

**THE HORROR
FROM THE
BLIZZARD.**

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•■■■■■■■■ **WARNING!**

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

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THE HORROR FROM THE BLIZZARD.

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

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

CHAPTER 1: RETURN TO ARKHAM.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tarleton would be a credit even to such an august institution as Miskatonic University, Robert. As you know, he graduated Salutatorian. He is showing much

promise in his field and don't forget he has family in town who can keep an eye on him in case, only in case, he shows signs of any relapse. They're good people – I know them well."

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

He turned right walking through the maze of narrow, crooked alleys between the very oldest houses fronting the river and shortly after made his way into the University Quarter. Away from the river vapours, it was lighter here with a more

wholesome air. Tarleton checked the time against the clock set in the ivy-clad tower, admiring the ancient brick buildings, mellow in the late August sun. The first of the new term's students were walking or cycling or just standing, chatting and idling in the sun. Late season swifts darted and wheeled in the air, their cries shrill and mournful symbolising the end of summer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm only glad you've decided to continue your studies here, Webster. As you will be aware, Miskatonic has a policy of supporting scientific expeditions and I know that you will be interested in going to..." Bamford broke off, recalling his visitor.

"Come back Thursday; no, make it Friday, and we'll talk further."

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

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

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

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

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

"I intend to pull my weight, professor."

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

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

"Any what?" asked Bamford.

"Expeditions. Where are you going?"

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 2: THE FEAST – AND HALLOWEEN.

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

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

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

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

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

Looking up from his thoughts, Tarleton saw he was home. He stood before his parent's mansion on the exclusive Saltonstall Street – a large neo-Grecian built some fifty years before. His grandfather had served on the staff of Major-General Benjamin

Butler's occupying force in New Orleans and on his return from the Civil War, he had torn down the old colonial and rebuilt in an antebellum Louisiana style.

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

"Master Jack! Welcome home!" Cartwright, the family's old retainer greeted him. He shook Tarleton's hand and guided him into the marble-floored atrium. A double staircase swept upwards to the second floor gallery; another design feature his grandfather had insisted upon. Tarleton's earlier worries were forgotten when he saw his mother sweeping down the staircase, her skirts swishing as she walked. Although not yet fifty, she had not taken to modern dress and looked like a Victorian matriarch in her black dress with a jet brooch at her throat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tarleton looked across the silver table decoration in which fruit and vine leaves were artfully arranged. Olivia looked across at him and her lips raised in a little smile. Olivia was beautiful with long ash-blond hair and pale blue eyes showing her

mother's Swedish ancestry. She wore a light-blue silk gown which complemented her complexion to perfection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He had no nightmares that night.

* * *

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 3: BAFFIN ISLAND.

June, 1916.

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

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

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

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

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

Tarleton was pleased that he'd been accepted.

The *Margarite Ohlsen* nosed into an inlet set between two rocky outcrops. A crewman sounded out the depths with a plumb-weight but it was a deep fjord. Their

skipper, Captain Calderbank, was happy as this natural harbour was safe; unless the wind blew directly from the south-east which it very rarely did. The anchor rattled and the ship slowed to a standstill. The crew climbed the shrouds and, singing a shanty, furled the sails. Boats were lowered and rowed across to a shingle beach in the lee of the foothills of a mountain.

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

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

Only one man would ever see it again.

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

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

However, to the nomadic Inuit, even these structures would have seemed strongly built and over the centuries the scale of the buildings had grown in the Inuit imaginations. However, he relished the chance to delve further into the rumours and

maybe establish the amount of interaction between the Viking pasturers and traders and the native peoples before these settlements were finally abandoned.

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

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

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

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

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

Apart from one camp-fire surrounded by seal bones at the head of a fjord they found no trace of any human habitation, present or past and the vast emptiness pressed down on Tarleton's spirits. However, Dr. Welham was not downhearted. As he told the group during one rest break, "Baffin Island is the world's fifth largest

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