

The Beginning is Nigh

There is a place there, over those mountains high that loom on the horizon. Those few who dare venture into that realm and the fewer who return alive tell tales of unspeakable horrors - monsters so mighty and so evil they can destroy an army with a flick of their tails. Men turned beasts whose callous lack of conscience is a breeding ground for malicious thoughts and actions. Murder, rape, theft, and general chaos rules that land. There is no god there, no divine being willing to intervene, for fear of enticing the wrath of that place. They call it... Shangri La.

Xion

April 23, 1932:

"A shadowy figure sat huddled in the corner of the bar, clutching his mug of ale close to his chest, head bent over it in a manner suggestive of an impromptu nap. I grabbed my beer from the bartender, Cho, and walked over to one of the empty tables. As soon as I sat down, the figure quickly jerked into an upright position and began to stare intently in my direction. He stood up quickly, clutching a small piece of parchment to his chest like a precious gem, and briskly walked over to an empty seat at my table. As he sat down, the smell of dead fish and rotting flesh wafted into my nostrils.

BlademasterBobo

As he sat at the table, I began to uncontrollably shudder, his visage caused some deep part of me to recoil with fear; I tried to understand this feeling, yet when I saw what was written in his eyes I thought differently... What I saw there cannot be described in our tongue, only the black language of the cult of Elder Gods can describe such terrible majesty. And I felt my mind being destroyed, 'til I could feel no more..."

Palefox

These are the last words of Ellsworth Alba, before the damage to his mind finally left him a mere husk of the man he once was, glossy eyed and ever-silent. A week later he died, a gibbering wreck.

And so the paper sent me, a young journalist for The Brightonshire Newsweek with a mysterious family secret, to see if I can find the meaning of his last message, and all I had as a clue were his words and the cryptic parchment he was found clutching tightly even in death.

At the time of writing this journal entry, I am on a distant mountain top in Tibet. My sherpa is sitting outside the tent, in complete darkness. I hear the howls of distant mountain creatures, and my hand is shaking uncontrollably in the cold. Our food supply is running short; in a matter of days, we'll have nothing to eat but the short, yellowing grass beneath the carpet of snow. I dread what the morrow will bring, for I have seen the tracks of the ones before us. I am no longer sure whether it is the cold that makes my hand shiver.

Dragonene

April 27, 1932:

Today's march brought us up through a chill, thinly forested valley, through which the wind whipped so violently that the few trees we encountered grew twisted and gnarled, clutching the stony soil like arthritic limbs severed from some ancient beast. As we grew nearer the mountains, a hush fell over our party. We ate on the march, keeping talk to a minimum, chewing quietly lest we disturb the ethereal silence. As the head of the column reached the crest of a pass, I heard my native guides crying harshly amongst themselves, intoning a single phrase over and over: "Zxyialu."

Sparky

I looked up. The group's leader began to shake, but walked on. As each passed over the crest, each exhibited a new symptom: a quickening of breath, whining slowly growing to a tormented moan, even outright weeping. As I reached the crest I cried out, suddenly stricken by a profound stench. I kept walking: surely, the source would be something mundane; but what could it be that struck fear in my seasoned companions, they who have traveled these parts so many times? Nothing unusual could be seen.

Super-Dot

I turned and felt my muscles seize and my blood drain from my body. What I found before me could not be described by mere words. The walls of the pass ended and here began something organic, something alive--if it could be called that. The walls pulsed with a horrible rhythm, my head throbbing in unholy counterpart. I vomited and nearly fainted.

Cascade

The native guides began to chant and murmur in a hollow, entranced chorus that seemed to match and even augment the throbbing...

Everyone

The darkness that is grasping hold of my mind is beginning to overwhelm me; I fear this journal is coming to an end. By the time of the nx entry, lur aulora will not see the ammur. Yx czor ta Lizttx ammur dz lur--

April 1932:

A heartbeat. A pulse. I hear it, I feel it, all throughout my body. My surroundings. Where does it stop? Where is the line between the self and what makes up the world around me. It emanates from this brittle yellow page upon which I write. God. I can hardly decipher my own hand. The pulse. It shakes me. I can see my words jumping from the page like ants, skittering across my hand, my desk, and trailing up my arm. What is real?

Xion

I have heard that some, when they know that their death is imminent, feel at ease. I have heard that they feel calm and secure and...accepting. I feel no such thing. I feel fear. I feel terror. God. God. Are you listening? Are you real? I know my time runs short, but what awaits me beyond that veil of encroaching darkness...I can sense...horrors beyond words. This pulse. This heartbeat. It rocks me. It breaks me...God.

I feel as though I have been swallowed by some great beast; the walls slowly undulating with some strange, hidden evil. I feel as though it is slowly growing

BlademasterBobo

in around me, slowly creeping towards me when I turn away. There is barely enough light here to write by, but a strange light emanates from the seemingly living walls that surround me. I can still hear a strange chanting, perhaps the same as from when I fainted. With every second I must suffer this noise I become filled with an encroaching sense of dread.

In order to banish these unnatural thoughts from my head, I decided to explore. The room, if you could call it such, only stretched off for a few feet in each direction, except for the ceiling, which I could see the end of from my current position. Strange rumblings echoed from a small indentation in part of the floor. A putrescent ooze covered the floor, now engulfing some of the items that had fallen out of my jacket. I picked up my compass from the littered belongings, only to notice that the bottom of it had corroded. I recall a tale I read once, by Poe; though the man in that tale at least knew what had led him to his current state. I fear the rumblings are intensifying - what does it mean? I think I will begin dating my entries by numbers, I do not know what day it is anymore.

Palefox

4:

The substance here percolates through everything, it coats the walls and the floor; I must assume too that the ceiling is coated with the vile stuff. But I do not know what to do, my attempts to reach a foothold reward me only with scalded hands and no handholds to lead me to freedom. But I have an idea, I still retain my penknife, and though the walls surrounding me are tough, perhaps with some work I can carve a way to ascend to the summit.

5:

I do not know the date anymore.

It was him, it must have been. The world twisted around that titanic figure of-- I cannot put these words to writing; I cannot speak them. Dare not try.

Visions of horror. Destruction. A civilization in ruin. Pain.
Pain and darkness. My god the sky is on fire. The sky is burning crying
darkness. The sky is pain.

It must have been that beast...that being. It must have been.
The walls, oh God, those pounding walls. I see them from the outside now. I see the monster within which I had dwelled. My hands and arms are burned from acid, and my clothes are in shambles, but God, the stench. The blood.

There is blood on my hands

THERE IS BLOOD ON MY HANDS

My god, what have I done?

6:

I am being carried on the back of a giant of a man; fur is brushing my back. Scars ribbon my arms and face - it hurts - it hurts so much. I am feeling sick. I know not who has taken me, or where I am going. Alas, the darkness is threatening to take over again...

Dragonene

I AM JULIAN ALBA.

My mind is my own.

I AM CHRISTOPHER JULIAN ALBA.

My mind is my --

November 9, 1948:

My dear friend Bertram Cromwell found this journal in a crevasse of this mountain pass. Perhaps an introduction may be appropriate: I am Joshua Rogersby. My mother's maiden's name was Catherine Alba.

I cannot fathom the intents behind this journal. I am beginning to wonder how much of it is true. True fear is sending droplets of sweat down my forehead, despite the blizzard storming outside. I do not think of myself as believing in the occult, these chthonic tales of children; but this, this is extraordinary. I do not know what to make of it.

My family has a role in many of the local tales, and I've always assumed them to be just that. But with the discovery of this journal, I am beginning to reconsider my doubt. The handwriting belongs to its stated owners: I've corresponded with each of the authors. And each of them disappeared shortly before their entry dates. I have always wished that I could speak to them all again. The loss so many kin has been a great burden on me. Now I wonder if they are truly lost. Might I speak with them again if I explore this crevasse? Or would I disappear as well?

Super-Dot

November 10, 1948:

I find myself moving down into the crevasse as if my body were not my own. The sun has set long ago and I can no longer find my way in the twisted shadows of the moonlight. I put pen to paper now because I am no longer sure of myself or what I have seen, and only through writing can I maintain my sanity.

Cascade

I first encountered the Numbers not by way of sight but by touch. I placed my hand on the first marking before I knew it was there, the bloody ichor making a print on my hand visible by the light of the stars.

I don't know what they mean or by what ink they were written, but the

Numbers are just that--they count up to some morbid finale I find myself inexorably drawn to. I first laid my hand on a 3, and then a 4, a 7, and then a hundred feet down an 18--some being is leading me to an unknown destination.

Sparky

On the ground near the 19 I find a small weathered object. I pick it up, thinking at first that it is some unusual pebble, yet it feels oddly shrivelled and leathery as I tuck it away in my pocket. I realize now that I can no longer find number 18. I would have sworn it was right here, next to this shattered boulder at the foot of this hill, but I no longer see it. I have no choice but to continue now; I could not find my way back to civilization if I tried.

Up ahead I see number 20, then 21. I find a small curved white object near 25, which is perhaps a piece of ivory. I hurriedly put it into my other pocket as I scramble over the scree toward number 28. It is growing colder now, and tendrils of mist waver in the air. I find a string of Numbers in rapid succession: 31, 32, 33, all in a row. Along the way I collect two small wrinkled objects, a dark, slightly soft mass, and... a finger. Yes, it is definitely a finger... but there is 44, just around that bend. My pulse pounds in my temples as I pass 2, skid down into a dry creekbed past 49, and am rewarded for my troubles with a perfectly matched pair of ears.

In the fog up ahead I see another Number, and I run onward. I pause in mid-stride to gather up a small collection of ribs next to 53, two fistfuls of intestine next to 85, and a severed hand next to 113, which goes into my rucksack. My breath comes quickly now. 134, 256, a great toe, 516, half of a liver, 606, the upper half of a head with locks of matted black hair still attached; all in the sack. 606, I trip and bloody my chin on a rock outcropping, 797, I rush onward, 809, a blackened lung, most of a shoulderblade, a severed jaw, 861. The wind thunders in my ears as my pack fills. The femur I have found does not fit in my baggage. I carry it, along with an unrecognizable mass of muscle tissue and a leg I have discovered, clutched to my chest as I run. 818. The pile grows higher. I drop pieces now and then, 821, but I always manage to find them. I stumble at 831, lose a shoe in a crevasse, bloody my toes, but 861, I run onward, another leg.

881 I balance most of a torso atop my pile 883 with a pelvis dangling fragments of spine 884 889. The fog is thick as smoke, and I can scarcely see as I tally up my load at the bottom of the valley into neat piles. I put each piece in its pile and they start to form a complete picture seemingly of their own accord. The larger limbs fit together first, not quite connecting but enough so that I am able to move on to other pieces. I manage to put most of the torsoes in place before moving on to legs and arms, stopping every so often to find a smaller scrap of skin or bone that connects to a larger limb. I have more trouble with the smaller parts, my numb fingers fumbling, and I sometimes spend almost an hour going through small chunks of flesh, trying to find the piece that connects with the others. I manage to find all of the correct positions for the toes and fingers.

BlademasterBobo

I then move on to the internal organs, but I stop when a piece seems to be missing. My heart races as I scramble to find the missing piece of kidney, when I realize with horror that I never picked it up to begin with. I shakily grasp a sharp piece of rib. I must finish I MUST FIND THEM I cannot leave them to the things they write of in their journals. Blood is pouring from my abdomen and pain lances through me like sharp pieces of barbed wire but I must continue I feel faint from the blood loss but I must find them. My hands are covered in now frozen blood and I can no longer feel my stomach and I place the kidney in its proper place.

I must now finish the faces. I find the ears and place them in their proper positions along with most of the teeth and I have trouble finding parts of the scalp but I find everything at last until I get to the eyes where for a moment I think one is missing. I find it under one of the torsos but I drop it but that's fine. I scream as I take one of the spare eyes but the cold soon makes it better and I put the eye in its correct place and now they are finished.

999 a tent. I take it and wrap them cradle them. 889 We can finally go back. I pull them with me. 821 They don't help but I know they want to. 809 I'm crawling, we're crawling. 797 home is getting closer. Cascade

113 I can't feel anything. I can't feel anything. We're falling apart. But I know we're almost there.

I see the 18 and remember it, I remember everything.

7 4 3

The beginning is nigh.

I see it, I see the 1. I never saw the 1 before. What is that thing? It's alive? What could live here?

What is that thing?

About the story

The story was written with an online real-time collaboration tool by members of the TIGSource community. The names to the right indicate who was primarily responsible for each part. In truth, there were no exact distinctions, and all of us have been involved in the others' parts. March 22, 2009