that I will add a comment for each new page. The comments are listed as recent events, so people who are interested can see the new additions easily.

Lost a few on my post count, but who's counting anyway?

Look to the top

For those interested in Dungeons and Dragons, or Role Playing games in General, I started a new page to detail the adventures of a character I have in a game run by one of my son-in-laws.

It has been a lot of fun getting back into role playing again. I did it years ago when the girls were very young. I even taught my eldest daughter how to play.

The trials of raising a family brought an end to my role playing days. Well that and the fact that the game was changing and I didn't want to spend more money on it.

There was a time when I spent some time playing with a local group, but that ended when some people moved away.

Well, now my daughter and her friends run a game or two, and they kindly invited the old man to sit in. I have and have had a lot of fun doing it.

Just in case you miss the link on the top, you can [click here](#).

A different type of game

One of my friends and blogging buddy posted some [notes on a game we played \(click to read\)](#). These were written by they guy running the game, so they were an overall view, as if someone was watching the action. I was thinking of writing something like that from a player's (character's) point of view. Just not with that game. I'm thinking of a game I'm a bit more familiar with...

Dungeons and Dragons... My Son-in-Law's campaign. But first a background of the character whose story will be told.

A short history of Calinth Knight of Deinir

Calinth of some temple in some town was orphaned at an early age and raised on the temple grounds. The Clerics there were good to him, and taught him their ways. All there thought he would grow to become a priest in that temple.

When Calinth reached the age of 11, the town and temple were attacked by a large band of orcs. Calinth was weeding and hoeing the small herb patch behind the living area when he was attacked. He drove his hoe blade deep into the head of the first orc, and then picked up the orc's sword and shield. He was able to make it to the Temple stairs by fighting his way there. Cut and bloody, he fought side by side with the holy warriors of the temple. Both clerics and knights were side by side to prevent the orcs from the worship area.

A great knight was knocked down by what could only have been an Ogre. (as seen by the eyes of an 11 year old. Actually just a very large orc.) Calinth jumped into the path of the Orc's sword, blocking the killing blow with his shield. This blow broke his arm and threw him over the downed knight. The Orc was furious that his blow was stopped. He raised his battle ax high over his head to kill both of the temple defenders. Calinth saw his chance to save both himself and the knight

under him. He pushed his sword up just under the Orc's breast plate with all his might. After that blow he passed out.

The next day he found himself in the infirmary, with the knight standing over him.

"I am Bahoson, and would like you to be my squire. I am a Paladin of this temple and I think you are also called to serve."

A warm feeling went over Calinth at that time. His arm was no longer sore. He felt a peace he had not known before. Yes, he would do that. He would be whatever a squire was.

Years passed, and Calinth learned the ways of the sword. He learned the ways of all that is right and good. In his 18th year, he became a knight in his own right. In his 22nd year, he saw the injustice of his own service. His master, mentor and friend, Bahoson, was driven out of town by a corrupt and power hungry official. Rumor has it, that Bahoson was assassinated on the outskirts of town. The law of the land and his calling prevented Calinth from interfering. A priest in the temple told him of "another way", and he was given directions to look for Kandomere in some other town. This started him on the path of the Grey Guard. There were all kinds of evil, corruption and chaos in the world, and now Calinth had a path to follow that could fight these problems at the closest source.

Calinth traveled far and wide fighting evil at its most foul. On the way back home from a successful campaign, he stopped at a strange Inn for a light noon meal. In the middle of town far from any sea, a large ship stood. The ship itself looked as though it could sail at any minute, except for the doors cut into its hull. Here is where Calinth's next adventure begins...

Call Of Cthulu

In the past few months, I've had the opportunity to get involved in a role playing game – sort of like Dungeons and Dragons, I'm told. This one was called "Call of Cthulu", and we played it on two separate Saturdays for about 5 hours each. We began by choosing a character, and then we used the dice to determine many different details of our characters; like their income, height, strength, looks, smarts, etc. Along the journey, we made decisions about where to go and who to speak to – that sort of thing. Sometimes the roll of the dice would help make decisions, and sometimes we were left to our own judgement. Overall, it was a really fun experience, although not a hobby I could pick up right now because it's not something you can do while kids are around. I'm lucky I found the time to put the hours into this game that I did. But it was fun, and the guy who ran it wrote up the entire thing novel-style. So here it is, from the website:

https://www.yogsothoth.com/modules.phpname=Journal&file=search&bywhat=aid&exact=1&forwhat=Max_Writer

If you go to the site, the journal entries concerning our game are called "The Haunter in the Hills", and there are 4 parts total. Here is the journal in its entirety:

The Haunter in the Hills 1

by: Max_Writer

Posted on: 10-08-2008 @ 04:44 pm

A quick note needs to be added before this journal entry.

The Haunter in the Hills (my title) appeared in the appendix

of the 3rd Edition Call of C'thulhu boxed set as a scenario vignette for a beginning scenario for a campaign. In preparing to run a group of people who had never before played Call of C'thulhu, I stumbled across it and was intrigued by it. Unfortunately, though the introduction was very solid, there were no details past the sheriff's fate. I thought this a great way to get characters together, so I took it upon myself to get a scenario together.

Moretown and Dr. Haylett are both real, as is the article by the Honorable D. P. THOMPSON of Montpelier. The Mad River Valley exists and the roads that the investigators are on are also real and, I assume, were there in 1925.

This is my first scenario for Call of C'thulhu (up to now, I've used published scenarios) and I hope you enjoy the story that came from it. This is merely part one as the investigators have not yet solved it. I'm hoping to run again in a month or so for this group.

Enjoy ...

Monday, October 6, 2008

(After playing the original Call of C'thulhu scenario "Haunter in the Hills" from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday with Kim, Chris, Lisa, Crystal, and John).

In September of 1925, an unsettling event occurred which would forever change the lives of five people. This is their story.

It was a cool Autumn Saturday on that fateful September 19, 1925. A tour bus wound along a narrow hillside road in Vermont. Though the fall foliage was beautiful, the cast of the day had dulled and the once jovial passengers were silent.

They were all from Boston though none of them knew each other.

Professor Katie Brooks was a tall, slim middle-aged woman, and, if not exactly attractive, was not unattractive either.

She had shoulder-length hair that was a respectable, if not a striking, brown. She wore glasses and a gray men's hat and a tan wool sweater. She wore trousers as well and carried a good-sized purse. She was a Professor of Science at Radcliffe.

Charles Puccano was skinny and of average height. He had dark hair and eyes and wore a nice suit though his shoes were old and well-used. He wore a baseball cap and appeared to be in his 20s. Though he was not handsome, his hair was perfectly cut and he read a newspaper. He was glad to be taking a day off from his barbershop. A brand new Kodak camera sat on the seat next to him. He'd purchased it especially for the trip.

Grace O'Conner was very tall and slim as well. She had frizzy red hair and lots of freckles. She wore a dress with a floral pattern and nothing about her said she worked at the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston.

Claire McAdams was a tall, curvy woman. She had blonde hair and blue eyes and though she was not particularly pretty, she carried herself with a grace that bespoke the stage. The talent agent was wearing a pink dress suit and appeared to be very young.

Finally, Jason Carthage was a short slim man in a fine suit and a bowler. He was also blonde and had green eyes that looked over the other passengers. He carried a fine walking stick and wore a dark suit. He was also middle-aged.

The tour bus was primitively arranged. There were narrow seats for about 20 passengers arranged on each side of the central aisle. The windows had velvet curtains, a little touch of luxury drawn back by straps to let in the daylight. All of the passenger wore coats as the bus wasn't heated and all of them had long been aware that there was no luxury in the suspension of the bus. Every rut was like a land mine and some of them had headaches.

The day trip up to Montpelier, Vermont, included a night's

stay at a local hotel and that evening and Sunday morning to tour the city and look at the changing leaves of Vermont. Charles Puccano had saved up all year for the trip, his barbershop not having done great business in 1925.

The driver, old Hiram Sikes, was the one source of comfort in the pioneering ritual of educational travel. Sikes' quick wit and thorough knowledge of the country had made the bumps and sways of the pitiful roads into something at least memorable if not comfortable. Everyone was looking forward to getting to Montpelier but everyone was glad they made the trip with Hiram.

In a town called Northfield Falls, they came to a detour sign. Hiram said that because of the detour, the trip would be a half hour or so longer. He turned the bus down the detour, a narrow road that ran between the Vermont hills.

As the afternoon darkened and got more chilly, Hiram turned more and more to jokes about his arthritis.

Ten minutes later, in a saddle between two hills, the bus stopped without warning or symptom. Advising the tourists that they may as well get out and stretch their legs, Hiram pulled out a leather-wrapped package from beneath his seat and left the bus.

Puccano followed him and saw that the package was actually a tool kit filled with automotive tools. Hiram laid it out on the fender and opened the hood. He got to work on the engine while Puccano watched for a few moments before he went back to his seat on the bus and opened up his newspaper again.

O'Conner got off the bus and lit a cigarette, looking at the surrounding wooded mountains. Claire McAdams joined her and chatted with her, then went back onto the bus herself.

To the north was a beautiful prospect of fall trees and a little town a few miles away. To the south was an unusual

grove of flaming red birches.

Carthage left the bus with his binoculars and headed up one of the nearby hills. He found a clear spot and looked at the nearby town. It appeared to be a very small village with little more than a single road running through it. He could see a narrow river running behind the village.

Professor Brooks left the bus with her own camera and headed towards the flaming red birches. She had never seen their like before. She knew that the color wouldn't show up on film but still thought it might be worth a picture.

She was several hundred yards from the others when she entered the birches and looked around, amazed at the color of the leaves. She finally looked down and saw the thing on the ground ahead.

It was at least as large as a man, possibly larger, and squirmed on the ground though it appeared to have large wings of some kind of membrane pulled tight between protuberances of thin bone. The pink, blasphemous thing seemed to be composed of pyramided, fleshing rings and was covered with antenna or projectiles of some kind where the head should be. It didn't have an kind of discernible face but did have many sets of paired appendages.

Professor Brooks gasped and turned and ran away as fast as she could.

* * *

The others were still just loitering around or on the bus when the tall woman dressed as a man came running back like something terrible was chasing her. She called out for them to leave, to get out of there. Puccano left the bus as she ran up.

"Settle down!" Puccano told the woman. "Tell us what you saw."

Professor Brooks was out of breath and muttering, barely coherent.

"It was this ... it was this ... it was this ..." she gibbered.

Carthage, down the road, was walking back, having heard the commotion. Sikes had stopped his work on the engine of the bus.

"Lots of feet," Brooks said. "And a face with ... no face. It's big. It's big."

"Did you ever think of going into acting?" McAdams asked, peeking out of one of the open windows on the bus.

Puccano gave her a look.

"It's big!" Brooks said again.

"Where was it?" Puccano asked.

"I don't know," Brooks said. "It's big. It's big."

As Carthage approached, the others looked at each other.

"Was it a tree?" McAdams quipped from the window.

Brooks just glared at her.

"No, it wasn't a tree!" she yelled. "A tree doesn't have this big pink thing on it and no face! It was unnatural."

"Right," McAdams said doubtfully.

"Go look!" Brooks shouted at her.

"No wonder I couldn't find anything—" Hiram said. He stopped speaking suddenly and then looked at his passengers.

"I'll go look," Puccano said.

"Whoa, whoa whoa," Hiram said. "Look, I'm going to have to ask

all you folks to get back on the bus.”

“Fine by me!” Brooks said, heading onto the vehicle.

“There’s a thing out there!” Puccano said.

“I know, I just need you stay on the bus,” Hiram said. “I’m going to need to investigate. All you people are my responsibility and I need you to get back on the bus.”

“I want to go with you!” Puccano said.

Hiram was gathering up his tools. He rolled up the tool kit and closed the hood of the bus.

“I can’t take you sir,” Hiram said. “I’ve ... everyone here’s my responsibility and that’s my fault. I’m asking you just please, please get back on the bus.”

“I’d like to go with you,” Puccano said.

“I understand that sir but—” Hiram said.

Carthage was climbing back on the bus as well.

“If you can just wait here, I won’t be long,” Hiram said. “I promise.”

“Hurry,” Professor Brooks said.

“I’m giving you two minutes and then I’m coming,” Puccano said.

“Just please stay on the bus,” Hiram said, herding them all back onto the bus.

He put the tools back on his seat. He reached under the seat and took something out, tucking it into his shirt. Only a few of them noticed that it was a revolver.

Carthage saw it.

"Do you need some help sir?" he asked.

He turned the handle on his cane and lifted it to reveal a sword blade within.

"Uh ... thank you sir," Hiram said. "But please just stay on the bus."

As they got back on the bus, they all noticed that Professor Brooks seemed very anxious and kept looking around with wild eyes.

"Was it some kind of animal?" McAdams asked the nervous woman.

"Was it chasing you?" Puccano asked her. "Was it coming after you?"

"I don't know," she replied. "It was squirming on the ground and it was unlike anything I've ever seen in my life."

"How big was it?" Carthage asked.

"Big," Professor Brooks replied.

Puccano had gone down onto the running board of the bus and was looking out the open door towards the woods where Sikes had disappeared. The shadows continued to lengthen in the gloomy afternoon.

"It was big," Professor Brooks said again.

"And pink," McAdams said with a frown.

"Pink," Brooks nodded. She stared blankly at the woman a moment. "I don't like pink either but it was pink."

"I like pink," McAdams said, gesturing at her pink dress.

Professor Brooks ignored the comment and looked out of the window.

"Where is the driver?" she said. "Can we go?"

She kept glancing nervously back at the grove of flaming red birch trees. She continually asked if they could go and where the bus driver was.

Jason Carthage got out of the bus, taking the crank with him, and tried to get the engine started. It wouldn't turn over.

"We'll give him some time," he said to the others when he got back on the bus.

He drew out his binoculars and looked towards the unusual-looking grove of flaming red birches.

Birches turn yellow in the fall, don't they? he thought.

Puccano looked at the woods where Sikes had disappeared and then at his watch.

"It's been two minutes," he said. "I'm going to go look for him."

He drew out a .38 revolver from his jacket pocket and showed it to the others.

"Well, he took a gun with him too," McAdams said.

"He did?" Puccano asked.

He hadn't seen that.

"Yeah," McAdams replied.

Carthage nodded.

"He's probably fine," McAdams said. "I haven't heard any gunshots."

"Well, I'll back him up," Puccano said.

"What if shoots you?" McAdams asked.

The man just frowned at her.

"You don't want to go down there," Professor Brooks said to Puccano.

"How big is this thing?" Puccano asked her.

"Big!"

"Bigger than a person?"

"Bigger than me, yes!"

"How fast was it moving?"

"I don't know."

"Was it moving?"

"It was moving across the ... it was—"

"How many feet would you say it had?"

"Lots."

"Hundreds?"

"Lots. I don't know, I didn't really take the time to count them all, okay? It was lots."

"Pink?"

"Pink. Pink. Do you see him yet? Can we go? Let's just go."

Puccano stepped off the bus.

"No no!" Professor Brooks said. "I meant all of us."

Puccano disappeared into the forest where he'd seen Sikes go. Carthage got off the bus with the hand crank and tried to crank the engine again without luck.

* * *

Puccano saw no sign of the older man and after looking for a

short time, he returned to the bus. He couldn't shake the feeling that something was watching him. He found the other man who had been a passenger on the bus outside when he returned.

"Mr. ... uh ..." Carthage said.

"Puccano," Puccano said. "Charles Puccano."

"Charles, I'm Jason Carthage," Carthage said, shaking his hand. "I tried to start the bus and it wouldn't turn over."

Puccano asked what Carthage did for a living and learned he was a museum curator with the Boston Museum of Art. He told Puccano that as they got back on the bus. The woman who'd seen the thing turned to him as he said it.

"Katie Brooks," she said, holding out a hand. "Science Department at Radcliffe."

Puccano introduced himself to her as well, telling her to call him Charlie.

"Claire McAdams!" Claire said. "Hi."

"My name is Grace," Grace said. "Grace O'Conner."

Carthage told them there was a town a couple of miles down the road he thought. Brooks was all for going there. Puccano asked if they should take a look at the engine. He grabbed the leather bound tools off the seat and headed out to look examine it with Carthage. They could find nothing wrong with it.

When he and Carthage came back into the bus, they discussed leaving the vehicle and heading for the small town Carthage had seen in the distance. Professor Brooks seemed very nervous about leaving the bus.

"Are you leaving the bus too?" she asked Carthage.

"I don't know yet," the man replied, thinking.

He noted that whatever happened, they should probably all stay together.

"Katie," Puccano said. "Is it Katie?"

"Yes," Professor Brooks replied.

"I say we get out of the bus," Puccano went on. "We stick together. I have a revolver." He turned to Carthage. "You have a sword. Do we have any other weapons?"

"What about the driver?" Professor Brooks said quietly.

The others looked at each other.

"We can't leave him down here," Brooks said.

"He left us here," McAdams said.

They talked about it for a few minutes and decided to leave a note. O'Conner said she'd write it and Puccano told Brooks there was nothing they could do there. Carthage pointed out there was no food on the bus or rest rooms.

"How far away is that town?" Puccano said. "Two miles away?"

"As the crow flies," Carthage pointed out. "It could be farther. I don't know how these mountain roads go."

As O'Conner was finishing the note and they were preparing to leave the bus, they suddenly saw Hiram up the road, just standing in the middle of the road and looking down at the bus. Puccano went down to the running board.

"Hiram!" he called.

The old man waved at them.

"Are you okay?" Puccano yelled.

"Start the bus and follow me!" the man yelled back.

His voice sounded strange, almost like his teeth were chattering.

"We can't get it started!" Puccano yelled back.

Hiram just waved for them to head that way.

"Well, that's kind of strange," McAdams said.

Carthage picked up the crank and went out in front of the bus. He cranked it and the engine roared to life. Hiram headed further up the road where it curved to the right and was quickly lost to sight.

"Jason, you know how to drive?" Puccano said.

Carthage had boarded the bus and looked over the various levers and pedals.

"Why don't you drive us?" Puccano said.

The man shrugged his shoulders and put the bus into gear. He started to drive them down the road and as they went around the curve, they all saw the old man sprawled in the road in front of the bus. Carthage brought the bus to a stop.

"Jason, you want to come with me?" Puccano said, opening the bus door.

"Uh ... we just saw him ... there—" Carthage said.

"He's lying in the road," Puccano said.

He climbed off the bus as Carthage engaged the parking brake and took the bus out of gear.

"We just saw him," Carthage said, going after Puccano. "This is strange."

O'Conner also got off the bus, telling Carthage she had some

first aid skills.

Puccano rolled the old man over and O'Conner checked for a pulse at his wrist and his throat.

Sikes was dead.

"Ye gods," Carthage said.

Puccano searched the man for the revolver the others had said they'd seen him take with him. He didn't appear to be armed.

McAdams stuck her head out of the bus door.

"What's going on?" she called.

"He's dead!" Carthage called back.

"Why don't you ladies come out here!" Puccano called.

"No!" Carthage called. "Stay on the bus!"

Puccano gave him a look as the woman pulled her head back into the window. Carthage and Puccano more closely examined the body and found that it was unusually cold and stiff.

"It feels like he's been dead for a while," Puccano said.

McAdams called to them to come back to the bus.

"Maybe we could go to that little town and get some help," she said from the window.

There was some discussion of leaving the body. The women didn't want to put the body on the bus but the men thought they should bring it with them. In the end, Puccano and Carthage carried Sikes' body back to the bus and put it in the back. They found a blanket to put over it.

Carthage put the bus in gear and headed down the road. They came to another detour sign and he followed it back to the main road. It was less than a half our later when they spotted

another automobile coming from the other direction. The Model T appeared to be a police vehicle and Carthage pulled the bus off the side of the road and then leapt out and waved the police officer down.

The auto pulled over and they could see that the side was marked "Washington County Sheriff's Office." The man who got out was solidly build and wore a brown uniform and a star. He was armed with a revolver on his hip.

"We've been looking for you folks," he said. "Noticed you were late. Where's Hiram?"

"He's ... I think dead," Carthage told the sheriff.

They showed the man Hiram's dead body and he examined it. When he asked what happened, Carthage tried to explain.

"She saw something," he said, pointing to Professor Brooks. "Hiram went out to investigate. He said to start the bus and waved us ahead. We pulled around the curve. He was there in the middle of the road."

"Felt like he'd been dead for hours," Puccano put in.

"What was he investigating?" the sheriff asked.

"Whatever she said she saw," Carthage said.

Professor Brooks was somewhat hesitant to explain but told him she'd seen a big pink "thing" moving around a copse of big, red birch trees. The sheriff seemed to take her claims very seriously.

"So, she sees this thing," Puccano said. "Hiram goes to investigate."

"He takes a gun with him," McAdams put in.

"We try to start the bus, it won't start," Puccano went on. "He calls us over, says 'Start the bus.' It starts up, we go

over to him, he's dead. Feels like he's been dead for hours."

The sheriff scratched his head. Then he told them he needed them to stay on the bus. He found out who was driving and asked Carthage to follow him back to Montpelier. He got off the bus, turned his automobile around, then led them back to Montpelier, leading them to what appeared to be a jail.

The sheriff asked them to wait on the bus as he had to make a telephone call. He left but within a half hour, a Cadillac pulled up and a man in a fine black suit carrying a medical bag arrived at the sheriff's office. He and the sheriff examined the body. The two men looked at each other and talked quietly.

Only Puccano wasn't listening to them. He had moved to the front of the bus and was certain that they were all going to get blamed for Sikes' death. The others heard the two men conferring. The sheriff told the other man that it had to be handled like the rest. The other man nodded and wrote "heart attack" on the death certificate.

When the coroner left, Sheriff Becket asked them to stay on the bus.

"If you folks will just wait here on the bus, we're going to get you home safe, all right?" he said.

"Are we going to get a whole new bus?" McAdams asked.

"Yes ma'am," he replied.

He asked them to wait on the bus and he'd be back in just a half hour.

"We were on the bus for two and a half hours!" Puccano said.

The sheriff looked them over.

"Look," he said. "This is for your own good."

He advised them not to come back to Montpelier and told them they would be refunded their money for the trip.

“Yeah, but I bought a new camera for this, are you going to refund me for that?” Puccano asked.

The man looked at him.

“Sure,” he said. “I’m trying to do something to help you—”

“I don’t see how your helping us,” Puccano said. “You’re not telling us what’s going on or what kind of danger we’re in.”

“The less time you’re know, the less danger you’re in,” Sheriff Becket said.

“Danger from what?” Puccano blurted out.

“What kind of danger?” McAdams also asked.

The sheriff looked at them again.

“I’ll be right back,” he said. “You folks please stay on the bus.”

“No no no!” Professor Brooks said.

Sheriff Becket left the bus.

Within the hour, there was another bus and bus driver, a young man. They were taken onto the new bus and each of them was refunded the cost of the trip, money that had been wired for hotel reservations in Montpelier, and Puccano was refunded the \$5 he had paid for his cheap Kodak camera.

They were driven back to Boston that afternoon.

* * *

The next week was a strange one for all of them.

Claire McAdams was fired from her job as a talent agent. She

had always gotten along with her boss in Boston but on Tuesday, he fired her without explanation. He seemed nervous that day when he told her to clear out her desk and not return to work.

She spent the rest of the week looking for another job.

On Wednesday morning, Charles Puccano found that his barbershop had been broken into and ransacked. Things had been moved around and the few addresses and files he had were disturbed. He found a back window broken and was somewhat miffed as he paid a local mobster to keep just this sort of thing from happening. He also knew the few members of street gangs in the area and got along well enough with all of them. Plus he serviced several policemen and they were often in the shop.

He didn't find anything missing.

Professor Katie Brooks returned home from teaching on Wednesday and found her home had been broken into that day. There was nothing missing but someone had been through her address book.

All that week, Jason Carthage had thought he'd seen shadowy figures near his own house. He called the police on several occasions but in each case, they found nothing, not even footprints in the grass where he was sure someone had been standing before he'd made the phone call that night. He was also seeing figures in the shadows at the museum, but when he went to talk to them, they couldn't be found.

It was all rather unnerving.

Perhaps Grace O'Conner had the worse of it. She found that the animals were sometimes shying away from her at the oddest times. It was often when she worked after dark and the wolves behaved the strangest. They would flee to the small doghouses in the wide cages where they were kept when she approached and

refuse to come out. She had always had a good, almost friendly relationship with the wolves, who had always seemed to trust her before that.

All five of them received telephone calls that week from Sheriff Carl Becket. He convinced them all to meet at Professor Brooks' home on Saturday evening.

* * *

On Saturday, Sept. 26, 1925, the five of them met with Sheriff Becket at Katie Brooks' house. Professor Brooks lived in a large home with a detached automobile garage behind and to the side of it. The others arrived on foot, most of them having taken a bus to the residential neighborhood. Sheriff Becket arrived in a taxicab after they had all met. He arrived well after dinnertime and they all went into the sitting room towards the front of the house.

The man warned them that because of what they'd seen, their lives might have been in danger. He stated emphatically that they must band together for self-protection and that he was willing to try to help them, but that his own family was held hostage to powers greater than anyone in the room could imagine.

"There are unknown forces at work here," he said. "Intelligences not of this world."

He made sure they all had each others' addresses and telephone numbers and mentioned briefly that the Old Adams Place outside of Moretown might hold something of value to them.

"Take care, however," he told them.

The phone rang and Professor Brooks looked at the clock on the wall. It was after 9 p.m. and she wondered who would call at that hour.

She picked up the phone. The connection was not very good and

the voice on the other end of the line buzzed terribly.

"Sheriff Becket please," the voice said.

"Who may I say is calling," Professor Brooks asked nervously.

There was a moment of silence before the voice answered.

"Mr. Smith," it simple said.

She turned towards the rest where Becket was just telling them that Hiram Sikes' death should be avenged.

"The telephone is for you," she said to the sheriff. "He says his name is Mr. Smith."

Sheriff Becket went white.

"Thank you," he said, carefully taking the telephone receiver from her.

He listened for a few seconds before he hung up the telephone.

"I've got to go," he said. "I'll get in touch with you as soon as I can."

"Who was that?" McAdams quickly asked. "On the telephone?"

He just stared at her.

"I've got to go," he simply said.

"Wait!" Puccano said.

"How did he know you were here?" McAdams asked.

"What do you mean band together?" Puccano asked. "What's that mean?"

Sheriff Becket pulled on his coat.

"You've got to find a way to protect yourselves," he said. "I just ..."

He looked out the window again.

"What's out there?" Puccano asked.

Sheriff Becket opened the door.

"Good luck," he said. "I'll contact you as soon as I can."

He closed the door behind him.

They all looked at each other and Professor Brooks was the first to speak, offering them the use of her house if they were going to "band together." McBride said she would stay as she'd lost her job and didn't have anywhere to go anyway. Brooks said she didn't want to be there alone and everyone was welcome to stay.

"I have plenty of room," she said.

"I want to know what the heck's going on here," Puccano said.

McAdams went to the window and peered out into the dark night. She saw only the street light across the street. Otherwise there was no one out there she could see nothing unusual about the street.

Puccano was still unsure of what Becket meant and O'Conner noted that if they all stayed together, it felt like they were a bigger target.

"A target for what!?!?" Puccano said.

He was getting frustrated.

Carthage asked Professor Brooks if she had any shotguns in the house.

"I'm getting scared," he confessed.

She said she didn't.

"I'm packing," Puccano admitted, patting the pocket of his

jacket.

McBride said she didn't see anything outside. None of them had driven as none of them owned automobiles. Carthage went to the front window and peered out into the gloom. He didn't see anything either.

"I don't know why, but his visit made me nervous," Carthage said. "That could just be me."

"I want to know how his friend knew he was here and how he got this telephone number," McAdams said.

They began to discuss what had happened to them in the week before.

Jason Carthage mentioned that he had seen shadows around his house. Men seemed to be skulking around the place. He told them of calling the police on several occasions but the officers had found nothing. Not even footprints.

"Someone broke into my barbershop," Puccano admitted. "They didn't steal anything."

"So, how do you know they broke in?" O'Conner asked.

"Because my stuff was all ransacked," Puccano said. "The window was broken."

"Someone got into my house too," Professor Brooks said. "They went through my address books."

They discussed what they should do and Puccano noted that he knew several Boston police officers. He suggested contacting them and seeing if they knew anything about the Washington County Sheriff. He figured he would wait until the next morning.

Professor Brooks showed them all a small liquor cabinet with various bottles of illegal alcohol.

"This is really not protocol right now," she said. "I don't know about you but I'm going to have a drink. Would anyone care to join me?"

"Yeah," McAdams said.

"All right, I'll stay," Carthage suddenly said, picking up a bottle of gin.

She made drinks for everyone and they talked over their cocktails.

* * *

Professor Brooks was the first one up the next morning. She started the coffee and then got the Boston Globe from her front porch. She sat down in the breakfast nook to read the paper and almost dropped it when she stumbled across a small article buried on the back page.

It read:

Vermont Sheriff dies on train

MONTPELIER, VERMONT – A sheriff from Vermont died on the night train bound for Montpelier Saturday night.

Sheriff Carl Becket was found dead in his seat by the conductor on arrival in Montpelier.

Cause of death was a heart attack.

She just stared at the newspaper article as the others got up. Then she finally got herself a cup of coffee before sitting back down in the nook. The others were making themselves at home and getting their own breakfast when she broke the news to them.

"Sheriff Becket is ... uh ... is dead," Professor Brooks said to them.

"What?" Puccano said.

"It's ... it's right here," she said, holding out the newspaper. "He died on the train on the way back to Vermont."

"Let me see that!" Puccano said, taking the paper.

"What did they say was the cause?" McAdams asked.

"It said heart attack," Professor Brooks said.

"Heart attack," Carthage said.

"Isn't that what they said the bus driver died of?" McAdams asked.

"Yeah," Professor Brooks replied.

"'Cause of death was a heart attack,'" Puccano read.

"Something's not right," Professor Brooks said.

Carthage pulled out the little address book he always carried with him and looked through it for anyone he might know in the Vermont or new Hampshire area. Puccano used the telephone to call one of his police friends. He had no luck finding out anything about Washington County Sheriff Carl Becket. By the time he was off the phone, Carthage had searched through his address book but found no contacts in Vermont or New Hampshire. Claire McAdams went to the liquor cabinet and poured herself a stiff drink.

"This early in the morning?" Mr. Carthage said to her.

"Yeah," was her only reply before she took a long swig.

Puccano looked again at the news story but there was no byline. It was just a short blurb buried inside the paper. Brooks realized she wouldn't even have noticed it or paid it any mind if she hadn't known Becket. They talked about telephoning the newspaper but realized there would probably not be anyone there on Sunday morning. Puccano asked Professor Brooks if she had an automobile.

"Yeah, I do," she replied.

"I say we head for Vermont," he replied.

Her eyes went wide. She wasn't sure if she wanted to take her Cadillac to Vermont or if she even wanted to go herself. They all discussed it and finally agreed that they should find out what was going on, at least for their own safety.

They all headed for their respective homes to pack their bags for a trip back to Vermont. It was roughly an hour later before they returned to Professor Brooks' home. When Grace O'Conner got back, she had a large rifle bag over her shoulder.

"What is that?" Puccano asked her.

"Elephant gun," she said with a smile, opening the bag and showing them a very large double-barreled rifle. "In case any of the elephants go mad."

Puccano asked Professor Brooks how big the thing she had seen had been and she wasn't sure.

"Was it bigger than an elephant?" he asked.

"No," she replied.

"Then we're in business," he said.

He noted that he had a .38 revolver and Professor Brooks confessed she had a .45 automatic handgun. The professor got an atlas off the shelf and found that it had a decent map of the state of Vermont within. She tucked it into her purse and told the others she had it with her.

They loaded up her Cadillac.

"It was Harold's car," she said as she put it into gear and pulled out of the garage.

* * *

They drove to western Massachusetts and then Vermont. It was about a three hour drive up the road that led through Northfield to Montpelier. They passed the spot where the detour sign had been before, in Northfield Falls, and saw that the sign was gone.

“Isn’t this where the detour sign was?” Professor Brooks asked they drove by.

“It was,” Puccano said. “Of course, so was Hiram.”

Less than a mile up the road, they passed over a bridge with new asphalt on it. It was less than a half hour before they entered the city of Montpelier, capitol of Vermont. It took them a little while to find the Sheriff’s Office. They headed in to ask about the Sheriff’s death and talked to a deputy on duty who was wearing a black armband. Puccano explained to him some of what happened to them the weekend before.

“He told us we should turn around, head home, put us on the bus back home,” Puccano went on. “Now my barbershop gets broken into, he’s seeing shadows, her house was broken into, the zoo animals were acting funny—”

“Are you folks from around here?” the deputy asked.

“No, we’re from Boston,” Puccano said.

The man gave them a look.

“Okay,” he finally said.

“So Carl Becket comes to her house and says ‘You all are in danger,’” Puccano went on. “Gets a call from a Mr. Smith, and he’s gone. Mr. Smith.”

“Mr. Smith, yes, that’s what the man said,” Professor Brooks said.

"He heard it was Mr. Smith, turned white as a ghost," Puccano went on. "And now he's dead."

"Yes sir, I know he's dead," the deputy said. "I don't know why you think there's a connection between some breaking and enterings in Boston and Montpelier, Vermont, but—"

"Well, I'll tell you why," Puccano said. "We all came down here for vacation, go back, suddenly all this stuff happens, and your man, Mr. Becket, comes over and he tells us we're all in great danger. We kind of connected the dots."

"I don't know anything about that sir," the deputy said.

"What's with the black armbands?" Puccano suddenly said.

"In memory of the sheriff," the deputy said. "He died last night on the train."

"What'd he die of?" Puccano asked.

"I think it said heart attack in the newspaper," the deputy said.

"Was anyone sitting next to him when he died?" O'Conner asked.

"I don't know ma'am," the deputy said. "He was on the night train, coming back up here from the south."

Puccano sighed.

"You have a lot of people die of heart attacks?" he asked.

"Our share I suppose," the deputy said.

He said he didn't know where the sheriff went the day before and Professor Brooks told him he'd been down in Boston. She noted that he'd called all of them on Friday to meet in Boston on Saturday. She said they had gathered at her house and the sheriff had told them to band together because they were in danger.

“And that there were ... how did he put that?” she said. “There were things—”

“Otherworldly things that we should be worried about,” Puccano finished.

The deputy looked at them like they were quite mad.

McAdams asked if the deputy knew where his family lived but he wouldn't give the address or phone number. He told them they were welcome at the funeral but he wouldn't give that information.

“You're right officer,” Carthage said. “You're right.”

When McAdams asked where the funeral was, the deputy showed her the obituary page of the Montpelier Argus and the listing there. It told when the funeral was the next day and where. Puccano asked about strange happenings in the area but the deputy said he didn't know of any.

“Sounds like you know plenty for everybody,” the deputy said to him.

Professor Brooks asked what time the sheriff had died and the man said he only knew what had been in the paper.

Carthage thanked the officer and ushered the others quickly out. They got back to Professor Brooks' Cadillac and talked about finding out where Becket lived. Carthage wasn't sure his family would be the ones to talk to but wanted to talk to the coroner instead. He suggested that man knew what was going on. They realized that none of them had gotten the coroner's name the week before.

“Why do you say he knows what was going on?” McAdams asked.

“We have to find him because those were the only two people we know here that knew something was going on,” Carthage repeated.

Puccano suggested Carthage to back in to find out the name of the coroner.

"Becket said his family was in danger too," McAdams said.

"That's another reason I don't want to include his family on this," Carthage said.

Professor Brooks wanted to investigate the newspaper office. She wanted to know where and when Becket had died. Puccano said he thought it curious that Deputy O'Connelly had not said how Becket had died but had noted that the newspaper said it was a heart attack. Professor Brooks wanted to know how the Boston Globe had gotten the information so quickly.

They found a telephone booth and McAdams called the operator and got Sheriff Becket's address and phone number. They drove by the house and saw black hangings on the front door as well as a few automobiles out front. They didn't stop but drove down the street and parked there to discuss what they should do next.

Professor Brooks got out the atlas and someone remembered Sheriff Becket mentioning the Old Adams Place near Moretown. She found that town on the map of Vermont in the atlas and though it didn't show a road connect it to anything, they guessed that the road to Moretown was west of Montpelier.

They headed out of town on the main road to the west and found a side road that looked promising. It was another wide road that led them to Moretown.

* * *

Moretown lay on the edge of what the signposts called the Mad River. It was a small town that was strung along the main road and seemed to consist of little more than a main street. The river ran west of the town, following the highway.

They drove through the town and saw that it consisted of

lumber mill and related buildings to the south, two churches, a small cemetery, a small building that appeared to be a library, a small general store marked Ward Lumber Company General Store, an old tin shop, an old blacksmith shop, a small home with a sign out front that read "Dr. James Haylett, M.D.", a horse barn, a hotel called the Central House, a second general store named Wilcox General Store, numerous homes and houses, a grandstand, and a couple of one-room schoolhouses.

Professor Brooks turned the automobile around after they passed through Moretown and they discussed what to do as they entered the town again. They stopped at the Central House and decided to ask about the Old Adams Place there and maybe get rooms.

The hotel proprietor was a rotund man who seemed extremely friendly. He was a sweaty man with a smell to him and often blotted his high forehead with a handkerchief. When they arrived, he seemed anxious to rent them rooms.

"What brings you folks to this area?" he asked amicably.

"Just sightseeing," Professor Brooks replied. "Driving around and looking around."

"Very nice, very nice," the man replied.

"I have a question about the area," Professor Brooks said.

"Okay, any way I can help a customer," he said with a smile.

"Have you ever heard of the Old Adams' Place," Professor Brooks said.

The man looked at her.

"Yeah," he said carefully.

"Could you point us in that direction?" she asked.

"Why ... uh ... why do you want to go to the Old Adams' Place?" he asked.

She noted it had been brought to their attention a few days before and sounded like an interesting place to visit on their weekend holiday.

"Well ... uh ... you know Dr. Adams is kind of strange," he said. "He's not from around here originally and kind of went off two or three years ago."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You know, he attacked somebody in Montpelier," the man said. "That's what I heard."

"Does he still live there now?" Puccano asked.

"Far as I know," the man replied. "We don't see him around town. He's kind of a recluse."

"Hm," Brooks said.

"His house is up on Old Moretown Road," the man said.

"Old Moretown Road?" Professor Brooks said.

The man described how to get to the road, noting that it angled off to the right if one headed north on Main Street. He said that it went all the way down to Northfield Falls.

"But you're not going to be able to find rooms there," he concluded. "Now, we've got rooms here."

"Well, I ..." Professor Brooks said.

"We've even got telephone," the man, blotting his forehead again. "Got long distance and everything."

"Do you?" Professor Brooks said, surprised.

"Yes ma'am," the man replied with a grin. "Long distance calls

cost 20 cents though.”

“That sounds good.”

“So, how many rooms do you need?”

Carthage coughed loudly.

“We’ll make our drive and be sure to get a room from you when we get back,” he quickly said.

“Be sure you do,” the man said.

Professor Brooks asked about any special spots of interests in the town and the man said the entire was very quaint. He mentioned Moretown Memorial Library and Ward Lumber Mill as both being in the town. They learned that rooms were \$1 a night and the man told them that each floor had its own bathroom.

“When you say Mr. Adams went crazy, was there something that caused that?” McAdams asked.

“I don’t know ma’am,” the man said. “He moved to the area—”

“You said he attacked some people?” Puccano asked.

“He attacked somebody in Montpelier,” the man replied. “That’s what I heard. Maybe I heard wrong, but that’s what I heard.”

“This was years ago?” Puccano asked.

“A few years ago,” the man replied. “Couple of years ago? Made the papers.”

“Interesting local color,” Carthage mused.

They talked briefly and decided to get rooms for the evening. Carthage, O’Conner, and Brooks realized they would have to make telephone calls if they were not going to be back to Boston for work by the next day. They ended up getting three

rooms: one for McBride and O'Conner, one for Brooks, and one for Carthage and Puccano. The man had them all sign the guest register. Then he handed over keys.

Professor Brooks asked the man's name and he told them he was Andrew Sawyer, the proprietor of the Central House.

They found that the rooms were simple, each with two single beds, a radiator, and dresser. There were hooks on the walls for hanging clothing. They used the telephone to call their employers to let them know they would not be at work on Monday or Tuesday. Professor Brooks also arranged for one of her graduate students to teach her classes. O'Conner was a bit unnerved that the zoo seemed happy she was going to be away but with the way the animals had been acting lately, she could understand that if not appreciate it.

"The animals have calmed down a lot since you weren't here," she was told.

They drove out of town down Moretown Mountain Road after that. It was plainly marked and they soon recognized the road they had driven down the weekend before. After they reached the spot where the bus had broken down and even after they passed the red-leafed birch copse, Mr. Carthage spotted a rusty, unused mailbox on the side of the road with the name "Adams" on it. He pointed it out to the rest but they'd already passed the dirt road beside the mailbox. Professor Brooks turned the Cadillac around and took them back.

The dirt road from Moretown Mountain Road led them a few hundred yards to the foot of a mountain to the north. The cleared area in front and to the side of the house included a large house and what appeared to be an old and abandoned carriage house. The dirt road continued around the side of the main house and disappeared from sight.

The house itself faced to the south and had peeling paint and loose shutters. Some of the shingles had apparently fallen to

the ground below. It looked a little worse for wear and though numerous chimneys jutted from the structure, only the one on the east side of the house had smoke coming from it. A porch stood on one side of the house. Telephone and electrical lines followed the drive up to the impressive-looking house that had a large tower jutting from the gabled roof.

To the west of the house was what appears to be a large kennel and dog run though that building looked like it was in little better shape than the house itself. There was no signs of any dogs.

Puccano and Carthage got out of the automobile and walked up to the house. Puccano knocked on the door. After he knocked a second time, the front door was finally wrenched open by an ugly individual whose nose looked like it had been broken numerous times. One of his eyes was off center and seemed to look over Puccano's left shoulder. His black hair was greasy and he needed a shave. His clothes were disheveled.

"Hi!" Puccano said. "Are you Doc Adams?"

"No," the man said.

"Do you know where we can find him?" Puccano asked.

"Uncle's napping," the man said. "His health is not good. Who are you?"

"Well, my name's Charles and this is Jason," Puccano said. "We're here trying to figure out some things. Why don't you wake him up and let us talk to him?"

Jason put his fingers to the bridge of his nose and shook his head.

"He's napping," the man slowly repeated.

"Excuse me," Carthage said.

He explained they were there because of the death of the Montpelier sheriff and the man looked confused.

"Okay," the man said.

"He came to visit us and told us about this place," Carthage said.

"Uh-huh," the man said. "What'd he tell ya?"

"Not a heck of a lot," Carthage admitted. "The name."

"Uh-huh," the man said.

McAdams was trying to listen from the automobile but it didn't sound like the two men were making much progress. She got out and walked up to the front porch.

"Hi! Who are you?" she asked the greasy man.

The man glared at her.

"Who are you?" he muttered.

"I'm a ... I used to be a talent agent," she said with a smile. "I'm Claire. Claire McAdams. Similar last names."

He just looked at her.

Puccano noted that strange things had been happening and people had died. He said that at the hotel, they said Mr. Adams had lost his marbles recently. The man wasn't eager for them to see Doctor Adams but agreed that if they came back the following night at 6 p.m., he might have time for them. They left the porch and returned to the automobile.

They told Professor Brooks and O'Conner, who had never gotten out of the Cadillac, what had happened. McAdams suggested they head back into town to talk to locals. Puccano suggested lunch and Brooks wanted to find a place that might serve flapjacks.

They drove back to Moretown.

As it was Sunday, there were no stores open. However, they talked to Andrew Sawyer at the hotel and he was willing to fix them a meal in his small cafe. They sat down and ordered lunch and he cooked it up. He had a pretty young girl named Amy as a waitress and she took their orders. When they asked her about the Old Adams' Place, she said she didn't know too much but remembered that Dr. Adams had moved to the area when she was very little.

A dark-haired man who needed a shave came into the small dining hall and sat down at a table. He wore jeans and a flannel shirt. Amy took his order and he leered at the girl.

The five Bostonians discussed what to do next. They were upset about what had happened to them.

"It also made the sheriff upset," Carthage said. "He and the bus driver are now both dead."

"Did you see that man who just walked in?" Claire asked Professor Brooks. "Why don't you go talk to him?"

"All right," Professor Brooks said hesitantly.

"Maybe he knows the Adams," Claire went on.

"I don't know if the Adams know anything," Carthage said.

Professor Brooks wondered if the man who had just come in would be in a hotel if he were from Moretown and Claire suggested he might just be there eating as it was Sunday and the rest of the town was closed. Professor Brooks told the woman to go talk to him herself. Then she asked Amy for maple syrup and dug into the pancakes she had ordered.

"I don't know what you think Jason, but that waitress is a doll," Puccano said, nudging the other man in the ribs.

"A little young," Carthage replied, rolling his eyes.

They had a pleasant lunch.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I could use a little something stronger than water," Claire said.

"I wouldn't mention that too loudly around here," Carthage said.

"Why don't you ask the gentleman sitting at that table?" Puccano said, gesturing towards the other man in the place. "He might have something for you."

Claire glared at him.

"You're a funny guy," she said. She raised her voice a little. "Funny guy over here."

She stood up and walked over to the man. A jacket was over the back of his chair and he appeared to be eating a club sandwich.

"He there!" Claire said to him.

He grunted at her.

"You from around here?" she asked.

"Yeah," he replied.

"You work at the lumber yard?" she asked.

"Sometimes."

She noticed there was a \$5 bill on the table and she saw that all he had was the sandwich, some potato chips, and a soda. It seemed a lot of money for just lunch.

"We're just here in town," Claire said. "We're just traveling through. Does anything go on around here? Anything to do? Any sights to see?"

"Sights?" he asked. "Not really. Why are you here?"

"We're just here to see the Adams," she said. "Doc Adams. Do you know him?"

He took a large bite of the sandwich and then chewed it with his mouth open.

"Not personally," he said. "Why you seein' him for? I've heard of him."

"Well, we've just heard of him too," Claire said.

A half-chewed crumb of bread fell out of his mouth.

"Right," she said slowly. "Okay, so, do you know anything about him? We've never met him before."

"He went crazy, didn't he?" the man muttered.

"Well, that's what we hear but we don't know much about that," Claire said.

"That's what I heard," the man said.

He looked her in the eye.

"You folks should be careful," he said. "You know, strangers get lost up here all the time."

"All the time," she said. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He shrugged.

"Sometimes people just get lost," he said.

"Okay, right," she said. "Thanks a lot. I'm just going to go back ... to my table. Okay, thanks."

She walked back to the table.

"What'd he say?" Puccano asked her as she sat down.

She related that he said strangers sometimes get lost up there.

"What does that mean?" Professor Brooks said.

"I don't know," Claire said.

"Go ask him," Professor Brooks said.

"Thanks Erik," the waitress said as she took the \$5 bill from the table. She didn't sound happy. Puccano guessed the man was a local.

Carthage stood up and went over to the man's table.

"Excuse me sir," he said. "She was telling us that you said people get lost around here. Do you happen to know of a good guide?"

The man just stared at him.

"Wouldn't want to get lost," Carthage went on.

"I wouldn't go off into the mountains," the man said. "I'd stay to the roads."

"Stay on the roads," Carthage replied. "Okay."

"What kind of sandwich you eating?" Puccano called to him.

"I don't know," the man replied.

"Looks good," Puccano said.

Carthage just shook his head.

"Thank you sir," he said to the man.

"Some kind of meat sandwich?" Puccano called.

"They say it's a club," the man muttered. "I think there's turkey in it."

"Did you notice that he gave her \$5 for that sandwich?" Puccano said quietly to the others as Carthage joined them again.

Claire noted that he had said he worked at the lumberyard and Professor Brooks wondered if he owned the lumberyard. That still didn't answer Puccano's question of why he paid so much for such a small meal. Claire suggested that the man might like the waitress.

The man finished his sandwich and left.

When their waitress, Amy, came by to see if they wanted anything else, Professor Brooks asked about the man.

"That's Erik Bartlett," the girl said. "He's a pig. You see him eating?"

"I noticed," Claire said.

"He comes in here and gives me all this money and asks me out," Amy went on. "I'm only 15!"

Puccano mentally marked the girl off the list of women he might ask out.

"Where does he get his money?" Professor Brooks asked.

"I don't know," Amy said. "He never seems to do any work in town but he always has money he's throwing around."

"He doesn't work?" Claire asked.

"I don't think so," Amy replied. "He's always hanging out at the general store."

"He said he worked at the lumber yard," Claire said.

"Where does he live?" Professor Brooks asked the girl but she didn't know nor did she care. She guessed he lived in a boarding house in the area somewhere.

"I think I'm going to go for a walk," Professor Brooks said, leaving the room.

"Great," Carthage said. "I guess I'm picking up the bill for lunch."

Claire was thinking about how rude the man had been.

"He said stay away from the mountains," she said.

* * *

Professor Brooks followed Bartlett down the street. He soon turned between two houses and when she followed him, she almost passed him leaning up against one of the buildings. He had a .45 revolver in one hand and was spinning it on one finger and occasionally pointing it at her.

He asked her what she was doing and when she told him she was just taking a walk, he suggested she do it elsewhere. She agreed and left, going back to the hotel.

* * *

It took some time for them to get out of Professor Brooks that she had followed Erik Bartlett and he threatened her with a revolver. She was vague about his threatening her but noted that the revolver had been pointed in her general direction.

She looked towards the lobby of the hotel to make sure that Bartlett wasn't coming back.

"Were you always this paranoid?" Claire asked her.

"No no no," Professor Brooks said. "I'm okay."

She called to Mr. Sawyer but he was already gone. She asked Amy if there were locks on the hotel room doors. The girl said she thought there were and that seemed to relieve Professor Brooks. She told the rest she was going to go take a nap.

After she left, Puccano remarked that every time she went out on her own, she would come back with some terrifyingly crazy story. He said he wanted to find out the location of the county coroner's office.

* * *

Puccano used the telephone and learned from the operator that there was no listing for the county coroner but suggested he call the sheriff's office. She also told him she assumed the county coroner was one of the local doctors. He learned there was a hospital in Montpelier and got the address for that.

* * *

Carthage took a walk to the Ward General Store across the street and learned that though they were open, they were not selling anything on Sunday. The boy working there pointed out the post office boxes off to one side and told him that they were open though the store was not. He said he could sell things to him if it was an emergency.

Carthage looked around the general store and saw it carried mostly produce and such as well as a few rifles and shotguns.

When he returned to the hotel, he found Puccano and McAdams had been looking for him. They rounded up O'Conner and said they wanted to have a look at the strange birch copse near Moretown Mountain Road. The two were all for just borrowing Professor Brooks' Cadillac but Carthage thought they should tell the woman.

They found her room and knocked. It took some coaxing to get her to open the door and when they told her they wanted to borrow her automobile to go for a ride, she said she would drive them.

They headed out of town on Moretown Mountain Road and had not reached the Adams' place yet when Puccano suddenly told

Professor Brooks to stop. She braked and when the car came to a halt, McAdams got out.

“What are you doing!?!” Professor Brooks asked.

She had seen the copse of red birch trees and was not happy to be back in the area.

“We want to look around here,” Puccano told her. “Coming?”

“No!” Professor Brooks said like he was crazy. “You’ve got five minutes.”

“Okey dokey,” Claire said.

Carthage went with them and they wandered around in the copse of strange-looking trees but found nothing, not even tracks. They returned to the automobile and Claire said something about rock climbing. They eventually pulled the car off the road near where a mountain loomed to the south and all of them got out.

They headed into the woods. It was around 2 p.m.

For the next three hours, they wandered in the woods, always looking for high ground. The shadows were lengthening before they got back to the automobile. They had seen nothing strange but had observed the mountain to the north and saw a great boulder on the side of it that didn’t look quite right. They also spotted the tower of the Adams’ place jutting from the tree line from the hill they were on.

They returned to Moretown and cleaned themselves up before having dinner at the cafe in the hotel again.

Brooks and O’Conner heard the church bells and so decided to go to one of the two churches in town. They headed out with Carthage not far behind them. He was of the same mind.

* * *

One of the churches proved to be St. Patrick Catholic Church and Brooks and O'Conner went in for the Sunday evening mass. The priest was a young, good-looking man in his mid-20s and they talked to him afterwards and learned he was from the area and had been the priest at the church for a couple of years.

They asked him about the Old Adams' Place and he told them that Dr. Adams stopped coming to town while he was at seminary some three years before.

"Nobody is even sure if he's still alive up there," Father Thomas told them. "Some say that something happened to the man in Montpelier."

That was all he knew.

* * *

It was a cold but sunny day on Monday, Sept. 28, 1925. The five met for breakfast in the cafe and discussed where they should go next to try to solve the mystery of the deaths and the thing Professor Brooks had seen in the birch copse.

They talked about going to the library, either in Moretown or Montpelier, going to the hospital to try to find the coroner, and going to the funeral that afternoon at 3 p.m.

Carthage walked down the street to examine the Moretown Memorial Library and found a card on the door with its hours. It would be open from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. that day. When he told the others, they decided to try the library in Montpelier.

Professor Brooks drove them back to Montpelier and it only took them a little while to find the library. They spread out in the place though Claire McAdams went to talk to one of the librarians.

Claire found the man quite helpful and asked about anything unusual that might have happened in the area. The librarian said there was an article from 1830 of a strange event. He

found it for her and she read it:

The following account of a most extraordinary thunder-storm was written by the late Hon. D. P. THOMPSON, of Montpelier:

The most remarkable instance of a sudden and great fall of water, which was ever known in this region, occurred about thirty years ago, round the sources of Jones's brook, a small mill stream that rises in Moretown Mountains and empties into Winooski river three miles below Montpelier. The mountains round the source of this stream rise to the height of about 2,000 feet, with unusual abruptness, and, at the same time, so curve around as to leave the intermediate space in the form of a deep half basin, down the precipitous sides of which a sudden shower descends almost as rapidly as water rushing down the steepest roof of a house, and, collecting, at the bottom, pours in a raging river down the valley to the outlet of the stream. It was over this mountain-rimmed basin that burst the extraordinary thunder-storm which I have undertaken to describe, and which passed among the inhabitants under the name of the bursting of a cloud.

The inhabitants of the basin, when the storm burst upon them so suddenly and unexpectedly, were struck with astonishment and alarm at the unwonted quantity of water that descended upon them, from the seemingly flooded heavens. A settler who lived nearest the foot of the mountain described the rain as 'coming down in bucketsful I was in a field a short distance from my house when it struck, and was so astonished at first I knew not what to do. But the rain, if it could be called rain, coming thicker and faster, I ran with all my might for the house, but was almost drowned before I got there, and then it was only to find the water gushing into the house on all sides till it was nearly knee deep on the floor.' And so with all the inhabitants of the basin. No place afforded them any protection; rivers were within all their houses, and rivers, rising into seas, were all around them without; and they looked on with mute consternation at that tremendous

outpouring of the clouds. But they were the first to be relieved. The rain, after a brief duration of less than half an hour, ceased as suddenly as it came, and the inhabitants ran out of their drenched houses just in time to behold the numerous uniting streams, that had come pouring down the encircling mountain, gathering into a mighty river that swept away shanties, fences, old trees, logs, lumber, and everything in its path, and bearing them in wild confusion on its surface, went foaming, trembling, and roaring like a cataract, with amazing force, down the valley towards the outlet three or four miles below.

But the principal scene arising from the destructive and fatal progress occurred at the saw-mill of Oren CLARK, and situated about a mile from the mouth of the stream. Mr. CLARK and his hired man were at work in a field near the mill, and being warned by the appearance of the clouds that a flood would soon be down upon them, ran to the mill to make some necessary protection for its safety. While thus engaged, they were aroused by a deafening roar, that burst suddenly upon their ears from the stream but a short distance above the mill; when looking up they beheld, to their astonishment and alarm, a wild, tumultuous sea of commingling flood-wood and turbid waters, with a wall-like front, ten feet high, tumbling and rolling down upon them with furious uproar, and with the speed of the wind. They attempted to secure a retreat over the log-way which extended from the mill to the high ground five or six rods distant. Over this they made their way with all possible speed. But such was the velocity of the on rushing torrent, that they had not proceeded half way before the mill came down, with a crash, behind them, the log-way was swept from beneath their feet, and they were struggling for their lives in a flood a dozen feet deep, foaming, boiling, and so filled with trees, timber, and all sorts of ruins, that it did not seem possible for a human being to be borne along in the frightfully whirling mass and live a single minute.

Mr. CLARK said, 'I saw EASTMAN once more when I rose to the surface after the first plunge. He was struggling desperately to get his head above the flood-wood. But I saw him no more. The next moment a raft of logs swept over me, and I was whirled onward, sometimes with my head above and sometimes below the water, until I neared the wooded bank down and on the opposite side of the stream, when I came within reach of a small tree which I grasped, which about as soon came up by the roots, and I was again plunged into the flood. I struggled on and soon was so fortunate as to grasp another sapling, and drew myself ashore, and fell down half dead from bruises and half drowned.'

The remains of poor Eastman were found next day near the mouth of the stream.

She took notes to share with the others later.

* * *

Jason Carthage looked up the more recent newspaper archive for any information on deaths in the last month or so. Unfortunately, he didn't find any kind of unusual numbers of deaths from any one cause. Even heart attack.

* * *

Professor Brooks, Mr. Puccano, and Ms. O'Conner all looked through old copies of the Montpelier Argus for anything out of the ordinary. Professor Brooks found a story and shared it with the others. It was from the Montpelier Argus dated Thursday, Sept. 7, 1922.

It read:

Nervous breakdown causes historian to attack second man

Second man disappears from site of the attack

Doctor Adams claims 'things' after him

A local landowner and one-time Doctor of History had a nervous breakdown in downtown Montpelier Tuesday afternoon.

Dr. Richard Adams of Moretown was arrested for assault after attacking a man on Main Street. Dr. Adams was reported to have had an altercation with the man both of them talking with raised voices, before he grabbed the man by the collar and threw him to the sidewalk. The man yelled for help, claiming that Dr. Adams was trying to murder him.

Several passers-by came to the man's rescue, subduing Dr. Adams until police could arrive. Dr. Adams proved to be armed with a revolver though he was not able to make use of it.

The man Doctor Adams attacked slipped away in the confusion.

Police questioned Dr. Adams Tuesday night but could learn nothing that made sense to them. According to one policeman who wished to remain anonymous, Dr. Adams ranted about things from the hills that chased him and tried to tear at him. Adams claimed that he had been under siege at his home near Moretown and only recently escaped to Montpelier. He further claimed that the man he had attacked had been in league with the things.

Dr. Adams' Ford Model T was found parked on Main Street and impounded by police.

Dr. Adams' nephew took custody of the doctor from police this morning. He told this reporter that Dr. Adams had been under a great deal of strain lately and needed a good long rest. This publication wishes Dr. Adams well and hopes that he gets the rest he needs.

Dr. Adams is an 1879 graduate of the University of Vermont in Burlington. He taught history at that college as well as Norwich University in nearby Northfield, and McIntosh College in Dover, New Hampshire. He retired to the Moretown area in 1910.

After he read it, Puccano tore it out of the newspaper, secreted it away in his jacket, and returned that paper to the rack.

* * *

They all discussed what they'd learned in the automobile that afternoon. The 1922 newspaper article was the center of the conversation.

"The second man, the one he assaulted, he claimed was in ... cahoots would be a good word," Professor Brooks said.

"Yeah," Puccano said.

"With these things that are in the hills," she finished.

"And the second man happened to slip away," Puccano said. "They didn't catch him. They weren't able to interview him."

Puccano pulled out the article he'd torn from the paper in the library.

"Here," he said. "Look."

Carthage rolled his eyes at the theft and took the article, reading it.

Claire told them that she had found an article the librarian had given her about something strange that had occurred.

"It was like a flood, like a thunderstorm," she said. "But it wasn't like any storm I've ever heard of. The water came down so fast that they said it was like a wall of water coming down. There was a man who owned a sawmill, Oren Clark, him and his hired man were outside when they saw the rain coming and they ran to get out but they didn't make it and everything was turned into a big river. And his hired man died because of it but he lived.

"The article was written by a Hon D.P. Thompson. It only rained for about 30 minutes but they said the water was a dozen feet deep in that 30 minutes and then just stopped."

"Where did this happen? Montpelier?" Puccano asked.

"In Moretown," she said.

She told them it had been dated 1830. Carthage noted that the man couldn't still be alive but she wondered if he had family still alive who would know of the incident.

* * *

The funeral was at a local Methodist Church in Montpelier at 3 p.m. and they all attended it, following the procession to the cemetery for interment after. After the interment, some of the mourners left but others stayed and talked. Carthage spotted the old man he'd seen in the church the night before. He also saw the coroner, whom he'd learned was Dr. William Thompson. He approached Dr. Thompson and introduced himself.

"We were on the bus last weekend," Carthage reminded the man.

"Oh ... yes?" he said. He suddenly looked nervous.

"Sometime when you have a chance, not today, because this is not a good time—" Carthage said.

"I probably won't have a chance," the man interrupted him quietly, looking around. "What are you doing here?"

"The sheriff came to visit us the night he died," Carthage said.

The man looked scared.

"I can't talk to you," he said. "Look for Dr. Haylett. He lives in Moretown. Talk to him."

He turned abruptly and walked away.

Carthage remembered the sign on the house in Moretown that listed it as Dr. Haylett's office. He quickly told the rest what he'd learned. Puccano asked him if he recognized any of the other mourners and Carthage pointed out the older gentlemen who was leaving the cemetery even as they talked of

it.

"He said talk to Dr. Haylett in Moretown," Carthage said.

"The coroner?" Puccano asked.

Carthage nodded.

"He seemed scared," he said.

Carthage made sure they stayed at the cemetery a respectable time before they left, taking Professor Brooks' Cadillac back to Moretown. On the drive there, they talked about whether or not they had time to look in the Moretown Memorial Library before their appointment with Dr. Adams. Mr. Carthage noted that they could keep the appointment with Adams and he could go look in the library.

"So you don't want to meet with Adams then?" O'Conner asked him.

Carthage looked at the woman.

"Not now," he said. "I'm more interested in the doctor in Moretown and the library."

Everyone but Carthage was interested in going to see Dr. Adams but then Professor Brooks changed her mind and decided to go with Mr. Carthage to see Dr. Haylett, if the doctor was in.

It was about 5 p.m. when they got back to Moretown. Puccano, O'Conner, and McAdams went to the hotel for some dinner. Before they left the other two, they asked Professor Brooks if they could borrow her car to go to the Old Adams' Place that evening.

* * *

Carthage and Professor Brooks walked down the street to the Dr. Haylett's house and office. There were no hours listed on the door but they guessed he was an on-demand doctor. Carthage

knocked and after a few moments, there was an answer. The door was opened by an elderly gentleman and they could smell cooked food coming from within.

Dr. Haylett was probably in his 80s but looked fairly healthy. His white hair was thick for the most part and he had probably once been tall. Carthage recognized him as the same man who had been at the cemetery and the church. He looked them over.

"Can I help you two?" he asked.

"Dr. Haylett?" Carthage said.

"Yes?" the man replied.

"My name is Jason Carthage," he said. "Last weekend, we had a trip scheduled to see the fall colors in Vermont. We come from Boston. Something strange happened on the road here and our bus driver died mysteriously."

"Hiram Sikes?" the doctor asked.

"That's the man," Carthage said as Professor Brooks nodded.

"Why don't you folks come in here," Dr. Haylett said.

He let them into the small office and examination room, looking up and down the street and then closing and locking the door behind them. He hobbled over to a chair and sat down.

"Go on," he said.

Carthage explained how the sheriff had come down to warn them and then died on the way back, his death listed as the same cause as Sikes had been: heart attack.

"Strange things have been happening to us," Mr. Carthage went on. "I've been seeing shadows when there's nothing there."

"I saw a thing in the woods," Professor Brooks said.

"Others saw other things or had things happen to them," Carthage said.

"Hmm," Dr. Haylett said. "I'll tell you folks, there are some things up here that aren't natural."

"That's what the sheriff was telling us," Carthage said.

"If they've latched onto you, then you are in a great deal of danger," Dr. Haylett said.

Professor Brooks sighed nervously.

"That's what we were afraid of," Carthage said.

"We've been hearing that a lot lately," Professor Brooks said. "Anything we can do to ..."

"Unlatch them?" Carthage said.

The doctor thought about it.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know about that. There's a book at the Memorial Library down the street called Legends of New England. You tell Lester Howes that I advised you to take a look at that. Otherwise, he won't let you borrow it."

"All right," Professor Brooks said.

"You take a look through that and ... you come back here and talk to me," Dr. Haylett said. "Don't let anyone see you come here though. All right?"

"Okay," Professor Brooks said.

Dr. Haylett stood up and went to the window, peeking out. Then he led them to the back door and let them out that way. As they left the building, they heard the locks clicking behind them.

They went to the Moretown Memorial Library which was in what

appeared to be a large house of the Greek-revival period. It had a porch, sidelights, and curved lintels over the windows. A tall, thin man within was stamping books but no one else was in the library. Lying on the desk nearby were three different newspapers: the Montpelier Argus, the Barre Daily Times, and the Northfield News and Transcript.

"Excuse me but are you Lester ... Howes?" Professor Brooks said.

"Yes ma'am," the man replied in a soft voice.

She told him Dr. Haylett had told them to see Legends of New England.

"Dr. Haylett?" Howes said.

"Yes," Professor Brooks replied.

"All right then," Howes said. "I guess there's no harm then. Not if Dr. Haylett sent you."

He went back to a small office and got a book that he handed over to her. She and Mr. Carthage found a table they could read at and began skimming the book.

Legends of New England was written by Eli Davenport and was dated 1839. They spent the next hour skimming it and found that it collected many of the legends and folklore of the Indian tribes in New England. A strange, ancient city of white man, long since destroyed, was described; the place seemed to lie somewhere in the wilds of northern Massachusetts. Of particular interest was a series of recurring tales about mysterious spirits from the constellation of the Great Bear who lived under the hills of Vermont and Maine, whose presence on earth pre-dated that of humanity.

As they finished skimming the dreadful book, they heard a car start up and head out of town. They guessed it was Professor Brooks' Cadillac heading to the Old Adams' Place.

Monday, November 17, 2008

(After playing the original Call of C'thulhu scenario "Haunter in the Hills" from noon to 6 p.m. Saturday with John, Kim, Chris, Lisa, and Shelley.)

Jason Carthage and Dr. Katie Brooks, still at Moretown Memorial Library, decided to read the book they'd found in more detail and what they found was very disturbing.

Legends of New England by Eli Davenport was a strange book and the legends it related were written almost as if they were all facts.

The book was a discourse on material orally obtained prior to 1839 amongst the oldest people in Vermont. Part of it hinted at a hidden race of monstrous beings which lurked somewhere among the remoter hills – in the deep woods of the highest peaks, and the dark valleys where streams trickled from unknown sources. The beings were seldom glimpsed, but evidences of their presence were reported by those who had ventured farther than usual up the slopes of certain mountains or into certain deep, steep-sided gorges that even the wolves shunned.

There were queer footprints or claw-prints in the mud of brook-margins and barren patches, and curious circles of stones, with the grass around them worn away, which did not seem to have been placed or entirely shaped by Nature. There were, too, certain caves of problematical depth in the sides of the hills; with mouths closed by boulders in a manner scarcely accidental, and with more than an average quota of the queer prints leading both toward and away from them – if indeed the direction of these prints could be justly estimated. And worst of all, there were the things which adventurous people had seen very rarely in the twilight of the remotest valleys and the dense perpendicular woods above the

limits of normal hill-climbing.

It would have been less uncomfortable if the stray accounts of these things had not agreed so well. As it was, nearly all the rumors had several points in common, averring that the creatures were a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great bat-like wings in the middle of the back. They sometimes walked on all their legs, and sometimes on the hindmost pair only, using the others to convey large objects of indeterminate nature. It was written that on one occasion they were spied in considerable numbers, a detachment of them wading along a shallow woodland watercourse three abreast in evidently disciplined formation. Once a specimen was seen flying – launching itself from the top of a bald, lonely hill at night and vanishing in the sky after its great flapping wings had been silhouetted an instant against the full moon.

The things seemed content, on the whole, to let mankind alone; though they were at times held responsible for the disappearance of venturesome individuals – especially persons who built houses too close to certain valleys or too high up on certain mountains. Many localities came to be known as inadvisable to settle in, the feeling persisting long after the cause was forgotten. People would look up at some of the neighboring mountain-precipices with a shudder, even when not recalling how many settlers had been lost, and how many farmhouses burnt to ashes, on the lower slopes of those grim, green sentinels.

But while according to the earliest legends the creatures would appear to have harmed only those trespassing on their privacy, there were later accounts of their curiosity respecting men, and of their attempts to establish secret outposts in the human world. There were tales of the queer claw-prints seen around farmhouse windows in the morning, and of occasional disappearances in regions outside the obviously haunted areas. Tales, besides, of buzzing voices in imitation

of human speech which made surprising offers to lone travelers on roads and cart-paths in the deep woods, and of children frightened out of their wits by things seen or heard where the primal forest pressed close upon their door-yards. In the final layer of legends – the layer just preceding the decline of superstition and the abandonment of close contact with the dreaded places – there were shocked references to hermits and remote farmers who at some period of life appeared to have undergone a repellent mental change, and who were shunned and whispered about as mortals who had sold themselves to the strange beings. In one of the northeastern counties it seemed to be a fashion about 1800 to accuse eccentric and unpopular recluses of being allies or representatives of the abhorred things.

As to what the things were – explanations naturally varied. The common name applied to them was “those ones,” or “the old ones,” though other terms had a local and transient use. Perhaps the bulk of the Puritan settlers set them down bluntly as familiars of the devil, and made them a basis of awed theological speculation. Those with Celtic legendry in their heritage – mainly the Scotch-Irish element of New Hampshire, and their kindred who had settled in Vermont on Governor Wentworth’s colonial grants – linked them vaguely with the malign fairies and “little people” of the bogs and raths, and protected themselves with scraps of incantation handed down through many generations. But the Indians had the most fantastic theories of all. While different tribal legends varied, there was a marked consensus of belief in certain vital particulars; it being unanimously agreed that the creatures were not native to the earth.

The Pennacook myths, which were the most consistent and picturesque, taught that the Winged Ones came from the Great Bear in the sky, and had mines in the hills whence they took a kind of stone they could not get on any other world. They did not live here, said the myths, but merely maintained outposts

and flew back with vast cargoes of stone to their own stars in the north. They harmed only those Earth-people who got too near them or spied upon them. Animals shunned them through instinctive hatred, not because of being hunted. They could not eat the things and animals of earth, but brought their own food from the stars. It was bad to get near them, and sometimes young hunters who went into their hills never came back. It was not good, either, to listen to what they whispered at night in the forest with voices like a bee's that tried to be like the voices of men. They knew the speech of all kinds of men – Pennacooks, Hurons, men of the Five Nations – but did not seem to have or need any speech of their own. They talked with their heads, which changed color in different ways to mean different things.

That was all that the book said of the things.

Dr. Brooks was unnerved by what she read. The description had been far too close to what she had seen for her comfort. She hoped the others were all right.

* * *

Charles Puccano was driving Dr. Brooks' Cadillac. Claire McAdams sat in the back while Grace O'Conner rode in the passenger seat in the front. They were some ways down the Old Moretown Road when they spotted a figure on the side of the track. The woman was very tall and solid with a backpack on her back. She held out her thumb and Puccano pulled over and slowed the automobile.

"Would you like a ride?" he asked.

"Sure," she said.

"We're going to a house up the road but can give you a lift at least that far," he said.

The woman had short, dark hair and was well over six feet

tall. She wore men's trousers and appeared to be very muscular. She climbed into the back seat with Claire and gave the woman a nod. Then she looked down and noticed that there was a long, leather gun case on the floor in the back.

They all introduced themselves and learned the woman's name was Dorothy Morgan.

"We're going to the Adams place," Puccano said as he put the automobile back into gear. "Ever hear of it?"

Ms. Morgan told them that she had indeed heard of the Adams place. She said she had heard Dr. Adams was very ill and couldn't stand the sunlight. She also related that she was from St. Louis, Missouri, and was in the area visiting her sister, who was having a baby.

Puccano pulled into the driveway by the decrepit mailbox and up the long, dirt road that led to the clearing in the woods where the house stood. It looked even worse at night. The old, apparently abandoned carriage house off to one side was dark and looked down on the clearing with empty windows. The loose shutters on the main house banged in the rising wind and dark spots on the roof where shingles had fallen off almost looked like great holes. No light shined from anywhere in the house and as they exited the auto, Claire lit a cigarette.

"I'll stay with the car," she said.

Puccano questioned her about that but she told him she just felt nervous about the place and thought someone should stay with Katie's automobile. Puccano shrugged his shoulders and asked Ms. Morgan if she'd like to come with himself and Ms. O'Conner. The woman just nodded and they went to the front door and knocked.

The door was opened by a handsome man in a fine suit who thanked them for coming in a cultured Bostonian accent. He introduced himself as Mr. John Noyes and told them he was Dr.

Adams' solicitor. He told them Dr. Adams was quite ill as he waved them into the house.

It was very dark in the house and they found themselves in a foyer. Mr. Noyes led them into a high-ceilinged inner foyer lit only by a single lamp with a dark shade. An archway to the left led into a darkened room and steps crept up into the darkness above. Another archway leading towards the front of the house was dark as well.

It seemed to be even darker towards the back of the house.

"Dr. Adams' illness has given him a great sensitivity to light," Mr. Noyes said as he led them slowly towards the back of the house. "It's further caused his asthma to become quite pronounced. He cannot speak above a whisper. He recently had a very debilitating fever, leaving him very, very weak. His feet and ankles are swollen – don't mention that – they had to be bandaged. He's in fairly bad shape but willing to talk to you."

By then they had reached two more archways. To the left was what appeared to be a darkened kitchen while to the right was a dim room lit only by the fire in a fireplace and a very dim, covered lamp on a desk. The large room appeared to be a greatroom that had been converted into a large library. Bookshelves filled with books lined the walls on either side and a large desk stood on the far side of the room. A great bay window, the curtains pulled shut across it, was behind the desk while a few chairs sat in front of the desk.

Puccano noticed that on top of the bookshelves to the right were several shiny silver cylinders. They were unlike anything he'd ever seen before and shiny even in the terribly dim light.

Noyes ushered them into the dim room and a half-imagined rhythm or vibration seemed to be in the air. A strange smell like sour milk was also evident in the room. Even though it

was a large room, they all felt somewhat claustrophobic.

Sitting in a high-backed, heavily cushioned chair behind the desk was Dr. Adams. He had thick, bushy gray hair, a thick beard and mustache, and he wore glasses that barely seemed to fit his face. He had a mole under his right eye and his face was that of a sick man with a strained, rigid, immobile expression and an unwinking glass stare. He wore a thick bathrobe and his hands lay immobile on the arms of his chair.

As they approached the desk with Mr. Noyes, Dr. Adam stirred.

"Thank you for coming," he whispered. "I apologize for my condition. I've been in ill health since a breakdown in Montpelier some years ago. Thank you for coming and visiting me. What is it I can help you with?"

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with us Dr. Adams," Puccano said as he sat down. "I'm Charles Puccano."

"I'm Grace O'Conner," Grace said.

"Dorothy Morgan," Dorothy said.

"It's nice to meet you," Dr. Adams whispered.

"It's nice to meet you," Puccano said.

He then explained that some strange things had happened to them since they took a bus trip into Montpelier. He noted that everyone else connected with the situation had died, including the bus driver on that first trip.

"From things we've heard, we're led to believe that you might know something about what's going on," Puccano finished.

"You'll have to tell me more," Dr. Adams whispered.

They were all seated by that point and could see that his face was obviously partially paralyzed. His lips barely moved when he spoke.

Puccano and O'Conner related the story of their bus trip to Montpelier and how the bus had broken down on the road they had taken. They told him of their driver dying in a most mysterious manner and how they had met with the sheriff. Ms. Morgan just listened to the whole thing.

"Dr. Katie Brooks claimed to have seen something out there," Puccano went on. "She couldn't really describe it very well, a monster or creature."

Noyes quietly left the room.

"When we went to the Sheriff's office, they sent us home," Puccano said. He related how their normal lives had then been disrupted, that his own shop had been broken into. O'Conner told him that the animals at the zoo where she worked had started to act strangely when she was around them.

"So a series of strange things have been happening," Puccano said, telling Adams that they had decided to return to the area to investigate what might be causing it. He said that the sheriff of Washington County had come to Boston to talk to them and O'Conner noted that the evening he spoke to them, he had died on the train ride back to Vermont of an apparent heart attack.

"What was this creature that you saw?" Dr. Adams asked quietly.

"I didn't see it," O'Conner said. "It was our companion."

"We didn't see it," Puccano put in. "It was a doctor and ... we thought she was crazy."

"She's a professor," O'Conner said. "She said it was pink and large and in the woods."

"She didn't have much detail on it," Puccano said.

"Yes," Dr. Adams whispered. "I believe you are mistaken about

the thing that she saw. The Old Ones, as they are sometimes called, the Outer Beings mean mankind no harm, and they offer much to humanity. They do have enemies who might be trying to harm you, however. The secret cult of evil men linked with Hastur and the yellow sign are devoted to hunting down and destroying the outer ones on behalf of monstrous powers from other dimensions."

He seemed to take a breath.

"My home is safe from anything that might threaten you," he continued to whisper. "You are welcome to stay here for as long as you wish to continue your investigations. If you find Mr. Noyes, he can get you some dinner and tea or coffee. I think that is all I can tell you at this point. It is all that I know."

"Doctor, can I ask you, I noticed some shiny cylinders up on the shelf there," Puccano asked. "Can you tell me what those are?"

"Merely an experiment," Dr. Adams whispered. "It has to do with preserving human life. It is too early in its conception for me to say any more. I continue to experiment when I feel well enough."

He hesitated again.

"There is little more that I know save to say that the thing you saw was not responsible for what is happening to you," he continued.

"Do you know what is responsible?" Puccano asked.

"I would guess it was members of the cult of Hastur," Dr. Adams whispered. "I am not sure who might be among them in this area, but Sheriff Beckett himself might have been luring you into some kind of trap, though I don't, of course, know for sure."

"How did you become ill doctor?" Puccano asked. "You said you became ill shortly after your breakdown in Montpelier."

"It was related to my mental condition, I believe," Dr. Adams whispered. "And I think it was related to these evil men."

Silence filled the room and Puccano asked the women if they should get a bite to eat or go back to town and get Jason and Dr. Brooks. Ms. Morgan said she would love to have some food and O'Conner nodded.

"Thank you for your time," Puccano said.

"You're welcome," Dr. Adams whispered. "If you will excuse me now, I will probably sleep here, as it is more easy for me than moving."

"One more question before I go," Puccano said. "Do you raise animals?"

"I had dogs," Dr. Adams whispered. "At one time. Several years ago. But I have not kept dogs since."

"Since ... you became ill?" Puccano asked.

"Yes," Dr. Adams whispered. "If you'll now excuse me, I'm going to try to sleep now."

"Thanks for your time," Puccano said.

"Thank you," Dr. Adams whispered.

The three left the library and looked for Mr. Noyes. They walked towards the front of the house and found that another archway led to a parlor. As they looked into the room, Mr. Noyes came from the darkened kitchen. Puccano told him of Dr. Adams' offer of dinner and tea and Noyes told him he had some food warming in the kitchen. He offered them tea or coffee and they all chose to have coffee. He asked them to wait in the parlor and then headed once more for the back of the house.

The parlor was dimly lit as well with only a single electric lamp burning on a small table. A couch and two stuffed chairs gave them ample room to sit as they conversed about what little they had learned. Within just a few minutes, Mr. Noyes returned with a tray laden with a large bowl of soup, several bowls and silverware, and a coffee pot and three coffee cups. There was also cream and sugar on the tray and after Noyes put it down on the small table in the center of the room, he excused himself, telling them he had to check on Dr. Adams.

Puccano poured each of them a cup of coffee.

"I found it interesting that he said the creature that the doctor saw was not evil," he said.

"Yeah," O'Conner agreed. "That's why I think Katie should talk to him. Did he say that we could stay here? Because I was planning on staying at the hotel."

"He said we could stay here," Puccano said, nodding.

He took a sip of his coffee and made a face. It had a strange, acrid taste and he didn't like it. Ms. Morgan had already ladled out three bowls of soup and he found that it tasted normal enough.

"Now I'm not so sure about staying here," O'Conner said as she put her own coffee cup down. "I'm a little concerned about this coffee."

Ms. Morgan had also noticed the strong taste in the coffee. They were all a bit put off by the fact that something seemed wrong with it.

Puccano wanted to go back to town to talk to Dr. Brooks and Jason Carthage. He noted that they had her automobile and they couldn't just leave them stranded in Moretown. He turned to Ms. Morgan.

"Do you have a time you needed to get out east?" Puccano said.

"Where are you headed?"

"I'm supposed to go see my sister in Vermont," Ms. Morgan said. "She's supposed to have a baby but ... this is really interesting to me."

"Do you need to meet her tonight?" Puccano asked.

"Well, she's unsure about when she's going to have the baby, so I've got some time," Morgan went on. "But if I can get a free night's stay, that's what I'd like to do. I like that idea."

They talked about it a little longer and decided that they were going to take Dr. Adams up on the offer to spend the night but they figured they had to return to Moretown to get the others first. They told Mr. Noyes when he returned to get the dishes. When Puccano mentioned it, Mr. Noyes said that there were several bedrooms upstairs, including Dr. Adams', where they could stay. Puccano went on to say that they wanted to return to town to pick up the others before returning to spend the night.

Mr. Noyes asked them to wait a few minutes while he checked to see if Dr. Adams was still awake. Puccano said they would wait in the parlor and it was about five minutes before the man returned. Noyes thanked them and noted that there was no telephone at the house but he would wait for their return and would turn down beds for them.

Puccano thanked the lawyer and the three left the house. They found Claire asleep in the back of the Cadillac. Puccano started up the car and drove back into town. The three arrived at the hotel and saw Dr. Brooks and Carthage about to enter the building.

Puccano pulled the Cadillac to a stop and Dr. Brooks and Mr. Carthage saw a tall, muscular woman with short brown hair in the back seat. The woman introduced herself as Dorothy Morgan

as she unfolded herself from the back seat of the car. She looked like she was all muscle and Carthage smiled up at the woman as he shook her hand and introduced himself. The woman dwarfed both him and Puccano.

Puccano told them they had picked up Dorothy hitchhiking on Old Moretown Road near the Adams place so they picked her up and gave her a ride. Ms. Morgan told them she'd heard about the Adams' place and that the old man who lived there was sickly and didn't go out often. She said she'd heard he was diseased.

"We did meet with Mr. Adams," Puccano said. "He's a very, very ill man. The house was almost completely dark inside. He was-"

"Was it Mr. Adams?" Carthage asked.

"He was, he was ... it appeared to be," Puccano went on. "It was very dark inside. Mr. Noyes, who is apparently is his assistant-"

"Caretaker," O'Conner put in.

"Caretaker, butler," Puccano said.

"Solicitor," O'Conner said.

"Solicitor he said," Puccano went on, "was very nice to us and led us to Mr. Adams who seemed to be almost bedridden. But he did mention he was doing some experiments preserving life. It was hard to see how he was doing that in his condition. He told us we could all stay at his place. He said we'd be safe there. He mentioned that the ... he talked a little bit about that creature that you saw. He said it was a good spirit, whatever that means, he said it was something friendly and I don't know if he's lost his mind, his age, but you seemed pretty convinced you saw something. So, he said that something you saw was good."

Carthage sighed.

"Does it have a name or anything?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"He said it was good," Puccano said. "Good spirits ... and that there was an evil cult of men who are--"

"Who are responsible for what is happening to us," O'Conner finished.

"Yeah," Puccano said. "And they work against these beings from another world or beings from another plane of existence and--"

"Funny," Carthage interrupted. "Not what I read."

"What did you read?" Puccano asked.

Dr. Brooks and Mr. Carthage just laughed nervously.

"We came across something that was similar to what I saw in the woods," Dr. Brooks said.

"You came across it?" Puccano asked.

"Read it in a book," Dr. Brooks said. "They described it as a crab-like thing."

"Multiple legs, light red crab-like thing with wings," Carthage said.

"And it's head changes color and that means different things," Dr. Brooks said.

"Was that what you saw?" Puccano asked.

"Pretty close to it," Dr. Brooks replied. "They referred to it as 'those ones' or the 'old ones.'"

"Yes," Carthage said.

"It wasn't good," Dr. Brooks said, noting that the things were reported to go after anyone that went near them or were spying on them. She told them that their food didn't come from Earth but from the stars. Carthage added that animals avoided them

and Dr. Brooks said that children were afraid as the things would just glare at them.

"It certainly sounds different from what we were told," Puccano said.

Brooks and Carthage went on to tell them that the things were reported to have come to Earth to mine metal they couldn't get at their homes. They said it was something that wasn't found on any other world.

"Well, you're an educated woman, does this sound like anything you've heard of before?" Puccano asked.

Dr. Brooks laughed again. It was not a nice sound.

Puccano asked about the book and they told him it was called Legends of New England. Dr. Brooks called the book interesting but Puccano noticed that she appeared to be terribly unnerved, almost as bad as she'd been the week before when she'd come back to the bus.

"Do you think what Adams described and what we read were the same thing?" she asked. "Or do you think they were different things or ...?"

"It sounds like he was talking about the same thing but to be frank, at the time he told us, I thought maybe he was a little crazy," Puccano said. "But it sounds like there might be something to this. You saw it, it's in the book, he mentioned it."

"He's experimenting on extending life?" Carthage asked.

"That's what he said," Puccano said. "He had these cylinders on a shelf in the library. I'd never seen anything like them before. I asked him about it and he said he was trying to extend life. He has a dog run or kennel and he said he used to have dogs and he stopped after he got sick. It was right after he went mad in Montpelier that he got sick and he blamed it on

his mental condition.”

“We told him we were going to come get you,” O’Conner said.
“He invited us to stay at his house.”

“We can stay the night free,” Puccano said.

“He said we’d be safe there,” O’Conner said.

“He said we’d be safe from the evil there,” Puccano said.
“Which I think were these cult members.”

Dr. Brooks was somewhat anxious about going to the house and Puccano said they should all stick together. Brooks noted that if what she read about and what Dr. Adams was talking about were the same things, she was unsure. They discussed it for only a short time before deciding to at least return to the Adams’ house to talk to Dr. Adams.

“Are you going too?” Dr. Brooks asked Ms. Morgan.

She looked them over.

“I’m always looking for a free place to stay,” she said. “Yes, I believe all of you all are crazy. But, you know, in Hollywood right now, they’re big on these monster films and I’ve stunt-doubled quite a few times for these monsters and this is an amazing piece of material right here and I’m on board.”

Dr. Brooks asked Ms. Morgan if she had any fighting experience and the giant of a woman clenched her fists and smiled.

“Yes I do,” she said. “Let’s just make it simple: I don’t carry a weapon because I don’t need to.”

Dr. Brooks asked the woman if she’d like a job as her bodyguard.

“You make sure nothing happens to me and there’s a little something in it for you,” Dr. Brooks told the woman.

"I might take you up on that offer," Ms. Morgan said.

"Money is no object," Dr. Brooks said.

Ms. Morgan thought about it.

Puccano asked if they should wake Claire and Dr. Brooks asked where the woman was. Puccano pointed her out in the back seat of the automobile, still fast asleep. O'Conner described how the woman had gotten terribly anxious when they had arrived at the house. Puccano told them she had waited at the car for them, smoking a cigarette. He related that she had never come in and when they had come back out, they had found her asleep in the auto.

"I thought I smelled something on her breath," Ms. Morgan quipped.

She had noticed a peculiar smell she couldn't recognize when she'd gotten into the automobile after the visit to Dr. Adams' house. She assumed it was alcohol.

"She'll be fine," Dr. Brooks said.

Carthage looked at his watch. It was about 7 p.m. and he looked up to see that there were numerous stars in the dark sky. He also saw no moon and noticed that the clouds were coming in from the west.

They discussed a little more going back to the Adams' house and though Dr. Brooks thought they should go back to the place during the day, Puccano pointed out that they were invited back to the house that night so someone should go back to tell them that they weren't coming. He noted that the telephone at the house wasn't working and that they had eaten a meal and nothing had happened to them.

"Terrible coffee," he noted.

"The coffee tasted acidic," O'Conner said. "That concerned me

a little.”

They talked a little about that and it made Dr. Brooks even more nervous. She turned to Ms. Morgan.

“You are definitely coming with us, right?” she asked.

Ms. Morgan nodded.

Dr. Brooks said she was not totally opposed to going back and Puccano repeated that they should at least tell them if they were not going to spend the night. They finally decided to go and Dr. Brooks asked Ms. Morgan to take Claire back to her room at the hotel. The large woman carried Claire up to her room and left her there. Dr. Brooks tipped Ms. Morgan five dollars for the help and then they all climbed back into the Cadillac and headed back down Old Moretown Road.

They saw that the curtains had been opened in the front window of the parlor and a dim electric light burned within. Dr. Brooks parked the Cadillac out front and they quietly made their way to the front porch. Mrs. Noyes opened the door at their knock and thanked them for coming. He looked them over and asked if there was any baggage they needed carried.

He ushered them into the house and was introduced to Dr. Brooks and Mr. Carthage. He led them all upstairs where he showed them four bedrooms that they could share. One of the bedrooms was quite large and actually had it's own bathroom. The other three rooms were somewhat smaller, though still good-sized. They saw that the steps continued up from the second floor, probably to the turret above. He also showed them another bathroom off the hall between the master bedroom and the back bedroom.

He told them he could bring coffee or tea if they wished and then headed back downstairs. They picked their rooms, Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan taking the master bedroom while O'Conner picked the front bedroom at the top of the stairs and Puccano

took the room just off the stairs. Mr. Carthage said he would take the smallest bedroom in the back of the house.

Mr. Noyes returned and told them that tea and coffee were in the parlor. They went down and found the tray with a teapot and coffee pot on it as well as glasses for tea and coffee. Sugar and cream were also on the tray.

“Is there anything else you think you need?” Noyes asked.

When they told him there wasn't, he told them he'd be there for another half hour or so before he had to go.

“Would it be okay, Mr. Noyes, if we took a quick look around the library?” Puccano said. “I want to show them the ...”

“Dr. Adams is there, sleeping right now,” Mr. Noyes replied with a smile. “So it would probably not be a good idea.”

“Do you think we could talk to him again tonight?” O'Conner said.

“I don't know,” Mr. Noyes replied. “I can wake you in the morning when he might be up.”

Puccano thanked him and he left the room. When Puccano tasted the coffee, he found it also had a weird acrid taste. He tried some of the tea and found it the same. They all found their drinks tasted strange and discussed it, noticing there was an extra cup on the tray. Carthage said there was probably something in the well's water. Dr. Brooks put sugar in her tea.

“It's not as bad,” she noted.

Carthage was disappointed that the tea was off but Dr. Brooks drank her tea anyway.

After a half hour, Mr. Noyes returned. He looked over the tray.

"I'm sorry, were the coffee and tea not to your liking?" he asked.

"It had a funny taste," Mr. Carthage said. "Must be your well."

Mr. Noyes explained that they had problems with the well in the past and apologized for it. He noted that he was getting ready to leave and asked if they needed anything else. When Ms. O'Conner asked what was ailing Dr. Adams, Noyes told them that he had a nervous breakdown some years before and it seemed to have stemmed from that. He noted that Dr. Adams had been getting better and some specialists were working with him. When Puccano asked, he said he had been working with Dr. Adams for a couple of years but knew nothing of his experiments.

They also learned from him that Dr. Adams' relatives lived with him normally but they were presently away. Before he left, he asked if there was anything else they needed and when they said they didn't, he asked that they give Dr. Adams his privacy as he needed his rest. Noyes took the tray to the kitchen and then left the house, locking the front door after him with an audible "click." A few moments later, they heard the sound of an automobile start behind the house, drive around the front, and then the noise of the engine heading into the distance.

They were alone in the darkened house.

Dr. Brooks was feeling very drowsy and was ready for bed. Puccano blamed the tea she'd drunk. He also suggested that they look around the place though Carthage was against it. Dr. Brooks was tired and asked how long it would take.

"Ten minutes," Puccano said.

"All right, I'll come," she said.

Puccano looked at Carthage.

"You coming?" he asked.

"Yes," Carthage replied.

"Shocking," Puccano said sarcastically.

They talked about going into the library and Carthage was against it. Puccano noted that Dr. Adams was barely awake when they were there before; it wouldn't bother him if they just peeked into the archway. Carthage was adamant though and decided that he would go look in the kitchen since they insisted on searching the house.

"What kind of professor are you?" O'Conner asked Dr. Brooks.

She sleepily said she was a professor of science.

"I really think you ought to take a look at this," Puccano said.

She finally agreed.

"What happens if we wake Dr. Adams," O'Conner asked.

"Yes," Carthage said.

"Well, according to you, he lied to us from the beginning," Puccano said, noting that the man had told them different from what they had read in the book. Dr. Brooks said that the things that she read about could speak but in a buzzing sounding voice.

"It did say that we didn't want to listen to what it had to say," she noted.

Puccano turned to O'Conner.

"Earlier, didn't you hear a kind of buzzing noise?" he said.

Carthage's eyes opened wide.

"I wish you had said that earlier," he said.

"There was," Puccano said. "It was a weird vibration. A kind of buzz in the air."

"The book made reference to bees," Dr. Brooks said. "Even when it talked it made a buzzing noise."

"Why didn't you say that earlier?" Carthage said to Puccano. He looked around nervously.

"You can leave if you want to," Puccano said to him.

Puccano still thought they should look around though O'Conner said she didn't want to go to the library. Carthage was holding his cane with both hands, making no pretense of using it to help him walk any more. He said that they could look around and if they heard any bees buzzing, they could flee. Puccano suggested that Carthage and O'Conner check out the kitchen and see if the well water tasted funny.

Puccano, Dr. Brooks, and Ms. Morgan crept to the library while the other two crept to the kitchen.

* * *

Carthage and O'Conner tried the water in the kitchen and, though it tasted like well water with a slight metallic tang, it did not have the bitterness that they had both noted in their tea. Carthage started to check drawers and cupboards, looking for whatever Noyes had put in their tea.

To his growing horror, he found that the cupboards were mostly empty. There was a lot of dust within the cupboards and drawers but little else. He found no food, aside from a few small bags of flour and rice, and no sign of tea bags or a can of coffee.

"Where did he get the tea and coffee?" O'Conner asked.

"He may have brought it with him," Carthage said.

He led her back out of the kitchen towards the library.

* * *

While Dr. Brooks and Mr. Puccano had crept into the library, Ms. Morgan had gone to the back of the house and opened the door there. In the dim light from the single lamp in the foyer, she could make out a large space and guessed it was an attached garage. She could smell gasoline fumes and pulled the electric torch from her pocket to quickly illuminate the rough structure. There were no vehicles within.

Then she saw Carthage and O'Conner pass through the hall and into the library. She followed them.

* * *

The library was still very dark with the remnants of the fire burning very low in the fireplace and the single electric lamp on the desk still burning. The dim light and the dark shade meant the electric lamp gave off very little light.

The chair where Dr. Adams had been sitting earlier that evening was empty.

Puccano pointed out the cylinders he'd seen before and Dr. Brooks crossed the empty room and climbed up the bookshelf to retrieve one. The cylinder proved to be about a foot tall and half as wide. Three curious sockets set in an isosceles triangle covered the front, convex surface. She tucked the cylinder under her arm and climbed back down where the two examined it in the dim light.

Puccano crossed the room to get a better look at the desk and noticed something was lying in the chair that Dr. Adams had been sitting in before.

Carthage and O'Conner suddenly burst into the room and Puccano pointed out to them that Dr. Adams was gone. Ms. Morgan entered the room behind them.

"The kitchen has not been used," Carthage said.

"How do you know?" Puccano asked.

"It's covered with dust," Carthage told him. "Other than making some tea and maybe your soup that probably came from a can."

When asked, he told them there was no odd taste in the water. He said he thought Noyes had put something in the tea.

"I'm thinking if Dr. Adams hasn't been controlled by the others, he is one," Carthage said.

"What others?" Puccano said.

"That we read about in the book," Carthage said. "The old ones. That's my feeling."

"There's something in the seat," Puccano said.

Dr. Brooks was examining the shiny cylinder and showed the rest. Puccano didn't recognize the sockets as like anything he'd ever seen before.

"Something strange is definitely going on here," Carthage said.

"Have you ever seen anything like that before doctor?" Puccano asked, pointing to the cylinder.

Dr. Brooks just shook her head. The cylinder was light and Ms. Morgan suggested opening it up.

Puccano moved to the chair and, to his horror, realized that sitting upon it were what appeared to be the hands and face of Dr. Adams! The hands looked real and the face appeared to be some kind of mask with eyeholes. It was attached to a mop of gray hair and there was a beard and mustache on the face. He told the others as Carthage walked over and picked up a leather briefcase that lay on the floor by the desk.

"Let me see that," Ms. Morgan said, crossing the room. "I have some experience with makeup and prosthetics.

She picked up the hands and saw that they were pinched at the wrist and had metal clasps that could probably be used to attach them to something organic. They were cold but otherwise seemed to be real! There was even hair that appeared to be growing out of the back of the hands. She dropped them on the desk, blinking rapidly, and picked up the mask. The hair was attached like real hair would be, the mustache and beard seemingly grown out of the cold flesh-like substance that made up the mask. It was complete down to the mole under the right eye.

They seemed to be alive.

"This is not makeup!" she shrieked before she dropped the mask to the desk and started screaming, staring at the things.

It shocked all of them. Carthage dropped the briefcase on the desk and backed away from the woman, fearful of what she might do. Then he walked over to Ms. Morgan and slapped her hard in the face several times while she continued to stare at the things on the desk, screaming and screaming and screaming. Puccano drew his snub-nosed revolver.

She screamed for more than a minute before she finally stopped and just stood there, still staring at the things there.

"Get hold of yourself," Puccano said.

"That's real!" Morgan said. "It's Dr. Adams' face!"

"What?" Dr. Brooks said.

"It's Dr. Adams' face!" Morgan shrieked.

"Let me take a look at that," Puccano said, putting his revolver back into his pocket.

"I thought this was a joke but it's not!" Ms. Morgan yelled, tears starting to flow down her cheeks.

Puccano found that the things did seem to be real though he couldn't for the life of him figure out how someone had make such a realistic mask out of living flesh

"It's real!" Ms. Morgan said. She felt like she was on the verge of screaming.

"If that's Dr. Adams' face ..." Dr. Brooks said.

"Probably his briefcase too," Carthage said.

"... where, or perhaps I should say what, is Dr. Adams?" Brooks said.

"The cylinders?" Carthage said.

"What?" Dr. Brooks said.

"His life force?" Morgan said.

They looked at the cylinders. Puccano looked again at the mask.

"It's a human face!" Ms. Morgan shrieked again.

"But, he had to wear it," Puccano said. "Someone's got to wear the face."

"Or some THING," Carthage said.

Puccano noticed that there were eyeholes and the mouth was a slit but it had lips and everything. As Puccano examined the mouth, Ms. Morgan shrieked again.

"You remember how he was talking!?!" she yelled.

"In a whisper?" Puccano said.

"No!" she replied. "He couldn't move his mouth!"

"It's true," Puccano said. "He talked very low."

"And his lips didn't move!" the woman cried.

Puccano noted that there was a vibration of some kind in the air when they'd been there earlier that evening and O'Conner said they should go back to the hotel and talk about it.

"I think we should go," Dr. Brooks agreed.

"Why don't we take the face?" Puccano said.

"Uh-huh," Carthage said.

"What?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"I don't want to take the face!" Ms. Morgan screamed.

"It's Katie's car, I think she decides if the face comes," O'Conner said.

"Take a picture of the face!" Ms. Morgan shrieked. "Take a picture!"

She pulled a Kodak camera from her backpack and dropped it on the desk. She also pulled out a flash and a box of powder, leaving them on the desk. Puccano was still for taking the face though Dr. Brooks didn't want him to.

"If we take the face, they're going to know we took the face!" Dr. Brooks said.

O'Conner noted that it would do no good to take it to the police – the things were killing the police. Puccano said they would just take it to their hotel.

"Why?" Carthage asked.

"Then what?" O'Conner said.

"I don't want that face in the car with me!" Ms. Morgan said.

Puccano said that if they had the face and hands, whomever had been using them wouldn't be able to disguise themselves any more and they could see who it was. Carthage, who was also getting more and more unnerved in the dark, claustrophobic room, told the man he didn't want to see who was in the mask. Puccano walked to the curtains and flung them open but the darkness outside was almost impenetrable. He could see the great tree tops and the overcast sky above but little else.

Ms. Morgan begin inching towards the archway, wanting nothing more to do with the face, the hands, or anything else in the horrible room.

"Anyone want to check the briefcase?" Carthage asked.

"No," Dr. Brooks said.

Puccano put down the horrible mask and opened the briefcase even as Dr. Brooks moved towards where Morgan stood in the archway. He found several file folders in the leather briefcase. He pulled them out and found that each of them had a typewritten name upon it. The names were: Jason Carthage, Charles Puccano, Grace O'Conner, Claire McAdams, and Dr. Katie Brooks.

"You need to see this," he said.

Scribbled across the front of a sixth folder were the words Dorothy Morgan.

Both Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan crept back into the room. Dr. Brooks almost had to drag Ms. Morgan. There was not enough light in the room to really read the papers within so it was decided to take a picture of the face and hands. Puccano put the files back into the briefcase and they decided to get out of the house. It was brought up that there might be more information in the house.

Carthage loaded the flash cartridge and took a picture of the

face and hands lying on the desk. The smell of flash powder filled the room and Puccano picked up the strangely lifelike face and hands and put them back in the seat where they had lain before.

"Here, Dorothy," Puccano said. "Here's your camera. Here's the briefcase. You want to run them out to the auto once we find the key?"

He handed both items to the woman and she turned and left the room.

"I don't need a key," she said under her breath.

"I want to look at my file," Dr. Brooks said to Puccano.

"You want to look at it here or at the hotel?" Puccano said.

"I don't think we should take it out of here," Dr. Brooks said. "If we take it out of here, they're going to know we were in a room we weren't supposed to have been in."

"They're going to know anyway," Carthage said.

"I think we're better off if we leave the things behind," Dr. Brooks said.

They suddenly heard a wrenching crash from the foyer.

"What was that?" Dr. Brooks said. "What was that?"

Puccano had his revolver in his hand and with a twist of his wrist, Mr. Carthage pulled the handle from his cane, revealing a long and deadly-looking blade hidden within. Puccano called for Dorothy and they ran into the corridor. They saw Ms. Morgan leaving the house.

"Where is she going?" Dr. Brooks asked.

Puccano told her that the woman was taking the camera and the briefcase to the car. They guessed she had broken the lock on

the door to get out.

* * *

Ms. Morgan reached the Cadillac and put the briefcase and her camera in the back seat. She got into the automobile and looked down to feel around where she had seen the rifle case before. She opened it up and found an immense, double-barreled rifle within. She picked it up and sat there, holding the weapon closely. She recognized it as an elephant gun and that made her feel better.

Her foot touched a small metal box that rattled and she assumed there were shells within. She cracked the gun open and found it was unloaded.

* * *

Puccano suggested they keep looking around the house and wondered aloud if anyone was in the house.

"Oh, I'm sure something's here," Dr. Brooks said.

"I'm sure something's here too," Carthage said. "Whether it's paying any attention to us ..."

"Let's just read the files and go," Dr. Brooks said.

They discussed it for several minutes until they realized that Ms. Morgan had not come back. When they went outside, they found her in the Cadillac, clutching the elephant rifle to her chest.

"What are we doing?" she asked. "What are we doing now?"

"Uh ... we want to read the files," Dr. Brooks told her.

"Is that what you have?" Ms. Morgan asked. "The files?"

"They're in the briefcase," Dr. Brooks said carefully.

"Oh ... I have the files," Ms. Morgan said.

"Yes, you have the files," Dr. Brooks said.

Ms. Morgan handed her the briefcase.

* * *

Puccano had not followed Carthage, O'Conner, and Brooks out to the automobile. Instead, he had gone into through the archway that led off the foyer on the opposite side from the parlor. He found a good-sized dining room with a large table and chairs. He saw in the dim light that there appeared to be several books on the table.

Puccano touched the light switch on the wall and only about three bulbs in the electric chandelier above lit up. It was enough for him to see that books were strewn across the table. He began to look through the books and found they were covered with dust as if they'd lain undisturbed for some time. They all appeared to be books about legends and lore of Vermont.

Dust began to float into the air.

* * *

Dr. Brooks reached into the front seat of her Cadillac and flicked the switch that turned on the headlights of her automobile. She took the briefcase to the front of the auto and pulled out the file folder with her name upon it. She leafed through the file.

It had detailed information about her. Her name, date of birth, address, telephone number, names and address of friends and associates, and even notes on her daily routine. The amount of detail about her life was unnerving and there were even hospital records noted in the file. Information on the police report about the break-in at her house the week before was also there.

Dr. Brooks told O'Conner what she'd found and the other woman found that her own file had the same things.

Carthage was trying to calm Ms. Morgan down and was horrified when he saw her load the elephant gun and put several more shells in her pocket.

"Mind where you're pointing that," he muttered.

Dr. Brooks called to Carthage and he walked to the front of the automobile.

"Read this," Dr. Brooks said, handing him the folder with his name on it. He looked it over and realized that though there was information from hospital visits and other records, there were no details of a personal nature more than a week old. He found that the traffic tickets he received in Boston were also noted. He felt a cold chill go down his back.

Dr. Brooks opened Dorothy's folder and found a handwritten note within with her name and a question mark.

Carthage grabbed Puccano's file from Dr. Brooks and looked through it. Most of his contacts were listed as police officers though others had unusual names and were marked "Underworld figure." That got Carthage's attention but he realized it was going to take some time to fully go through the files.

Just then Puccano came out of the house. He told them he wanted to look upstairs. Ms. Morgan got out of the back seat of the auto, the elephant gun in her hand.

"I'm ready," she said.

Puccano was waving his revolver around and Carthage ducked. The barber noticed that the three were standing around the front of Dr. Brooks' Cadillac and looking through the files.

"What's in those files?" he said.

"Would you mind not pointing that gun at me?" Carthage said.

"What's in those files?" Puccano said again.

"Everything," Dr. Brooks said.

"Everything about what?" Puccano asked.

"Everything about you!" Carthage said.

"Everything about you, about him, about me," Dr. Brooks said.

"Let me look at my file," Puccano said.

He jerked the file out of Carthage's hands and quickly looked through it. It was insanely detailed and he saw information on the police report he'd made about the break-in at his shop and even a list of every person he'd given a haircut to in the last week.

Dr. Brooks saw that there was a file for Claire McAdams as well. She looked through it and found nothing of interest though it was noted that she had lost her job.

"I don't know about you but this is all crap!" Puccano said, tossing the file aside. Papers scattered to the ground in front of the automobile. "I'm going up that stairwell. I want to see what's up in that tower up there."

"I'll go with you," Ms. Morgan said. "I don't want to step foot in that room though."

He guessed she meant the library.

"Are you going to bring that?" Puccano asked, pointing at the elephant rifle.

"Yeah," Ms. Morgan replied.

"You lead, I'll get your back," Puccano said to the wild-eyed woman. He turned to the professor. "Dr. Brooks, do you have a weapon?"

"I do," Dr. Brooks replied.

Ms. Morgan was looking around nervously as they all headed back to the house. Dr. Brooks shut off the headlights and tucked the briefcase back into the Cadillac. O'Conner quickly gathered the papers Puccano had scattered and put them in to the automobile as well. Then she scurried into the house after the others.

They all crept up the stairs, passing the second floor, and then proceeding to the third floor. It was very dark and dusty on those steps and on the third floor, they opened onto a landing in what appeared to be a study or a reading room. Small doors opened off the room, probably leading to attic storage spaces. An archway to the left led to an area where windows looked out into the darkness beyond.

On the landing were a pair of soft chairs and a small table with a lamp upon it. It was very dark and Ms. Morgan switched on her electric torch.

"Thank you Dorothy," Puccano said.

They peeked into the turret room and saw there were windows on the other three walls. Brass rifle shells were scattered across the floor and a .303 Lee Enfield rifle was leaning in the corner. A box of shells was on the table as well as another clip that looked like it would fit the rifle. There were dozens of brass shells on the floor.

Carthage switched on the lamp that stood on the table in the reading room. He moved into the turret room and picked up the rifle, checked the clip and saw it was full, and then pocketed the shells and the extra clip, which was also full.

"It looks like someone used this as a spot to shoot into the woods," Puccano said. "Like a sniper's tower."

Puccano took the rifle and handed his revolver to Ms.

O'Conner. Carthage gave the man the bullets as well, wishing the weapon had been a shotgun. He was a much better shot with a shotgun than a rifle.

It was very dark outside of the windows though when he looked down, Puccano could make out the shape of the automobile. He could also see the carriage house and make out a little of the kennel.

Ms. Morgan suggested that some of them should go search the carriage house and the kennel. Carthage asked her if she wanted them to split up after she'd found that face in the library. She replied that she wasn't scared of much though the face had unnerved her. When Puccano asked if she'd like to come with him to examine the bedrooms, she said she'd rather go outside. Carthage noted that there were two large weapons now with them and he thought they should keep one with each group if they split up.

As they walked back onto the landing, Carthage noticed a loose board on one wall. Ms. Morgan pried it open and shined the flashlight within. There was a book there. She pulled it out and gave it to Puccano, who looked it over and opened it.

It proved to be a handwritten diary. The first entry was in 1910 and noted that the writer had just moved to the area of Vermont near Montpelier. He guessed it was Dr. Adams' diary and so flipped to the back.

The last entry was dated Sept. 6, 1922. It read:

"I will try to leave this place tomorrow. With the full moon, perhaps I can get as far as Northfield or even Montpelier, where I might take a train east to Boston or even Dover though I wish to leave these haunted hills. I only hope they let me go. I will leave this journal hidden here in the event of my demise. I fear that if the fungi do not get me, their human servants will.

"The things' lair must be on the west face of Chase Mountain. There is a large cave there covered with a great boulder too heavy for anyone to move. However, erosion has left a place where a man might wiggle through. That must be where they are."

He put the book down and they decided they would read it later. He gave it to Ms. Morgan to hold onto and she stuffed it into her backpack.

They decided that Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan would examine the kennel and carriage house while the rest searched the bedrooms.

* * *

Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan crept downstairs and exited the house. They found that the kennel was probably built within the last five or so years and had a rough look about it, as if it were built by an amateur or put up quickly or perhaps both. There were numerous large doghouses in the chain-link fenced run around the entirety of the building.

The small building appeared to have not been used in some time. Cupboards within held rotten dry dog food and one of them was full of bones. Careful examination proved that the bones were those of several dogs.

They crossed the yard to the carriage house and found that the building looked old though it was still intact. There was room within for a carriage or perhaps an automobile and a couple of stalls for horses, all empty. A ladder led up to a loft where two round windows bereft of glass looked out onto the yard. Cracks were in the walls where the wood had twisted and shrunk.

They headed back into the house.

* * *

Puccano, Carthage, and Ms. O'Conner started with the master bedroom and found nothing of interest until Puccano tried to open a pair of double doors that led off the room. They proved to be locked but he kicked them open to reveal a room without windows. Light streaming in from the lamp in the bedroom revealed a large pentagonal drawing on the wall. The thing was marked with figures, mathematical formulae and unsettling symbols. It was some five feet across and looked unlike anything they had ever seen before.

Carthage went to examine the wall while Puccano headed into another bedroom to search on his own. The museum curator first looked over the thing and then touched it to see how thick the paint that had been used to craft it was.

His hand went through the wall as if it wasn't there!

He jerked his hand back, suddenly feeling weak, and then laughed strangely. Ms. O'Conner, who had been watching the man, jerked back and shook her head. She didn't think she could have seen what she thought she'd seen. Carthage laughed loudly again and Puccano came into the room.

"What's going on?" he said.

"Touch the wall!" Carthage said with another burst of laughter.

"Why, what's going to happen?" Puccano asked.

"Touch the wall!" Carthage said again with a maniacal grin.

Puccano moved forward and tapped the wall with the end of the Lee Enfield. It knocked smartly against the plaster.

"No no, with your hand," Carthage said.

"You touch the wall with your hand," Puccano said.

"I did that already," Carthage replied. "She saw me do it."

"I did," Ms. O'Conner said.

"Then why do you want me to touch the wall?" Puccano asked.

"It's strange," Carthage said.

"His hands ..." Ms. O'Conner said. She stopped but didn't really want to say what had happened. It was impossible.

Carthage picked up the cane where he'd dropped it on the floor and touched it to the wall. Then he thought a moment and touched its tip to the strange symbol on the wall. It didn't go through. He turned his cane around and then touched the handle to the wall but it was solid. He turned the handle so that his hand actually touched the wall and as soon as his flesh touched the wall, it went into it again. The cane went in as well.

He jerked his hand back, feeling uneasy and again weak for a few moments.

"When it touched your flesh first, it went through?" Puccano said.

"Yes!" Carthage replied with a grin.

Puccano walked forward and tried it as well. His hand and the rifle both went into the wall and he stepped back, only a little unnerved by the impossible thing. They were still talking about it when suddenly Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan were in the doorway.

"You've got to see this!" Carthage said.

"Real close!" Puccano said.

Carthage shoved his hand through the wall and then pulled it

back out.

"What?" Dr. Brooks said. "What did you just do?"

Carthage grinned at her as Ms. Morgan walked forward and touched the end of the elephant rifle to the wall. It tapped there and didn't go through.

"It only works with flesh," Carthage said.

"Yeah, right," Ms. Morgan said.

"Dorothy, I want to show you that he's crazy," Puccano said. "Go ahead and put your face right up against it."

She looked at him like he was mad as he told her to put her face up to the diagram on the wall, telling her it was an optical illusion.

"No," Dr. Brooks said.

Ms. Morgan walked to the wall and looked very closely at the diagram. Then she put her face against the wall and it sunk into the wall. Dr. Brooks backed away and almost screamed.

"What do you see?" Puccano said.

Her jaw moved and then she moved forward and disappeared through the wall.

"Where'd she go!?!?" Dr. Brooks said.

* * *

Ms. Morgan had seen only darkness beyond the hideous symbol on the wall and tried to tell the others when she heard Puccano ask what she saw. She had not been able to even hear herself speak, a strange and unnerving thing. So, she stepped into the room. As soon as she took that step, she saw a fungi or moss that was attached to the ceiling just over her bent head start to glow in an eerie green luminescence.

The walls, floor, and ceiling of the room beyond the wall were cold stone and appeared to have been cut perfectly, leaving a reflective surface. The room had only about a six-foot ceiling so she had to stoop under it. Walls on either side of her came closer together at the far end of the room and on that wall was a circular metal disk about five feet wide with cuts in the metal that all came together in the center, almost like the shutter of a camera. A small, metallic pentagon was on the wall with some kind of small, spindle-shaped mechanism upon it.

To her right was a shelf with a dozen more of the shiny metal cases like the ones that had been in the library.

On the wall behind her was a pentagonal symbol that looked much like the one she had just stepped through. Beside it was another, more intricate symbol of the same general size and shape though with different symbols and lettering. There were more of the symbols in the second pentagonal shape than in the first one.

She looked around the room carefully and then walked back to the wall where the symbol was.

* * *

“Dorothy!” Dr. Brooks and Ms. O’Conner called.

There was no answer.

“Charles, go into the wall and see what you see,” Dr. Brooks said.

“My God!” Carthage said.

“I will,” Puccano said though he made no move towards the wall. Instead he turned to Dr. Brooks. “What did you find?”

She quickly told him of the rotten dog food in the kennel and the dog bones in the cupboard. She said there was nothing in

the carriage house either. Puccano told her that the doors to the room had been locked and he explained what they had done in the room and what had happened when they had touched the painted wall with their hands.

Ms. O'Conner mentioned the diary they'd found in the room above and the boulder that had been written about. Dr. Brooks told them that they'd seen a great boulder on the mountain during their drive the day before when they'd hiked up a nearby mountain. She remembered seeing a house at the base of the mountain where the boulder was and guessed it had been the Adams house.

Just then, a hand came out of the wall and they all took a step back.

"Is that Dorothy's hand?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"It looks pretty big so it might be," Puccano said.

"Grab it!" Dr. Brooks said.

"Carthage!" Puccano said. "Why don't you grab that hand?"

"Okay, fine!" Carthage said.

He grabbed the hand by the wrist and it turned and grabbed his hand and pulled him through the wall!

* * *

Carthage found himself in the small stone room. He looked around desperately and saw that Ms. Morgan was there, holding his hand. He had his sword cane in his other hand and was glad of that at least. He was also glad to see that Ms. Morgan still carried the massive elephant gun.

She quickly explained that she had found herself in the room and he carefully looked at the two symbols on the wall and at the cylinders on the shelf. He guessed that the iris on the

opposite wall was some kind of strange door and eventually he manipulated the small spindle-shaped mechanism on the panel beside it.

Without a sound, the iris opened, revealing a larger area beyond. Carthage peeked out to see a five-sided room with a ceiling hidden in the darkness in the dim light that spilled from the room they stood in. Dorothy had just gotten out her flashlight to shine it around when another of the iris doors opened and something came out.

The horrible creature was about five feet long, nearly the size of a man, but crawled on the ground on numerous segmented legs. It had a crustaceous body with a vast pair of dorsal fins or membranous wings and the head seemed to be some sort of convoluted ellipsoid covered with a multitude of very short antenna. The thing's head glowed in strange colors and it suddenly stopped where it was for a moment, then lunged at Carthage with a terrible speed, snapping at him with claws at the end of its legs.

Carthage jerked back with a shout and then Ms. Morgan's elephant gun roared, knocking her backwards as the stink of gunpowder filled the room. The great bullet had missed the target, however, and ricocheted off the stone walls of the outer room.

Carthage tried to stab the horrible thing as Ms. Morgan fired a second shot with little more effect than the first one other than to fill the room with the reek of the firearm and almost deafen the two. The thing continued to try to injure or grapple with Carthage while he tried to stab it as Ms. Morgan laboriously reloaded the rifle.

Then it slashed Carthage's arm with a razor-sharp nipper, cutting his left bicep almost to the bone. Carthage screamed and stumbled back and Ms. Morgan rushed forward and kicked the thing in the midsection, sending it crashing back into the

outer room where slammed into the ground. Carthage, bleeding profusely from his arm, followed the thing and stabbed it with his sword blade but then saw that the thing was still alive. It dragged itself to the other open iris door as Ms. Morgan fired a shot into it. It jerked to one side but continued to pull itself through the door.

Blood seemed to be everywhere as Carthage tried to hold the horrible wound closed.

"I have to get out of here!" he cried.

He stumbled back towards the strange symbol on the wall and vanished through it.

* * *

The others were still waiting to see what would happen next when Carthage stumbled out of the wall and into the room. His left arm was bloody and dripping and his coat sleeve was cut wide open. He stumbled out of the room with the symbol, made his way to the bed and sat down on the edge of it.

"What happened?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"Something attacked me!" Carthage said, trying to apply pressure to the horrible wound. "Help me out with this! Anybody got bandages?"

"Where's Dorothy?" Puccano asked.

"Still in the room!" Carthage said. "I need help!"

Puccano suggested he use his tie like a tourniquet.

"I can't really do it myself people!" Carthage said. "C'mon! I think I'm going to die here!"

They helped him to get the bleeding stopped. Ms. O'Conner helped him the most, knowing some first aid and veterinary medicine. She patched him up as best she could.

"There's a monster!" Carthage said. "I don't know if it's dead!"

* * *

Ms. Morgan went to the central room again, this time shining her flashlight up into the darkness. The walls there went up about 50 feet to 75 feet before it ended in a flat ceiling that reflected the light like the floors and walls of the rest of the place had. The five-sided shaft had an iris door on each wall.

She looked to her left where the iris door had closed a few moments before. She manipulated the spindle and the door slid open with the barest of hisses.

The room was the same size and shape as the room with the strange symbols on the wall. Across from the door she stood in was another iris door in the far wall. The room was filled with metallic containers filled with odd minerals. Most of stones were black with specks of white and she picked one up and examined it, finding it greasy to the touch but leaving no residue. She put it back down and then crossed the room to open the door on the opposite wall.

A crudely dug tunnel lay beyond. Even as the fungus on the ceiling of the room she was in began to glow, she closed the door again and exited the room, heading back for the room with the strange symbols on the wall.

* * *

Something else came through the strange portal. It was Dorothy and they could smell gunpowder. There was still smoke coming out of one her the barrels of the elephant rifle. Ms. Morgan noticed it and blew it away.

"I didn't even hear a shot," Puccano said. "What did you shoot?"

"It was the beast," Ms. Morgan said.

"Her beasties exist," Carthage said.

"I told you!" Dr. Brooks said.

"You saw one?" Puccano asked.

"A small one," Carthage said.

"I shot it," Ms. Morgan said.

"Did it die?" Ms. O'Conner asked.

"No, but it dragged itself back into another amazing room," Ms. Morgan said. "There are minerals in there."

"There's more than one room back there?" Puccano said.

"There are different rooms in there," Ms. Morgan said.

Dr. Brooks asked if they had doors or more of the odd, painted walls and Ms. Morgan told her some of the rooms had normal doors. When asked how many rooms there were, Ms. Morgan guessed half a dozen.

"Did you see anything in these rooms?" Puccano asked.

"Was it like a house?" Ms. O'Conner asked. "Furnished? Wallpaper?"

Ms. Morgan was unnerved and took some time to answer any questions.

"The beast did not seem to-" She started.

"What happened, did you get attacked?" Ms. O'Conner asked.

Ms. Morgan told them what happened when the beast attacked and how the thing got away, its head flickering in different colors. She described the thing as hissing at her as it fled but neither she nor Carthage were terribly coherent in their

discourse of the events. It had all happened so quickly that they were both still unsure.

Mr. Carthage asked Dr. Brooks if she had her hip flask and the woman gave it to him. He took a solid slug of the whiskey within and thanked her for it.

"I know what door it went into," Ms. Morgan said.

"You can find it again?" Mr. Puccano asked.

"I think so," she said. "I'm not as good a shot with this rifle as I thought so I didn't want to go after it alone. I think it was hurt pretty badly."

They talked about what Dr. Brooks had seen and Mr. Carthage noted that what she had seen seemed to have been larger than the creature they had seen just a short time before. Puccano was all for blowing a hole in the wall and destroying the symbol so that things would not be able to get in or out. They talked for some time about destroying the wall with rifles and Carthage wished he had a shotgun. Ms. Morgan was not sure that destroying the wall would have any affect on the portal on the other side. Puccano questioned her about he symbols on the wall on the other side and then asked if she'd take her camera back through the wall and take a picture of the thing on the other side. He went so far as to ask Dr. Brooks to offer Ms. Morgan money to go back through and take a picture. Dr. Brooks asked Ms. Morgan how badly hurt the thing had been and Morgan said she thought it was hurt fairly badly.

"All right, I'm going through," Dr. Brooks said.

"You're going to go through?" Puccano asked.

"I'll go," Dr. Brooks said again.

"And take a picture?" Puccano said.

"Well, she's not going alone, I'm not going alone," Dr. Brooks

said.

"There's more to discover in those rooms," Ms. Morgan said.

"All right, I'll go," Puccano said.

"Okay," Dr. Brooks replied.

Puccano suggested the others search the other bedrooms. Carthage said he'd stay right there and would check the other bedrooms with Dr. Brooks.

Puccano and Ms. Morgan went through the wall.

"Good luck," Carthage said after they vanished.

I'm going to die, he thought.

* * *

Puccano caught his breath as he arrived in the strange room. He and Ms. Morgan looked around a little bit and he was especially intrigued by the other design on the wall. It looked much more complex than the one that he had seen in the sitting room and had different symbols and numbers. He decided to experiment with it and put his hand through. This time he felt terribly drained and his hand felt cold and numb as soon as he put it through. He left his hand there and it began to ache. The horrible cold ache continued and he finally jerked his hand back out of the room.

His hand was swollen and his fingernails had turned black. It was very red overall and there were spots where bruises were forming. It looked like blood vessels had burst under the skin and his entire hand ached and hurt. Frost was over part of his hand and his fingertips had turned gray as if they were frostbit.

"We don't want to go there," he said, holding his hand under his arm to try to warm it.

They did decide to take two of the cylinders from the shelf on the wall and Ms. Morgan tucked them into her backpack.

They crossed the room to the open iris door and then into the room with the containers full of the strange mineral. Puccano suggested that Ms. Morgan take some of the metal and she emptied her makeup kit into her backpack and put some of the metal within. Then they opened the far door and entered the narrow tunnels.

The ceiling in the tunnels varied from around five feet high to well over ten feet. The walls, floor, and ceiling, though not cut and perfect like the walls of the rooms they had been in, were very regular, almost like great scoops of dirt and rock had been taken out all at once. In places, the rock and dirt were scorched, while in other spots, rocks were sheered off as if by some great saw.

They went about 100 feet down that tunnel, their only light Ms. Morgan's electric torch. Then they came to a place where the tunnel split. Puccano thought they should keep going and suggested they leave something behind to show where their path was. Ms. Morgan left some of her makeup and they followed the left tunnel for another 100 feet or so before it again split and also had a third tunnel that went up and to the right.

After some discussion, they left a lipstick and then helped each other to climb to the upper tunnel. They followed that for well over a hundred feet before a cross tunnel intersected it just before that tunnel split as well. By then, Ms. Morgan was becoming nervous but Puccano thought they should press on. They left some makeup and again took the tunnel that was to the furthest left.

After only a few dozen yards, the tunnel opened into what appeared to be a natural cavern. Moss and lichen grew in the humid atmosphere and stalactites hung from the ceiling. Stalagmites grew from the floor and the sound of water

dripping came from deep inside the room. Other tunnels or holes exited the room and as they discussed continuing or heading back, they heard the sound of rocks striking the floor as if something had disturbed them.

Each of them armed with their rifle, they entered the cavern and soon found a spot where the rocks had fallen. It was completely flat and there was no where the rocks could have fallen from however. That's when they noticed other, small piles of rocks. Ms. Morgan kicked one over but nothing was within. Then she saw what appeared to be claw marks in one of the rock walls.

They left that room and headed back the way they'd come but when they reached the spot where the tunnel from above spilled down into the tunnel below, they couldn't find Ms. Morgan's lipstick. Puccano wanted to continue exploring so they picked the corridor to the left again.

They found Ms. Morgan's lipstick on the floor not far down that tunnel.

They again stopped to discuss whether they should press on but Puccano was adamant. Something in the place might give them a clue as to what was going on in the house or the strange place.

They had gone further down that tunnel than any other when Puccano stepped in something that seemed to splash. He assumed it was water but when he pulled his foot up, something stuck to it. He pulled his shoe back from the greenish-black substance that was sticking to it and rubbed as much of it off as he could.

The further down the tunnel they went, the more of the strange, plastic-like substance they came across. There was also an odd and pungent smell.

After at least a hundred yards, the tunnel opened into another

natural cavern. This one was smaller than the one they had found before and rounded with several other entrances. In the center of the room was a pool of black water. The smell was very strong.

As they stepped into the chamber, Puccano ready to go around the pool of water, it started to roll and lap up against the sides of the hole that held it. Ms. Morgan shined her light directly on the vicious substance for the first time and they saw that it was not water.

The black iridescent ooze, a shapeless mass of protoplasmic bubbles, had a myriad of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light all over the horrible mass. The terrible thing, whatever it was, splashed forward and came outward, slithering towards them with horrible intent.

Puccano screamed, turned, and bolted down the tunnel the way they'd come. Ms. Morgan was not far behind him and ran as fast as she could. She suddenly realized the implication of the slime on the walls, ceiling, and floor of the tunnel they'd come down. The thing must be huge! She could hear it moving behind her, sliding and slithering down the corridor, coming ever closer, ever nearer, with probably her death the only thing on its horrible, alien mind.

She ran after Puccano as fast as she could, turning down the tunnel where they'd found her lipstick and almost screaming as the smell enveloped her. She lost sight of the man at the next juncture and then stumbled and leaned against the wall, out of breath. She looked behind her finally.

There was no sign of the horrible thing. She did not know why it had not continued to follow them and didn't care. She just hoped she would never see it again.

She stumbled down the tunnel and soon found herself back in the room with the minerals in the containers. There was still no sign of Puccano and she hoped he was all right. Then she

went to the shaft to one of the unopened iris doors and manipulated the control beside it.

* * *

Dr. Brooks, Ms. O'Conner, and Mr. Carthage waited for what felt like a very long time in the bedroom, watching the strange symbol on the wall carefully. It had actually been nearly a half hour before Mr. Puccano burst out of the room again.

"We saw we saw-!" Puccano said, stumbling out of the room, his eyes wide, his jacket torn and dirty, the rifle loose in his hands. Carthage took the rifle from the man.

"What did you see?" Dr. Brooks said.

"The-" Puccano said.

"What?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"The ... the ... the thing!"

"The pink thing?"

"No!"

"No?"

"No!"

"What? Something else?"

Puccano was grunting and making strange noises that had no meaning.

"The-" he said.

"Something with lots of feet?" Dr. Brooks said.

"The water wasn't water!" Puccano said. "The black water wasn't water came up and ... eyes! Eyes popping! Popping!"

"What do you mean?" Dr. Brooks said.

"Eyes in the water popping! The water came out of the ground was up and popping, popping, popping!"

His eyes focused on Carthage.

"Who are you?" he said.

"Jason," Carthage said.

"Popping?" Dr. Brooks said.

"Eyes!" Puccano said, looking around wildly. "They were eyes and the black water came out it was smoke, water filled eyes!"

"Where's Dorothy?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"I ran, I ran and she couldn't keep up," Puccano said.

"Dorothy couldn't ..." Dr. Brooks said. "Is she okay?"

"I don't know," Puccano said.

"Is she hurt?" Dr. Brooks said.

"I don't know."

"Are you hurt?"

"I don't know."

She saw that he didn't appear to be bleeding.

"Does she still have my elephant gun?" Ms. O'Conner said. "I have to give that back to the zoo."

"I don't know," Puccano said.

"Did the eyes hurt you?" Dr. Brooks said.

"They ... it was evil," Puccano said. "They came after us."

"The eyes came after you," Dr. Brooks asked.

"The whole black ... we, we found this, this material, this black goop with ... it was water you touch it and it wouldn't touch you," Puccano said. "So, if she comes back, she has some of that. She, she put it in her makeup. She put it in her makeup."

"Her makeup?" Dr. Brooks said.

"In her makeup case," Puccano said. "In the case in her bag! She put, she put, she put-!"

Dr. Brooks tried to calm the man down and asked Carthage if he still had his flask and then handed it to Puccano.

"What is this!?! " Puccano asked.

"Take a drink," Dr. Brooks said.

He drank down a good amount of the flask's contents.

"She took this black stuff," Puccano said, still not making a lot of sense.

"Goo," Dr. Brooks said.

He looked confused.

"Like a goo and we dumped out her makeup and we put the black stuff in the case," Puccano said.

"How'd you get it in there?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"Just kind of held it and it was kind of oozing," Puccano went on. "We got some of it."

"Okay," Dr. Brooks said.

"But then we went down these tunnels, dozens of tunnels, and the ceiling would glow and we went in the tunnel and there was this sticky, everything was sticky, and there was sticky on

the walls of the tunnel, and we got to this pit, a room with a pit, and there was this black stuff that looked like water, but when the flashlight, she shined her torch and it started coming out at us and that's when I ran."

He looked them over.

"Did you see that pink thing at all?" Dr. Brooks asked him.

"No, I didn't see any pink thing," Puccano said.

He told them that they had taken some of the cylinders and put them in Ms. Morgan's backpack.

"I don't think you're in the right ..." Dr. Brooks started.

"Frame of mind?" Puccano said.

"... to discuss what our plan was," Dr. Brooks went on.

"You have a plan?" Puccano asked.

"Sort of," Dr. Brooks said.

"When ..." Carthage said. He stopped and thought for a moment.

"When what?" Puccano said.

"What's her name?" Carthage went on.

"Dorothy?" Puccano asked.

"Dorothy," Carthage said. "When she comes back, we're going to burn this place to the ground."

"How do you know she's coming back?" Puccano said. "She might not be coming back!"

"Do we need to go in after her?" Dr. Brooks said.

"I say we burn it now!" Puccano said.

"No!" Dr. Brooks said.

"We're not burning it now," Ms. O'Conner said.

"I say we burn it now," Puccano repeated.

"No!" Dr. Brooks said again.

"We're not burning it now!" Ms. O'Conner repeated.

"We came here as a group, we stay as a group," Dr. Brooks said.

"She wasn't part of our group!" Puccano said. "She was a hitchhiker! For all we know, she was one of those things."

"But she was in my employ so we have to wait," Dr. Brooks said.

Puccano just stared at her. Then he turned to Ms. O'Conner.

"You haven't been in, why don't you go in?" he said. "You haven't been in, why don't you go in?"

"I don't like the status of the people coming out," she simply said.

Dr. Brooks nodded as Puccano muttered something incoherent.

"She's dead," he said. "Dorothy's dead."

"No she's not," Dr. Brooks said.

"She's got to be dead!" Puccano said.

"Is she hurt?" Dr. Brooks said. "You said she wasn't hurt, why would she be dead?"

"We were running and -" Puccano said.

Dr. Brooks questioned what the things that chased them could do and then accused Puccano of leaving the woman behind.

"They can grab you!" Carthage said.

"What grab you?" Puccano said.

"They can grab you," Carthage said again.

"What can?" Puccano asked.

"The things."

"What things?"

"That are in there. They did this."

Carthage pointed at his arm.

"Who are you?" Puccano asked him.

Carthage rolled his eyes. The man was really in a bad way.

"Jason Carthage," he said.

Puccano nodded while Dr. Brooks and Ms. O'Conner quietly talked about what to do.

* * *

Ms. Morgan, meanwhile, was exploring the horribly alien place she had found herself in. She opened another of the iris doors off the main shaft and found another room, this one with a number of small cells, each sealed with an iris door comprised of metal bars. The floors, walls, and ceilings of the cells were composed of some kind of pink material and each cell was just large enough for a single person.

One of the cells held a man who cowered in the back while the other held another man who just glared at the woman. She tried to talk to them but they refused to answer and she eventually left the room and tried another iris door.

That room was the same size as the others and had a number of plastic slabs, a single large table, racks of strange, alien equipment, and several large charts depicting what appeared to

be the various portions of the human brain. Portions of the brain depicted on the charts were marked with symbols and complex formulae that she couldn't even begin to understand.

Hanging over the table were several tendrils and tubes of some kind.

To her left was a cabinet with glass windows in the front. Floating within, apparently held by nothing, were several human bodies that appeared to be alive. Tubes were connected to them in various places but they had a normal skin color. Their eyes were closed as if in sleep. A gray-orange tube connected to the back of each of their heads led to the back of the cabinet.

One table held a dozen more of the shiny cylinders and she examined them more carefully. At least half of them had names upon them, one of them marked "Dr. Richard Adams." There was also a tall rig with twin lenses mounted on the front, a box with vacuum tubes and sounding board, and a small box with metal disk. A cord came out of the back of each of the connected devices.

Against one wall was a strange mechanism covered with tubes and studded with lights. She looked around briefly and then left the room, going to the last closed iris door and opening it. The room there was filled with short shelves and tables filled or covered with instruments of alien design. The stone shelves cut into the walls were filled with what looked like mineral samples and bottles containing more minerals, some of them odd-looking and wholly unfamiliar to the woman.

She only spent a moment in the room before she went back out to the five-sided room with the shaft.

Then, to her horror, she heard the sound of flapping wings. She looked up and saw another of the horrors floating down the shaft on its membranous wings. She took one look at it and ran back to the room with the strange designs on the wall,

plunging into one without looking back.

* * *

As Dr. Brooks and Ms. O'Conner talked about going back into the strange wall, Ms. Morgan burst through the wall.

"She's back, let's burn the place!" Puccano said. "You said we were going to burn the place!"

"Just calm down!" Dr. Brooks said. "What did you see Dorothy?"

"A lot," the woman replied.

She stepped away from the wall and suddenly something else came through. It was one of the horrible pink things with the wings and the many, claw covered legs.

"Oh God!" Dr. Brooks screamed.

"Jesus?" Puccano said.

Ms. Morgan kicked the thing and sent it flopping across the room. O'Conner fired a shot from Puccano's .38 revolver and the bullet seemed to strike the thing as it jerked away.

Mr. Carthage had gotten up from the bed and limped to the far side of the room.

The horrible thing leapt backwards and fell through the wall, disappearing as if it had never been there.

"No!" Dr. Brooks yelled.

Her .45 automatic was in her hand and she ran to the far wall, flinging herself through and vanishing even as Puccano watched, horrified. Ms. Morgan ran to the wall and vanished through it as well.

"Don't go ..." Puccano said.

Then he ran out of the room.

* * *

Dr. Brooks found herself standing by Dorothy Morgan on the other side of the strange wall. The horrible pink thing was moving out of the room and into the shaft beyond when Dr. Brooks opened fire and struck it. It jerked once to the side and then fell and lay still, the glowing tendrils on its head turning gray.

Both women ran to the thing and Ms. Morgan nudged it with her foot but it didn't move. They guessed it was dead and when Dorothy told Dr. Jacobs about what had happened to Puccano's hand when he put it in the other strange painting on the wall, they decided to put the thing through it.

They found that it wouldn't go into the wall. That's when they really guessed it was truly dead.

"Show me this place," Dr. Brooks said.

Ms. Morgan, carefully looking up the shaft in the center, began to show her the other rooms.

* * *

Puccano had not only left the master bedroom, he had left the house. The barber had enough and didn't feel like he could take it any more. He fled the house and ran to Dr. Brooks Cadillac, dropping into the front seat and pressing the electric starter on the vehicle.

Nothing happened.

He looked at the starter and pressed it again and again before abandoning the car and running down the dirt road that led to the house. Then he turned west on Old Moretown Road and continued to run until he spotted the lights of an automobile coming from the other direction. He ran into the middle of the road and waved his arms over his head, flagging the aged soft top Model T Ford down.

"Can I help you mister?" the man on the passenger side asked.

He was a small man, about the same size as Puccano, and was solid and muscular. He looked somewhat familiar but Puccano couldn't place the face. The driver was strangely silent.

"The house, the black eyes, the stuff, my friends are in the house!" Puccano said.

"All right, get in the back," the man said.

As Puccano climbed into the back seat, the silent driver put the car into gear.

"No!" Puccano said. "Don't head back there!"

The driver ignored him.

"You're heading the wrong direction!" Puccano said. "You're heading back to the house!"

"What?" the passenger called over the wind blowing into the auto. "What are you talking about?"

"The the the doors and the black stuff and the eyes!" Puccano said.

"Yeah?" the man said.

"My friends with the guns and-" Puccano went on.

"Oh, they got guns?" the man asked.

"They got guns and the ooze with the eyes!" Puccano nearly screamed.

The auto slowed as it turned onto the dirt road leading up to the Adams' house.

"Oh no ..." Puccano said quietly.

He looked around wildly.

"No!" he said. "No! This is all wrong! This is still ... no, I need to go to the hotel in Moretown! I want to go back to Boston!"

"Sure, sure, we'll take you back to Boston," the passenger said.

"Good, good," Puccano said. "You'll take me back to Boston right now."

"Yeah, we're not taking you back to Boston," the man said turning around as the car pulled up at the front of the house. "Get out."

Puccano saw that the passenger had a .45 revolver in his hand and as the other man let the engine die, he saw that he had a smaller .32 revolver in his hand. The driver stepped out of the car and put a cigarette in his mouth, lighting it. In the light from the flame, Puccano recognized him as the man who had answered the door of the Adams' house earlier that day. He tossed the match away and grinned at Puccano.

* * *

Carthage and O'Conner, still waiting to see what, if anything, was going to come out of the horrible wall this time, thought they heard an automobile engine out front. O'Conner left the room while Carthage, the .303 rifle in his hand, ducked down behind the bed and aimed the rifle at the door.

O'Conner went to the darkened front bedroom and saw that there were now two vehicles in front of the house. Three men were leaving one of them and heading for the front door. One of the men was gesturing wildly.

"You better get back in the room because I'm going to fire at the next thing to show his face!" Carthage called from the next room.

* * *

Puccano got out of the automobile as ordered.

"I don't want to go back to the house!" he said.

The passenger took him by the right arm and led him into the house while the other man marched on his left side.

They entered the house.

* * *

"Hello?" Ms. O'Conner heard someone call from below. "Hello?"

"I saw a car pull up and it looked like some men had him," she called to Carthage. "I'm going to go see them."

"Hello?" the voice from below came again.

"It's me!" Puccano called.

* * *

"Shut up!" the man who had Puccano by the arm muttered to him.

Puccano flinched but didn't say anything else. A few moments later, Ms. O'Conner came down the steps with Puccano's .38 revolver in her hand. She saw that Puccano was flanked by two men, one of them she recognized as the man who had answered the door that morning. The other man had Puccano by the arm and when they spotted her, they both raised their arms to reveal revolvers, now pointed right at her.

"Drop it lady," the man who had Puccano said.

She dropped her pistol at the foot of the steps.

"Who else is in the house?" the other man asked her.

"Uh ..." O'Conner said.

"No one!" Puccano muttered.

"Shut up!" the man next to him said, not taking his eyes off O'Conner. "Come on!"

* * *

Upstairs, Jason Carthage heard someone say to "shut up" from below. He started to carefully sneak towards the door to the room. He crept to the top of the stairs and looked over the railing but could only see O'Conner standing at the foot of the stairs almost directly below him. Her hands were held out and he could see a revolver on the ground at her feet.

He guessed that whomever she was talking to was right under him.

He started to head down the steps.

* * *

"There's just a couple other people here," O'Conner said.

"She's lying!" Puccano yelled. "She's lying!"

"Shut up!" Puccano's captor said to him again. "Calm down."

Puccano suddenly broke free from the man on his right and leapt at the revolver on the floor. Both men tried to grab at the man but he was already out of reach and managed to get hold of the revolver before they could get him. He spun around and fired a single shot that struck the driver in the side. The man screamed and stumbled backwards.

O'Conner turned and fled up the steps as the man who had been holding Puccano fired a shot from his .45 revolver. With a grunt, Puccano fell back onto the steps, dropping the handgun and lying still. The other man stumbled back towards the library, holding his bleeding wound with his left hand.

"You weren't supposed to kill him!" the injured man yelled.

Carthage had moved down to the staircase.

"Nobody else has to die or get hurt!" he called.

He saw both of the men look up towards him though he doubted they could see him crouched in the dark stairwell. Both of them aimed their pistols up in his general direction.

"There's a rifle on you!" Carthage called. "Nobody else has to get hurt or die!"

The injured man, blood still dripping from the wound, stumbled past the other man and towards the front door where he disappeared from Carthage's sight. Closer to him, O'Conner stumbled up the steps past him.

The other man's .45 revolver roared again and the banister near where Carthage crouched shattered as the bullet tore through it. He aimed the .303 and fired a shot that knocked the man off his feet to crash to the floor, his revolver sliding away from him.

"Got him!" he said to O'Conner. "Puccano is down."

He got up and ran for the front bedroom even as Ms. O'Conner turned and headed downstairs again.

It was dark in the front bedroom but the curtains had been pulled open and he looked down into the darkness of the clearing in time to see the other man limp out to the second automobile there and pull open the door. He fired a shot from the .303, shattering the glass in one of the panes of the window. He didn't think he'd hit the man, who leapt into the automobile and out of sight.

He took aim at the vehicle's tires.

* * *

Ms. O'Conner had run down the stairs and found Charles Puccano dead at the bottom. He'd been shot in the chest, almost directly in the heart, and the wound had probably been

instantly fatal. She moved to the other man, who was gasping out his last breath on the floor but she saw that Mr. Carthage's shot had been very good and there was no way she could save the man. Even as she examined the horrible wound, death rattled in his throat.

She heard shots from upstairs as she gathered the .45 revolver and Puccano's .38 snub-nosed revolver from the floor. She headed back up the steps.

* * *

Carthage had fired two shots, each of which had missed the auto's tires as far as he could tell, when a figure leapt out of the opposite side of the automobile and made a dash for the woods. Carthage had already worked the slow bolt action on the rifle and took aim, firing at the figure. The man jerked forward and fell onto his face, lying still on the ground.

"I think I got him!" Carthage yelled and then ran out of the room.

He found Ms. O'Conner at the foot of the stairs and ran past her. She followed him out in the darkness. They found the man on the ground, dead, a bullet hole in his back. They quickly searched the Ford Model T and found a .22 bolt action rifle, a Springfield M1913 30-06 bolt action rifle, a hunting knife, and a large board with a nail in one end. They found no sign of the .32 revolver that the man in the house had. They gathered up the weapons and went back into the house, heading up to the master bedroom once again.

There was still no sign of Dr. Brooks or Ms. Morgan.

Ms. O'Conner picked up the .45 revolver that one of the men had used and found that it had a good balance. She kept that ready while she left the other weapons on the bed. Carthage talked to her briefly about going into the wall but she refused.

"Well, somebody's got to," he finally said. "Damn."

He gripped the .303 and walked into the wall again.

* * *

Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan had dragged the body of the creature into the strange lab with the bodies in the glass case. They put it on the central table and then looked for something sharp to cut it open with. Dr. Brooks was curious as to what the creature was. Then Ms. Morgan pointed out the cylinders. Dr. Brooks noticed that the strange apparatus on the table had plugs that looked like they might fit into the sockets on the cylinders.

As she fiddled with them, Mr. Carthage suddenly came into the room.

"We have to get out of here," he muttered. "Puccano is dead. We have to get out."

Dr. Brooks pushed the last plug into the socket and the twin lenses started to glow faintly. There was a rattling noise from the box with the vacuum tubes and the sounding board. It almost sounded like a human moan, metallic and devoid of feeling.

Then it talked!

"Where am I?" the voice said, completely devoid of emotion. "Who are you?"

"Uh ... you are ..." Dr. Brooks stuttered.

"Dr. Adams," Ms. Morgan said.

"I ... I am Dr. Adams," the metallic voice said. "At least what is left of me. They have put my brain in their hellish cylinders. They have destroyed me. You must escape."

"Do you know how to beat these things?" Dr. Brooks said.

"No," the voice replied. "Fire. Nerve gas. You must get ... you must get out. You must get out."

"Can we take you with us?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"It will do no good," the voice replied. "I am lost. I am lost. I am lost."

Dr. Brooks and Ms. Morgan looked at each other.

"What do you think?" Dr. Brooks said.

"We need to ask him everything we can before we leave," Ms. Morgan whispered back.

"The journal," the voice said. "My journal is in the turret in the house."

"I have your journal," Ms. Morgan said.

"Burn the house," the voice went on. "Destroy this place. Flee for your lives."

"Let's do it!" Carthage said. "I like that idea."

"What do you think?" Dr. Brooks said to Ms. Morgan. "Should be burn it?"

"You cannot escape them," the voice went on in its damning monotone. "Change your names. Move elsewhere. Anything you have to. They will follow you to the ends of the Earth to protect the knowledge of them."

"Do you know anything about this place we're at?" Ms. Morgan said.

"This is where they brought me, that's all I know," the disembodied voice said.

"Let's go!" Carthage said.

"Did you see those that brought you in here?" Ms. Morgan said.

"Are they the pink beasts?"

"The fungi from Yuggoth," the voice said. "They have bases on the moon and on Yuggoth."

"What's Yuggoth?" Ms. Morgan asked.

"A planet that has not yet been discovered in our solar system," the voice said. "You must get out. It is the furthest from the sun, further than Neptune. You must get out before they return. They're technology dwarfs that of humanity. You must get out before they return."

"Sounds like a good idea!" Carthage said. "Let's go!"

Carthage felt unhinged, almost like he was losing a little more of his mind every time he went through that horrible wall.

"How can we bring the stones Dr. Adams?" Ms. Morgan asked.

"What stones?" the voice said.

"That they are mining," Ms. Morgan asked.

"I do not know," the voice said.

"Do you know what it is they're mining?" Dr. Brooks asked.

"No, something that they cannot find anywhere else," the voice said.

Carthage suddenly felt himself go completely cold. He could hear a flapping noise coming from the shaft outside of the room.

"They're coming back!" he shrieked.

"Flee," the voice said. "You must flee."

Ms. Morgan jerked the plugs out and grabbed the cylinder, shoving it into her backpack and replacing it with one of the

cylinders she'd taken from the room with the strange symbols on the wall.

She and Brooks ran out into the pentagonal shaft. Carthage was fleeing through the door to the room with the symbols and the strange wall. Looking up, Morgan and Brooks could see two of the horrible things floating down the shaft. One of them had a cluster of twisted metal tubes held in several of its clawed legs. It also wore some kind of strange web of semi-luminescent green slime over most of its body.

The other creature started to make a strange noise and suddenly Ms. Morgan stopped completely and just looked up at the thing, wide-eyed. Her mouth fell open and a dazed look completely covered her face.

The other one dropped towards Dr. Brooks and manipulated the odd cluster of twisted metal it held. Mist came out of the device and struck the ground next to Dr. Brooks. Frost immediately formed on the floor where the mist touched.

Dr. Brooks fired a shot from her .45 automatic and struck the thing, which jerked backwards but didn't fall from the sky. The other creature dropped down and landed next to Ms. Morgan, continuing to hum in its odd way. The armed creature fired another burst of the mist, which completely missed Dr. Brooks. More frost formed on the walls and floor where she'd been.

* * *

Jason Carthage burst out of the wall and into the bedroom of the Adams home once again. He found Ms. O'Conner waiting there, the .45 revolver in her hand. She had stuffed Puccano's .38 special in her belt.

"They're going to be killed!" Carthage said.

O'Conner knew she had to go in.

* * *

Dr. Brooks turned and fired her .45 automatic at the other creature and it jerked back and stopped making the strange noise. Ms. Morgan shook her head and came out of the weird hypnosis that the thing had her under. She found herself confronted by another one of the horrible creatures as it lunged at her. She fired a shot from the elephant rifle but missed the thing completely. They both heard the bullet ricochet and the stink of gunpowder filled the air.

* * *

O'Conner pushed past Mr. Carthage and stepped into the weird wall. She suddenly found herself in a claustrophobic little stone room. Through a round opening in the far wall, she could see Ms. Morgan and Dr. Brooks fighting for their lives with two creatures like the one that had come through the wall earlier that evening.

O'Conner aimed the .45 revolver she'd procured at the creature near Ms. Morgan and fired at it. Her aim was off, however, and she missed.

Carthage appeared next to her and fired a shot with the .303, the blast filling the small chamber with noise. The thing threatening Ms. Morgan jerked to one side and fell to the ground. Carthage pulled back the bolt and the brass shell flew into the air trailing smoke.

The other creature had floated to one side and more of the icy mist flowed out of the strange device it held. Both Morgan and Brooks ducked to the side and the icy cold coated more of the floor with frost. The entire shaft felt like it was getting colder by the moment.

Dr. Brooks returned fire with her .45 automatic and the thing jerked back again. Then Ms. Morgan fired the elephant gun again, deafening both of them and missing completely.

As the thing landed, Ms. Morgan kicked it solidly and sent it

reeling across the room where it struck the far wall and crashed to the ground to lie very, very still. The strange device slid across the room and Ms. Morgan picked it up.

"Are you sure these things are dead?" Carthage said.

"Dead enough," Ms. Morgan said.

"I'm a vet," Ms. O'Conner said. "Maybe I can tell."

The strange cluster of twisted metal tubes looked odd and gave Ms. Morgan a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. She asked Dr. Brooks if they should take it and the other woman told her she might as well.

"Should we burn the house down?" Mr. Carthage said.

He pulled out a lighter from his pocket. He went to one of the things and held the lighter under the thing. It scorched the thing a little bit and he looked around for something flammable but saw nothing. Ms. Morgan told them they were going to burn the house down.

They all went back through the wall and felt unnerved and drained by whatever it did to them. Mr. Carthage went immediately to one of the curtains in the master bedroom and lit it on fire. They started fires on the top floor and then moved down to the ground floor, setting fires wherever they could before fleeing the horrible house, passing Puccano's body on the stairs. Another dead body lay in the foyer and yet another lay in the clearing outside.

Dr. Brooks got into her Cadillac and pushed the starter but nothing happened. She pushed it again and again and again, cursing under her breath. Carthage saw that and went to the Ford Model T, getting out the crank and starting it up. Dr. Brooks climbed out of her automobile as windows started to break on the Adams house and black smoke began to billow out. She opened up the hood on one side and looked over the engine.

Ms. Morgan used her electric torch to look over the engine as well but could not see what was wrong with it.

Carthage moved the Model T around and turned on the headlights, shining them on the Cadillac. Then he got out and looked at the engine as well but had no idea what might be wrong with it.

Ms. Morgan, meanwhile, had gone to examine the body in the clearing. She didn't recognize the man but he'd been shot twice, once in the back.

Carthage suggested pushing the Cadillac into the fire and they emptied the Cadillac of the files they'd found and Ms. Morgan broke the license plates off the machine. Dr. Brooks got in and Carthage moved the Model T around pushed the other vehicle towards the house. Flames were showing on the outside of the house by then. When it got close enough, Brooks bailed out of the Cadillac and Carthage gave it one final push, slamming it into the front porch.

They all piled into the Model T and Carthage turned it around and drove down the driveway. He turned back to Moretown to pick up Claire and get their belongings and they rode in silence down Old Moretown Road.

At one point, they could all see the flames of the burning house over the treetops. As they watched, they thought they saw three winged shapes in the sky swoop down towards the burning house like moths to a flame.

They made it to Moretown without incident and quickly gathered their belongings and Claire McAdams, who was still asleep and impossible to awaken. They put everything in the back of the Model T and headed towards Montpelier with the intention of taking the main roads back to Boston.