

The Final Letters of Nudedor Viking III

April 27, 190_

My Dear Friends,

I fear I do not have much time and so I beg your pardon if my writing seems somewhat crude and commonplace. Earlier to-night whilst at the Hellfire Club, a gentleman with whom I am quite certain you are all acquainted with, Mister B____, entered looking most harried and with a most peculiar parcel under his arm.

Mister B____ poured for himself a rather brimming glass of brandy that he downed in a single gulp as though he were a common day laborer. It was peculiar behavior from a refined gentleman such as Mister B____ made all the queerer by the fact that he had not placed the parcel down while pouring or consuming his beverage.

Someone, I believe it may have been Major Sebastian Bludd, inquired of Mister B____, "B, my good man, what is that peculiar parcel you have there?"

As everyone who has ever had any dealings with Mister B____, business or otherwise, knows, Mister B____ is a rather even tempered fellow, but upon being asked of his parcel, the fellow flew into a rage. His face became as red as an Irishman's some five minutes after leaving the church on Sunday and he screamed something most unintelligible before hurling his empty glass across the room at Major Bludd.

Most fortunately Sebastian was able to avoid the missile which shattered against the wall. How dreadful would it have been if our dear friend, Major Bludd survived the bloody Anglo-Zanzibar War only to be done in at the Hellfire Club by a hurled chalice, but I digress.

The room was utterly poleaxed by what we had all witnessed, some gentleman approached Mister B____ in an attempt to subdue him but he drew, from his coat, a Remington which he aimed at the approaching gentleman. The gentleman, stout-hearted though they were, had no desire to be shot by a fellow who had clearly gone quite mad and so they backed away allowing Mister B____ to flee.

Now, if I may be somewhat forthright, I myself was not present for the exchange between Mister B____ and Major Bludd, for I slipped out with a rather buxom waitress to dance the blanket hornpipe in the alleyway behind the Hellfire Club shortly after Mister B____'s arrival. And it was there in the alleyway I next saw the fellow, running as though the Wild Hunt were upon him.

Though I was quite occupied with an invasion of the waitress back settlements, the appearance of

Mister B____ screaming down the alleyway was quite distracting and rather spoilt the mood. I watched the fellow trip and fall on a cobblestone before picking himself back up and running off into the night screaming unintelligibly.

Having been frightened by the raving lunatic the waitress no longer had any desire to join giblets, and so I removed my pego from her fundament and pulled my trousers up. She returned to the Hellfire Club, while I walked over to the place where Mister B____ had fallen. There next to a vegetable crate and an overturned dustbin I saw the parcel Mister B____ had been carrying. I picked it up and returned to the Hellfire Club where the other patrons regaled me with the tale recorded above.

I told my companions what I had witnessed in the alleyway and showed them the package that Mister B____ had dropped in his night flight. The parcel which was the size of a loaf of bread or common house cat and had been wrapped a bit of burlap and secured with length of jute cord seemed to pulsate as if whatever contained within were alive.

A number of individuals called for the parcel to be opened so that we could see what was contained within. And so that is what was done, though I now wish I had left that accursed parcel in the alleyway. I cut the jute cord with a spring knife and pulled the burlap covering off revealing what seemed to be block of glass, though I was quite certain it was not glass for it had not shattered or cracked when Mister B____ had fallen.

The glass was clear, though it had a somewhat dusty quality to it and so it was not entirely transparent, but as I gazed into it, I could make out movement. There was something within the block, and it was moving as if it were alive; crawling about in its glass prison.

The din of the Hellfire Club ceased and the room fell silent at the sight of this most unnatural thing and so for the first time we heard it. Whatever was contained within the block was giving off a queer humming sound. It was not a hum like an insect might give off, but the sort of hum that I used to hear in my beloved shirtwaist factory. It filled me with dread.

Others wished to examine the thing crawling about like a worm in the glass and each, to a person, said the same thing after looking at it, "This thing is most unnatural. It should not exist."

It was decided that the cube should be disposed of so Major Bludd and I took a hansom cab down to Water Street and hurled the thing into the murky waters of the Hudson and considered the matter to be settled. I parted company with him and returned to my manor house to retire for the night.

It was not long before I heard it again, faintly at first, but growing ever louder. A hum, not like the hum of an insect, but rather the hum of some great engine coming to life. The source of this incessant humming seems now to be outside the door to my study. It is nearly deafening. I hear it speak now, but I know not what it means.

-N

April 28, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Have you ever journeyed in the Orient and heard the gongs and discordant flutes of long forgotten temples? Have you seen the shamans dance their dance of blades? Quaffed deeply from the Goddess' quim?

In my youth I traveled in the Orient and saw magicians and gurus perform feats that amazed and astonished the crowds that had gathered to see them performed. At the time I considered myself to be a rational man; a man of reason and would attempt to discover how these seemingly impossible feats had been carried out. More often than not these feats amounted to little more than simple parlor tricks and showmanship, but every so often I would see something of which my mind could make no sense of, something so illogically that there was no way it could possibly be real and yet, no explanation for it could be determined.

Those incidents would weigh heavily upon me and I would often lie awake at night cursing my own dunderheadedness and attempting in vain to determine what trick the wizard had employed to convince the simpleminded folk that they had seen something miraculous. A thought, however, now occurs to me. What if there never had been a trick to be uncovered? What if I had borne witness to something truly remarkable, something for which there was no logical explanation?

I must confess that last evening I was quite certain I would perish, somehow utterly annihilated by the awful humming that filled my house, and yet the sun rose again and the humming ceased and I somehow found slumber. How long I slept, or if I truly slept at all I cannot say, though when I awoke I found myself at my writing table and thought for a brief moment that all that I had thought to have transpired had been but a rarebit dream, but I found there on my desk a hastily written letter giving an account of what had transpired that evening.

Perhaps then I had merely over imbibed in liquor the night before and merely imagined the awful cube Mister B____ had dropped and the accursed humming that assailed me until dawn's first light. It would not be the first time such a drunken flight of fancy had filled my mind with dread and resulted in me drafting a rather regrettable letter.

"Yes, that is most certainly what had happened," I thought to myself, but when I opened the door to my chamber all hope of logically explaining away the horrors of the previous night faded.

A foul miasma permeated my hallway; a stench not unlike rotting plant matter, and an oily, black

residue pooled outside the door to my study. Some viscous substance was smeared across the door and seemed to be dissolving the wood. It had not been a rarebit dream or an alcoholic flight of fancy. Some unnatural thing had been there at the door to my study last evening attempting to enter.

The terror that had gripped me the night before suddenly returned as I stood before that foul puddle. A half dozen questions quickly entered my mind. What precisely was it? How had it come to be in my manor house? Why had it stopped humming so suddenly? I fear that the only person who may be able to answer these queries is Mister B____. I wired him this morn at both his residence and his counting house, but as of yet have received no reply to speak of. This causes my anxiousness to grow for as I am certain you all know, Mister B____ is quite prompt in responding to correspondences. I therefore beg your indulgence my dear friends; if you happen to see him, please let him know I wish to speak with him in person.

Most Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking III

May 1, 190_

My Dear Friends,

I am quite sorry to say that Mister B____ was of no help at all. On Friday morn I paid a call to his manor house and found it completely empty. Neither Mister B____ nor his ladywife were present, and so I took the gripcar across town to his counting house. There I found his business partner, the esteemed Mister L____, though he looked exhausted and rather disheveled.

When I inquired whether or not he had seen Mister B____ recently the fellow sighed quite loudly and seemed to slump slightly. Mister B____, he said, had come to the office on Friday morning, unwashed and smelling of rotten meat. Mister L____ thought, at first, his partner had perhaps fallen asleep in a heap of trash after a night of heroic inebriation, but Mister L____ quickly discovered that his partner was suffering from a far greater affliction than a lack of hygiene.

"I regret to inform you that the fellow has been reduced to a gibbering wreck and was committed to an asylum yesterday morn," Mister L____ spake, "Mister B____ was carrying on, screaming about worms. I tried to calm him at first for he was disturbing our clients, but nothing seemed to work so I wired the asylum and they took him away shortly before lunch."

I thanked Mister L____ for his time and then hired a hansom cab to take me out to the asylum so that I could speak with Mister B____ and ask after the strange cube he had been carrying and the thing contained there within. I managed to convince an orderly that I had some business dealings with Mister B____ and needed to speak with him. After I opened my billfold they agreed to let me speak with him and led me to a small room. A moment later a second orderly entered with Mister B____.

His eyes had the distant look of an opium fiend and he was trussed up in a peculiar coat, not unlike the sort Madam Valencia would confine a gentleman visiting her muscle dungeon in before Socratizing their fundament with her belted Cantonese groin. He looked twenty years older than he had the last time I had seen him.

I greeted him, though he did not seem to recognize me, and then posed my questions. As soon as I inquired about the strange cube he had been carrying Mister B____ became quite agitated, shouting something in a tongue I did not understand and attempting to do grievous bodily harm to me, though his jacket prevented him from doing anything other than nipping at me like a leashed dog.

The orderlies subdued him by clubbing him about the head until he slumped on the floor in a heap and then asked me to leave. They did not need a troublemaker such as myself making their lives any more difficult.

I left the asylum and decided next to pay a visit to Major Bludd and see if anything similar had happened to him after he and I tossed that vile thing into the Hudson River in the early hours of the morning several days prior. I arrived at his suites to find the door ajar and so I let myself in.

The entire place was in complete and utter disarray. Drawers had been pulled out and their contents spilled about seemingly at random and furniture had been upended. Had someone ransacked the Major's apartments or was he merely a slovenlier fellow than any of us at the Hellfire Club had known?

I was most fortunate to encounter the good Major's manservant as I was leaving the apartment and asked the fellow if he knew what had happened.

"I cannot rightly say sir," the fellow said, "The Major returned home late last night and upended his chambers and then departed with a steamer trunk saying he would not be returning."

I asked the fellow if he had any idea where the Major would go, but the manservant merely shook his head in the negative. The Major would provide no additional help and so, my dear friends, I am at a loss as to what exactly happened. I should count myself lucky though that my dear Lydia and our darling daughter, Nemesis Archibald Viking, were visiting my sister-in-law and her ladywife in Boston when this horror transpired, for such a dreadful event would unnerve even the most stout-hearted gentlewoman to say nothing of a small child.

I suppose I will have to have the ruined door replaced before they return.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking III

May 2, 190_

My Dear Friends,

There is, quite undeniably, something living within the door to my study. It is a black and wormlike thing. It...or perhaps I should say they, for there appear to be a veritable colony of the foul things...crawling about, writhing atop one another within the door. I do not know how I did not notice them until earlier to-day when a well-knuckled day laborer removed the ruined door from its frame.

For his part, the day laborer did not seem all that perturbed by the unnatural things crawling about beneath the surface of the door, claiming them to undoubtedly be some manner of termite larva. He did, however, make note of the, and I quote, "rather unpleasant odor," that permeated my hall way. Yes, my dear friends, though I had opened every window in my manor house, and had the maids scrub the foul black residue from the floor the terrible odor still persisted some four days later.

Moreover, as the day laborer began to set about his work, the door, which had up to that point been quite silent, began to emit that same terrible hum that had so haunted me that fateful night. It was faint, to be certain, but quite undeniably the same. I thought perhaps it might have merely been a trick of the mind and so I asked the day laborer if he, too, heard the noise. The fellow nodded and replied that often termites and other such insects hum in that a fashion to communicate with one another. I was not entirely certain that even he himself believed the words he spake.

The day laborer worked rather quickly, for I believe the humming and the foul aroma that hung in the hallway like a London fog unnerved him somewhat. When his task was completed I paid the fellow the agreed upon amount for the door and his labor and gave him a rather generous gratuity for I felt rather badly for the stench he had to suffer while completing his task.

The fellow inquired if I wished for him to dispose of the old door, but I found myself compelled to tell him that I would deal with the door myself. To be most forthright I did not wish the fellow to take the door and the things residing there within away and cause some poor fellow at the trash heap to experience the same terrors that I myself had endured several days earlier.

The day laborer merely shrugged and bid me adieu before departing from my manor house. Once the day laborer's wagon had disappeared from sight, I dragged the infected door from my manor house out to an old work shed on my property and placed a heavy lock upon the door to

the shed. No sooner had I turned the key within the lock than the hum began to grow louder and more persistent.

Returning to my manor house I wondered who among my friends and acquaintances might possibly possess a modicum of knowledge as to what these unnatural things could possibly be. I, myself, know a number of captains of industry, a multitude of well bosomed doxies, men of science and opium fiends, but am familiar with very few occultists, and so, dear friends, I ask of you a favor. If you know anyone intimately acquainted with black magicks and ancient horrors who may be able to assist me with this most irksome situation, please let me know how to go about contacting them for I would very much like to bring this entire sordid affair to a conclusion.

Most Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking III

May 4, 190_

My Dear Friends,

To-day a witch paid a call to my manor house at my behest. She was not the sort of witch that one might find at the campus of a more broadminded Northeastern women's college: overly concerned with jade eggs and tarot cards, but rather a crone, quite advanced in years, who undoubtedly offered her quim to Old Scratch quite willingly and made her home in the dark, forgotten wild places that still exist in the hills and forests of these United States. How I came to know of this woman I do not wish to say beyond telling you that I paid a rather steep price indeed to make this woman's acquaintance.

Some hours before daybreak there came a rapping upon my front door. I had been expecting the witch and so this did not give me as much of a start as one might expect. That being said, upon opening the door and standing face to face with the witch I found myself racked by fear so fearsome was the sight of her.

The crone was stooped with long, oily, grey hair that hung limply to her knees with leaves, twigs, and feathers entwined within, seemingly at random. She wore not a stitch of clothing beyond a length of hemp cord around her neck from which hung a number of teeth; human and animal alike. Her unkempt hair did conceal some of her wrinkled flesh though it did little to conceal her large, pendulous bosoms hanging nearly to her waist or the tangled pelt of her tuzzy muzzy. To be quite forthright I have danced the blanket hornpipe with a number of gentlewomen well advanced in years, but the sight of the witch's naked form in my doorway filled me with naught but disgust. Had I not a cast-iron stomach I may very well have sicked up there upon my front steps.

She entered my domicile and after she and I settled the agreed upon price, I led her across my property to the shed in which I had placed the door under lock and key. As we crossed the yard, we both heard the accursed humming. Though it had been somewhat faint the day before, it was now nearly as cacophonous as it had been the night when Major Bludd and I had thrown that vile cube into the Hudson River. In the light of my lantern I could see a queer smile form upon the thin lips of the witch and quickly began to regret my decision to seek this foul woman out.

We reached the storage shed and I took, from my pocket, the key and unlocked the door. The humming was nearly deafening, like the roar of some great industrial engine, but the witch seemed rather unconcerned by the awful din. I shined the lantern into the darkened room and

there, where the door had been but a few scant hours earlier was something else.

A black mass of undulating formlessness swayed and pulsed in the corner where I had placed the door. It seemed to recoil further into the darkness away from the light as I stared at the unknowable horror that had once been a simple mahogany door.

The witch tossed aside her matted locks, revealing her nakedness and strode into the shed. I wanted to scream but found myself frozen. I watched the witch walk closer to the pulsating thing in the corner and heard her chanting something in a tongue no mortal should ever speak. The thing seemed to respond to the foul syllables the witch uttered and it was not long before a long, snakelike tendril branched off from the thing and swayed towards the witch.

I watched, paralyzed with fear as the tendril slide into the crone's crinkum crankum. Again, she smiled quite queerly as the thing entered her. Had this been her intention all along or had something gone terribly wrong? A second tendril snaked its way into the woman's fundament and once more she smiled most unnaturally. The crone continued her chanting as the thing began to join giblets with her in earnest.

My heart pounded in my chest like a workman's sledge as this horrible scene unfurled itself before me. I had no desire to see any more of it and so, I fought the paralyzing fear that held me fast in place. I ran back across the yard as fast as my legs would take me and once inside, quickly barred the door shut behind me. From my manor house I could still hear the humming as well as the witch's chanting. I could hear them blend together until the sound coming from my shed was a strange sort of buzzing speech, as if a hive of bees had been taught how to recite the works of Shakespeare and Coleridge without understanding what they were saying.

I placed my head in my hands and wept quite openly for in my effort to put an end to the foul, unnatural thing residing within my shed I had made things all the worse. I must have fallen asleep while weeping there in the kitchen for when I opened my eyes, daylight streamed in through the windows and the awful buzzing had ceased.

I took up my sabre and crossed the yard to the shed to see what had happened. To be quite honest, I expected an awful scene, but when I got there I saw the door to the shed was still open. Slowly I peered into the darkened room, but saw nothing. Besides some tools and a workman's barrow, the shed was completely empty. There was no sign of the vile thing that had emerged from my door or the old crone ever having been there.

A thin layer of dust lay undisturbed on the floor aside from where I had dragged the door some

days earlier. I had seen the witch walk barefoot into the shed, and seen the thing recoil into the darkness. There should have been more footprints and markings in the dust, but it was as if they had never been there.

I pray to the Allfather that this strange series of events has come to something of a conclusion and never again shall I hear that most terrible humming again.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking III

May 8, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Today while riding upon the gripcar I had a most peculiar encounter that left me somewhat shaken to say the least. It was mid-morning, some hours after the morning exodus of workers from their homes to their places of employment and so the car was more or less devoid of riders. If I am not mistaken aside from myself there were two other passengers: a young mother and a babe of indeterminate gender.

At one stop, Grand Central Station if memory serves correctly, another passenger boarded the gripcar and proceeded to sit beside me though the car was more or less completely empty. To make matters all the worse, the uncouth fellow was a ragman clad a motley assortment of decomposing garments with a hood pulled up over his head so that his face was obscured.

Like many of his sort the fellow was most malodorous, reeking somewhat of decomposing plant matter. Under other circumstances I might not have even noticed the scent but the recent queerness has caused me to become somewhat more aware of odors than I might otherwise have been. I could not help but notice that the odor the ragman possessed was an unpleasant aroma not unlike that given off by those vile black things that had taken up residence in the door to my study.

I confess that a feeling of utter dread overcame me as the fellow slouched into the seat beside mine and, with a most peculiarly unpleasant voice asked, "Have you ever seen the face of God?"

I have encountered Puritanical prophets upon the gripcar before but there was something different about this fellow's demeanor that caused me to become anxious rather than merely annoyed by his query. I elected to ignore the fellow, but my own lack of a response did little to deter the fellow from continuing to speak to me.

"The Lord of Worms is everlasting," the ragman said, his voice a strange, almost mechanical hum. The infant began to weep at the sound of the ragman's raspy voice and the child's mother turned to cast a disparaging gaze upon the ragman for upsetting her child, but quickly quailed at the sight of him.

He seemed even more terrible and malformed than he had been when he first boarded the gripcar and shambled towards me. I pulled the cord to sound the bell and inform the driver that I wished to disembark at the next station. I stood walked toward the exit, stopping only to tell the

gentlewoman, "My good woman, it would be advisable to disembark and take the next gripcar. I fear that fellow is something of a madman."

She nodded and collected her things. There was terror in her eyes. Behind us the ragman was ranting in tongues. His vile voice producing queer, guttural noises that I suppose were some manner of speech. I felt some pity for the poor gripcar driver, who had no choice, but to continue on with the ragman ranting and raving in tongues.

The gentlewoman and I quickly disembarked from the gripcar at the next station and parted company, but I must confess the entire ordeal has left me somewhat unnerved. Had I not seen those crawling black things residing within my door, I would have merely assumed the ragman to be a mostly harmless crackpot and yet now I cannot be so certain. Perhaps he and the door were somehow related...

No, I mustn't allow myself to think in such a way! Such ideas are complete and utter poppycock. He was but an unwashed malcontent with a mind addled by drink or narcotic and nothing more. I shall not allow myself to give in to such ludicrous flights of fancy. I am certain things will return to normal once my dear Lydia returns from Boston with our daughter later this week. I, for one, could do with a return to normalcy after this most peculiar week.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking III

May 10, 190_

To Whom It May Concern,

This morn I was roused from my slumber by my manservant. He informed me that a most uncouth vandal had defaced the front door to my manor house, carving a most peculiar symbol into the wood. I donned by house shoes and smoking jacket and followed my manservant to the foyer in order to inspect the damage that had been done.

There on the door was a crudely carved mark, just as my manservant had said. The symbol was not unlike the glyphs commonly used in the Orient, though I, myself could not determine its meaning. Had my darling Lydia been at home, she would have perhaps been able to ascertain its meaning, but at present she is still with her sister and her sister's ladywife in Boston.

I was rather poleaxed by the symbol for I, myself, had returned hope quite late last evening, well after midnight to be certain, and at that time the door was completely free of any sort of marking meaning the vandal must have carried out his nefarious deed in the dead of night or early morning hours.

"Perhaps, sir, Mister Wayne might have witnessed the villain responsible for this foul deed," my manservant offered as we stood there, we two, in the foyer gazing upon yet another ruined door in my manor house.

As those of you in our community are undoubtedly aware, Mister Wayne is a somewhat eccentric fellow who keeps rather peculiar hours. Some have taken to referring to him as Mister Flittermouse for he apparently never sleeps at night. My manservant was correct; if anyone in my neighborhood would have seen the fiend responsible for the wanton destruction of my property it would have been Mister Wayne.

Still in my smoking jacket and house shoes, I marched across my property to Mister Wayne's manor, which is adjacent to my own, and rapped upon the door. His manservant answered and insisted that Mister Wayne had had a rather late evening and would not be able to come to the door. I was rather insistent that it was a most pressing matter and after a fair amount of haranguing on my part, the servant let me in to the sitting room and went to fetch Mister Wayne.

A moment later Mister Wayne, dressed rather similarly to myself, descended down the large staircase and greeted me. He was rather jovial for a fellow who had just been roused from his slumber unexpectedly. I apologized for the intrusion and explained what had transpired sometime

between midnight and six o'clock in the morning and asked if perhaps he had seen or heard anything.

Mister Wayne apologetically replied that he had not seen anything at that time, for the moon was in its first phase and thus provided no light to speak of. He did confess that he heard a somewhat queer noise emanating from my house, but assumed that perhaps my friend, Mister Tesla was paying me a visit.

"Why would you think such a thing as that, my good man?" I asked of him.

He replied, "Why because the humming sound I heard was quite similar to the noises produced by one of Mister Tesla's machines, my dear Nudeador, and I know that you and he are quite dear friends."

Ladies and gentlemen, I do declare, with no shame whatsoever, that when Mister Wayne spoke those words, my heart sank into utter despair. I had thought that things had more or less returned to normal since my brief encounter with a madman on the gripcar the other day, but it seems now that I was most certainly mistaken. Nevertheless, I thanked Mister Wayne for his assistance and once again apologized for calling upon him so early in the morn.

I returned to my own manor house and told my manservant to hire a day laborer who would be able to replace the door that afternoon and then retired to my study to meditate upon this turn of events.

I wonder, now, if Mister B____'s ladywife might be able to offer some insight into what precisely was happening. To ask anything of her would first require locating her, for she had not been at their manor house when I paid a call last week. I must also wonder if a woman I scarcely know beyond the dozen or so times she and I joined giblets during grand orgies at the Hellfire Club would readily divulge whatever it was her husband was involved with that caused him to go mad to a gentleman who was more or less a complete stranger.

There are few options left to me. I must seek out Missus B____ and pray to the Allfather that she has some idea of what it is that her husband carried with him that now haunts me so.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 11, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Late last evening my darling Lydia returned home with our daughter. I am quite glad for this for their presence has had a calming effect on the mood of the house. The foul miasma of despair that had permeated the house these past weeks has dissipated as though whatever vile aspect of those unnatural things that had remained after removing the door to my study was utterly destroyed by the laughter of a child.

I had hoped that my dear Lydia would not notice that a pair of doors had been replaced, but she is rather astute to minutia of that sort and this evening after our darling, Nemesis Archibald Viking, had been placed in her caged bed, Lydia asked after the doors.

"My dear Nudie," she began, "What could have transpired in my absence that would cause a pair of doors to be replaced?"

For a moment I debated whether or not to tell my wife the truth of what had transpired. In the years in which we have been married we have always spoken true to one another, and so I decided to tell her what had happened while she had been visiting her sister and her sister's ladywife.

I told her of the incident with Mister B_____ at the Hellfire Club and what Major Bludd and I had done with the cube. I explained the terrible din and the black worms and the witch of the wilds. I told her of the terrible price I paid that witch and the abomination that had appeared in our toolshed. I spoke of the ragman and the vandal that had defaced our front door.

She listened intently as I told my tale, and when it was all over she laughed quite heartily and made a jape that my imagination had run wild due to my humours being unbalanced due to the irregularity with which I expelled them during her absence. She offered to gamahuche me posthaste, right there in the parlor.

To be somewhat forthright, I was rather disappointed to be dismissed in such a fashion, but not so disappointed that I rejected her offer to bring about the expulsion of my humours with her mouth. We danced the blanket hornpipe, but my dear Lydia was rather weary from her travels and so once she had expelled her own humours retired to our bedchamber to sleep, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Perhaps, she was right and I had imagined the entire sordid affair. I had, to be quite honest, been

rather heroically intoxicated when the events transpired at the Hellfire Club. Perhaps I had spilled some foul smelling substance in my hallway after returning home that evening and that was what I discovered in the morning, but I was not addled with drink when I saw the worms crawling about in the door. The day laborer had said they were termites though and not been perturbed by them in the least. As for what I saw happen to the witch? I suppose she could very easily have drugged me and stolen a slightly termite eaten door from my shed. The ragman and the vandal were real enough, though my overactive imagination caused me to give them more credence than they deserved.

For a moment I laughed. What a dunderhead oaf I had been these past few days! But then a niggling thought entered my mind. What of Mister B____? He was actually being held in an asylum. I had visited him here and seen him in chains and he had become quite agitated when I asked of the cube he had been carrying. Further, his wife was nowhere to be found. I had visited their manor house and found it quite deserted. The same was true of Major Bludd! He had seemingly vanished from the face of the Earth after he and I threw that accursed cube into the inky blackness of the river.

There is something more to this than an overactive imagination. Of this much I am quite certain. I must find Missus B____ and Major Bludd, for I am certain they could provide answers that will reveal the truth of this entire sordid affair!

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 12, 190_

Her hair was a most peculiar hue, not at all unlike the color of a miner's denim coveralls. How it came to be that color I cannot even begin to fathom. It certainly was a more commonplace chestnut hue when last I saw her. She looked at me nervously from across the table. Heavy bags were beneath her bloodshot eyes.

Finding her had taken a fair amount of legwork, but finally Missus B____ sat across from me at a table in the back of the W____ Public House. A glass and a bottle of Scotch whiskey sat on the table before her. She poured herself a generous serving and quickly down the glass in a single gulp, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand like a Slavic day laborer.

"Why have you called me her Mister Viking?" she asked quite bluntly.

"Madame, some weeks ago I had a chance encounter with your husband," I replied, "He seemed...agitated to put it rather lightly. He dropped a most peculiar parcel before fleeing into the night like a sneak thief. When next I saw your husband he was quite mad and under lock and key at a rest home. The parcel..."

"I shall not speak of that accursed thing!" she interjected most vehemently, "Thank you for the drink Mister Viking. I am sorry we could not have met under more pleasant circumstances than this."

She stood and took up her parasol and began to cross the public house towards the door. I knew in my heart that once she stepped through those doors I would never again see Missus B____, and so I shouted, "Wait! The cube your husband carried with him that night...you have seen it! What is it? Tell me woman! I must know!"

Several patrons glanced up from their glasses but Missus B____ did not turn. With her back turned to me she replied, "Mister Viking, you are a man who seeks naught but base desires and pleasures of the flesh. You of all people would do well to put that thing from your mind and go about your life."

Her voice was cold and distant. She bid me farewell and stepped through the doors. I poured myself a brimming glass of Scotch whiskey and downed it quite unceremoniously. I paid the barkeep and stepped out of the public house.

The weather was quite pleasant and it was still early enough in the evening that the streets were still a bustle of activity: hawkers and cabmen and young lovers walking arm in arm. I looked about

for sight of Missus B____ but she had vanished from sight already. This had been a complete and utter waste of time. I waved down a handsome cab and boarded giving the fellow the address of my manor house.

As the driver pulled the reigns of the horse and the cab rolled forward I decided to try and do what Missus B____ had suggested and put the thing from my mind. I would return home and join giblets with my ladywife...perhaps even invite the scullery maid to join us. For a woman of common birth, the scullery maid was quite a charming creature indeed.

Yes, my dear friends, I vow never again think of that accursed cube. It has consumed far too much of my time already.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 15, 190_

A short while ago I awoke to a terrible pounding upon the door to my manor house. Lydia and the scullery maid were huddled together beside one another in the bed in fear. I could hear Nemesis wailing in the nursery and her nanny attempting in vain to soothe her. I stood and threw on my smoking jacket and took up my sabre and proceeded down the stairs. My manservant was there at the base of the stairs, clutching an old hunting rifle in his trembling hands.

"Steel yourself man!" I said to my man as I crossed the foyer to the door. I had had quite enough of all of this.

The pounding on the door was relentless and someone on the other side I could hear a hoarse voice crying out. It sounded almost animal.

With sabre drawn I opened my door and there standing upon my doorstep I saw Major Sebastian Bludd. To say that he looked utterly terrible would be kind.

His hair was limp and unwashed and instead of an impeccably waxed mustachio he sported rather scruffy looking chin whiskers that were as unkempt and grimy as his locks. He appeared to be wearing the same garments he had been clad in when last I had seen him some two weeks earlier, or at least I assumed them to be the same vestments. To be most forthright they were utterly ruined; caked with filth and festooned with stains. I could see unbridled terror in his darting eyes.

"Odin above! You gave my entire household an awful fright Sebastian," I said, chastising the fellow slightly, "What was so urgent that it could not wait until the morning?"

"Thank the Allfather they haven't found you yet," Sebastian said as he placed his right hand upon my shoulder and slumped. It was then I noticed his left hand and forearm were wrapped in what appeared to be a shred of his jacket and was dripping a dark substance steadily onto my front steps.

"Is that blood? Sebastian you're wounded!" I exclaimed as the terrible realization of what the dark substance pooling upon my doorsteps actually was.

Major Bludd nodded slowly, "Please, dear friend, allow me in and I shall tell you the dreadful tale of how I came to be in such a horrid state as this."

I bade him to enter and sent my manservant off to fetch a doctor to see to Major Bludd's wounds which in the light of my sitting room were far more grievous than I had previously thought them.

"I suppose I should start at the beginning," he said weakly.

"It can wait Sebastian," I replied, "Your strength is waning. Save your tale until after the doctor has tended to your hurts."

He shook his head and said, "Nay friend. I fear I may not survive the night. I must tell my tale."

"Very well," I said. I was somewhat certain he was being overly dramatic, but I was not about to argue with the fellow.

"After you and I disposed of that vile cube in the Hudson I returned to apartments, but when I arrived there I found the door ajar. Thinking it a burglar I readied my automatic knife and entered. As soon as I entered I was set upon by a half dozen men or so with cudgels. I am quite certain I wounded a pair of them mortally in the ensuing fray but I was soon overwhelmed and lost consciousness."

"Who were they?" I interjected.

"I am not certain. It was dark in the apartment when I entered and they were clad in dark cowls. When they spoke it was a queer, guttural language that I did not recognize," the Major continued, "Where was I? Ah yes, I was knocked unconscious. I awoke to find myself chained by the wrist in a makeshift dungeon."

"A dungeon? Were the assailants constables then?" I inquired.

"No, not at all. The dungeon was what appeared to be a roughhewn cellar. There were kegs and barrels strewn about and complete lack of iron bars. On occasion the cowled men would return harass me or to leave me with a heel of black bread and some foul tasting water, but I was otherwise utterly alone in the dungeon."

"What did they do to you Sebastian?" I asked.

"If fortune smiled upon me they would merely beat me with a rod as they asked me questions. More often though, their torments were far, far worse than a simple beating. I shall not speak further of the horrors I endured in that dungeon," Sebastian said, his eyes wide with terror. I dared not wonder what sort of horrors had been inflicted upon him for in all my years of knowing him Major Sebastian Bludd has shown himself to be a stout hearted fellow through and through.

"What sort of questions did they ask you?" I inquired.

"They wanted to know what became of that vile cube...they wanted to know about you!" Major Bludd said. He began to weep openly, "Oh Nudeador, I am sorry! I just wanted them to leave me be!"

For some reason my eyes went to the makeshift bandage on his wounded hand and I asked, "Sebastian, how did you come to escape from your imprisonment?"

"Some hours ago one of my gaolers came to me and I instinctively knew that this was to be my end. I have seen enough death upon the field of battle to know when it comes for a man, and with each footstep that echoed through that cellar my own end came ever closer. Some men, when they face death do so as if they are meeting an old friend, others cry like infants. I, weak though as I was, decided to do neither. I intended to fight," the Major said, "A fellow clad in strange black vestments with a hood concealing his face came upon me with a cruel looking dagger drawn. I struck him with as much force as I could muster squarely in the face and then, after he fell to the floor, I used the chain they had bound my wrist with to choke the life from the robed fellow. I searched his body to see if he perhaps carried with him a key that would unlock my shackles, but I would not be that fortunate. All that the fellow carried with him was the dagger he had intended to kill me with, and so my decision was made for me."

Again my eyes went to the bandage, dripping blood steadily upon the floor of my sitting room and asked, "Oh Sebastian, what did you do?"

"It was not hard. I have seen it done countless times upon the battlefield a ruined limb cut from a body to prevent disease from spreading. The knife was sharp so I did not worry much. The pain was unimaginable to be sure, but I was able to cleave my hand off at the wrist and slip free of the shackle. I wrapped it to try to slow the bleeding but as you can see my efforts were rather in vain. I removed the fellow's robes and clad myself in them and made my way out of the cellar. I found I was in a great hall, not unlike the hall owned by our Hellfire Club, though I am uncertain as to what organization owned this particular hall for their crest was not one I had ever seen before: a queer glyph that seemed not unlike the sort you would see upon shop windows on Mott Street. There were other robe clad fellows milling about, so I tried to exit the building as quickly and inconspicuously as possible. It was early evening when I emerged from the place that had served as my prison for Odin knows how many days. From the outside it was a rather nondescript building and few passing it would know of the unspeakable horrors that had transpired within."

"Where is this building?" I asked, "How were you able to make your way here to my house at this hour?"

"I found myself a short distance from our own Hellfire Club," replied Major Bludd, "In that regard I was most fortunate, for I quickly recognized precisely where I was. To be most forthright I have probably walked past the building in which I was held several dozen times in the past year. I turned down an alleyway and removed the robes, for they had a most unpleasant odor; not unlike a composting heap. I disposed of them in a rubbish bin and made my way to the Hellfire Club, for I needed to warn you of my blunder, but found you were not there. Others at the Club wished to call a doctor for me, but I was most insistent that I needed to find you, and so I borrowed from your lawyer, the venerable William S. Preston Esquire, a sum of money to hire a carriage to bring me here."

A look of calm came over Major Bludd and he said, "Nudeador, these people are fiends, you must hide yourself and your family away unless you have some perverse desire to end up in a sorry state such as this."

"Rest, friend," I said, "The doctor will be here soon and after you have recovered we shall report this incident to the constabulary and they can investigate the building of which you spoke."

Major Bludd shook his head, "No, my friend, something was done to me before I made my escape. I am quite certain I shall not live through the night. Their hall is on W____ Street. Do not go there alone, Nudeador, for I am certain that they would murder you on sight."

My mind swam. Had I not experienced similar events over the past few weeks it would have been quite easy for me to dismiss Major Bludd's claims as the rantings of a fellow who had just emerged from a week long holiday in an opium den, but the things he had described were quite similar to things that I had seen with my own two eyes, though why these mysterious villains would want me dead I knew not. I assumed perhaps because of my part in the disposal of that foul cube and thus asked Major Bludd, "The cube. Have they retrieved it from where it lies?"

"I cannot say, but as of late they have seemed less concerned with the cube and more interested in you. I am sorry my friend. I am truly sorry..." Major Sebastian Bludd then closed his eyes and said no more for he was dead.

-NV III

May 16, 190_

My Dear Friends,

I do not recommend having a gravely wounded individual expire within your sitting room in the early hours of the morn. It is a surefire way to attract the wrong sort of attention from the constabulary of our fair city. To be somewhat forward, had Major Bludd not first stopped at the Hellfire Club where he was witnessed by a number of trustworthy individuals all of whom told the constabulary that he appeared to be grievously injured when he departed, I am certain that I, myself, would be awaiting trial for murder.

That being said, I did spend the majority of the day to-day, "a guest" of the constabulary of our fair city, repeatedly telling detectives the tale that Major Bludd had regaled me with prior to his death, before they ultimately allowed me to part company with them. I am not certain they believed my story. To be quite honest I am not entirely positive that I believed it either.

The constables apparently searched the hall on W_____ that Major Bludd and confessed to be the place in which he had been held captive but apparently found naught there that incriminated anyone there with any sort of criminal activity. The constables now attempt to paint a picture that our dear friend, Major Bludd, was a troubled fellow who ran afoul of some nefarious individuals due to an addiction to opium or gambling debts and paid for some misdeed with his life in an effort to close this case.

I cannot allow the fiends responsible for the death of my dear friend, Major Sebastian Bludd to walk free, so I intend to continue the investigation on my own if need be. I am acquainted with a clerk in City Hall and to-day I inquired as to the owner of the hall in which my friend was deprived of his liberty. The clerk with whom I am acquainted told me the records merely named a group of some sort known as The Ancient Order of the Black Worm.

I am quite well aware of most societies that exist within our fair city, including the so-called secretive ones, and yet I have never heard of this particular group. Perhaps someone at the Hellfire Club might know of them. I shall question several of my colleagues on the morrow, but for now I must sleep. I have not slept soundly in quite some time and find myself tiring quite easily these days.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 17, 190_

My Dear Friends,

I have just returned from the Hellfire Club. I am quite sorry to inform you that, if I may be somewhat forward, the mood there has been quite black since the death of Major Bludd. A grand orgy was scheduled in his honor to-night, but few among us possessed any desire to join giblets. A most dire scenario indeed!

I, being of the mind that our dear friend Sebastian Bludd would not wish us to wallow like swine in our misery, engaged rather vigorously in clictet with a gentlewoman in her middle years. Though she was greying at the temples she was quite voluptuous and greatly skilled at the amorous congress. Had more people been engaging in blanket hornpipe I might have passed her by for someone a tad younger, so I suppose some good did come of the malaise that saturated the Hellfire Club after all. I have not expelled my humours as completely as I did this evening in quite some time; though I am certain few among you care to know the amount in quarts of mucilage that issued forth from my pego, so I shall spare you the details.

When the gentlewoman and I tired of the lackluster orgy, she and I parted company and I retired to the smoking room where I spoke with several of my fellows of what the good Major had told me, specifically his dealings with the Ancient Order of the Black Worm. Most of the gentlemen there claimed to have never heard of the group and several wondered aloud if perhaps it was a new organization formed by men of modest means to ape social clubs such as my beloved Hellfire Club, but one fellow eyed me most peculiarly when I spoke of it.

The gentleman was, by trade, a professor of archeology and anthropology, if I am not mistaken, and as the room began to fill with the buzz of conversation he approached me. In all my years of attending events at the Hellfire Club, I do not think this fellow ever said more than four words to me (those four being, "Might I join in?" when he wished to invade the back settlements of a gentlewoman I was already joining giblets with during our Yuletide Orgy some years back), but on this particular night he had much to tell me.

"The group of which you speak is not, as others have claimed, a recent invention, but rather a group that can trace its ancestry back over a thousand years," the professor said to me quite suddenly as I sipped a most delectable brandy.

"So you know of them then?" I inquired.

"I have heard them spoken of in whispers and seen vague mention of them in ancient texts," the Professor said, "Frighteningly little has been written of them I'm afraid, though I do have, in my collection, several texts that you may find illuminating. Perhaps you would like to visit my estate on the morrow and peruse them?"

I wondered for a moment if this was some sort of jape and I would once again find myself dressed as Marie Antoinette while a well knuckled fellow had his way with my fundament, but the professor seemed far too serious for such a jape as that, and so I agreed to meet with him the next day. After receiving his address, I bid him farewell for it was already quite late for I had spent far more time with the veteran orgyist than I had originally planned.

I stepped out into the cool night air and in an instant felt ill at ease. There were few people on the street, primarily Paphians and their clients, but I felt as though someone was standing inches away from my personage, glaring upon me. On an evening as pleasant as this I would generally stroll back to my manor house, but in no small part because of the uneasiness I felt, I hailed a hansom cab.

Once inside cab the queer feeling faded. I gave the driver my address and may have drifted off to sleep, for the next thing I recall was the driver rapping on the cab and informing me we had arrived. I paid the fellow and stepped out of the cab.

It was quite peculiar for no sooner had I disembarked from the cab the feeling of being watched returned. I thought I heard faint a metallic buzz in the distance. To be forthright I cannot recall being as terrified as I was in that very moment. I ran from the street as fast as my legs would carry me up to the house.

The buzz seemed to grow louder as I fumbled with my keys. It was a roar. Deafening voices of the damned howling in agony as I slid the key into the lock and turned the knob. There was a click and I flung the door open. I rushed in, slamming the door behind me and locking it as quickly as I could. In an instant the noise vanished and the strange feeling of being observed faded to nothingness.

Perhaps it was just my imagination. I did, after all imbibe rather heartily at the Hellfire Club this evening.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 22, 190_

My Dear Friends,

My sleep has been troubled as of late for I am haunted by strange dreams in which I find myself in an immense catacomb far beneath the surface of the earth. The caverns in which I find myself are not formed of rock but rather an infinite number of those vile black things. Something calls to me from the murky darkness and I am drawn towards it. The worms hum and undulate as I traverse long, dark corridors ever closer to whatever calls to me.

I come at last to a grand chamber not unlike a cathedral though the walls and ceiling are again, those vile things. Long tentacles hang down from the ceiling and fail at me as I pass. Ahead of me I see a cloaked figure, flanked on either side by a gentlewoman. I recognize them both. On the figure's left is the witch who joined giblets with the creature that had at one point in time been the door to my study. On the figure's right is Missus B____, her denim hued hair hanging in oily clumps that concealed her face.

Neither woman was clothed and both were visibly with child though their bellies were far too large to be a single child or even a duo of children. Both looked as though they were about to burst like potted meat left too close to an open flame.

Missus B____ spotted me first and hissed in a serpentine manner causing the cloaked figure to turn its terrible gaze upon me. Something burned from within its hood as it spoke to me in a voice that would turn even the most stout-hearted gentleman's bowels to water, "Nudeador, my children yearn to be free once more and there is naught that neither you nor anyone else can do to stop them for inheriting what is theirs by right."

I have had this dream nightly for some three nights now and each time I awake after the cloaked figure speaks to me. I suppose I should perhaps stop dining upon rarebit so close to the hour that I retire to my bed chambers.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 23, 190_

A Ghastly Murder on Mott Street

Last evening the denizens of Mott Street were thrown into a state of great excitement by the rumor of a horrible and mysterious murder which had been committed outside the public house at 14 Mott Street. Immediately on the intelligence reaching the police station the officers proceeded to the spot and discovered the body of a gentleman in his middle years, with his throat cut in a frightful manner.

The circumstances of this appalling affair are at present involved in considerable mystery. The murdered fellow was unknown to any individuals in the area and had not been in the public house prior to his demise according to the proprietor. The officers do not believe the fellow was murdered by an overzealous cutpurse for the body was discovered with a pocket watch of good make and an untouched billfold in the pocket of his overcoat.

At present the identity of the victim is unknown. He is perhaps forty years of age, standing some five feet and nine inches in stockinged feet. He possesses a full head of dark hair and chin whiskers to match. The gentleman was discovered dressed in a dark suit of clothes that, save for some peculiar dark, oily stains upon his shirtwaist, were quite well kept and of good quality.

Officers request that any individual who may have information related to either the crime committed last evening upon Mott Street or the identity of the currently anonymous victim step forward and reveal what they know so that the maniac responsible for this gruesome crime be captured.

May 24, 190_

Fiend Strikes Again

Less than one day removed from the as of yet unsolved murder of an anonymous gentleman outside a public house on Mott Street, a second most cruel murder has been committed on the body of Mister Thomas Good, of Fifth Avenue, who was returning home about seven o'clock, when he was stabbed from behind by some villain a short distance from his house. The wound was not mortal, however, and so the horrible purpose was effected by cutting his throat. The sounds of the melee alarmed the inhabitants of a neighboring manor house, the servants of which went out to the spot from whence they supposed it to proceed; when they discovered the poor man weltering in his blood and speechless. He was immediately taken care of, but expired a short time afterwards.

A gentleman in a heavy cloak reportedly fled from the scene and a servant from the neighboring manor house gave chase, but the fiend has thus far eluded capture. Police believe the two murders to have been committed by the same fiend, for much like the victim discovered on Mott Street, after the attack Mister Good's garments were marred with a great deal of dark, oily smudges that had no business staining the vestments of a gentleman of Mister Good's status.

Once more the police request that anyone possessing information which may lead to the capture of this terrible fiend please step forward. They stress that they are quite certain this vile murderer will most certainly strike again.

May 25, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Again I find my sleep quite troubled indeed. I dream that I am in some great pillared temple while all around me the world burns. I hear the howls of those outside as their flesh is seared from their body. Before me is a great throne of gore, upon which is seated the cloaked figure. He laughs the laugh of a madman. It echoes and reverberates throughout the temple, drowning out the cries of the damned. At his feet are Missus B____ and the ancient crone, their middles still distended with child and their bosoms pendulous, oozing some rancid black fluid freely.

The two women engage in an act so lurid and repugnant that I shall not commit it to paper. They smile at me wickedly as they perform this unspeakably depraved act and invite me in unnerving voices to join them. My limbs are not my own and I find myself striding forward to join them.

Missus B____ spreads her legs allowing me to gaze into the endless depths of her tuzzy muzzy. Something stirs in the gloom. It creeps forward. This thing is an awful abomination. It creeps in the dark across the shattered bones of its victims. I am certain that my bones will soon be counted among them.

I try to avert my gaze from that abysmal abyss but I am drawn to it like a moth to a flame. The thing writhes within. I hear the witch chanting once more in that same accursed tongue of the damned and the cloaked figure continue to laugh.

I must not go in. I call upon the Allfather to give me strength to endure and the cloaked figure laughs mockingly, "There is no god but the Lord of Worms! Bask in his eternal glory!" There is a terrible roar as Missus B____'s quim is torn asunder and The Thing emerges from its depths. The Thing is hideous. It is large and malformed. I quail at the sight of it for it is terrible.

It is here that I awake, quite thoroughly drenched with sweat; the voice of the cloaked figure still ringing in my ears, "Soon, Nudeador. Soon."

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 29, 190_

My Dear Friends,

These past few days I have experienced something of a return to normalcy. My sleep has been more or less dreamless and when I am outside my manor house I no longer feel as though I am being watched. Yesterday, my family and I traveled to the countryside to make merry. We picnicked and took a boat out upon a rather splendid pond and by and large had a most jolly time of it. Over the weeks that have passed since this horrible series of events began I had forgotten how lovely a spring day can be, but yesterday I felt as though all was right with the world once again. After this morning, however, I am now of the mind that perhaps this lull was the same sort of stillness one is said to experience within the center of a tempest.

As I broke my fast this morn with my daughter, a most charming and intelligent girlchild, she said something quite peculiar. To be quite forthright, she is a rather impish little girl, somewhat elfin in nature, and so it is not all that uncommon for her to issue rather queer statements from time to time, but this morn her declaration left me somewhat taken aback.

"Father," she said in a most nonchalant manner between bites of her toast sandwich, "the small men are quite cross with you. They said you sent their father away."

"What small men?" I inquired quizzically, half expecting to hear a farfetched tale about pixies or gnomes. Her reply, however, left me poleaxed.

"Why, the small men who live in the wall near your study, Father! They hum and sing and are really quite funny little men, but they are rightly upset with you for sending their father away. I know I would be quite cross if someone sent you away."

My dear Lydia laughed and commented what a funny little girl our daughter was, but I felt my heart sink like a stone tossed from a pier. I excused myself and went to my study to examine the wall and sure enough when I placed my ear near to it, I could make out a faint, almost mechanical hum from somewhere inside.

I jumped with fright as a voice behind me said, "They say that their father is coming soon to fetch them soon." I turned and there before me stood my daughter, Nemesis Archibald Viking. She smiled in a rather peculiar fashion and then added, "Soon, Nudedor. Soon."

Oh how those terrible words were like an arrow through my heart. I had wondered how she had communicated with the queer humming things in the wall, but once she uttered those words it

became as clear as glass. I quickly hoisted up my daughter in my arms and went from that awful hallway down to the dining hall where my wife still sat. My sudden appearance must have given her a fright for she started and nearly spilled her tea.

"Nudeador, what is that matter my dear?" she asked, "Why do you carry our daughter so?"

"There is something in the wall I fear. I heard it creeping about behind the wallpaper," I replied, "I do not think it behooves her to stay in a house where unknown vermin creep about within the walls. Perhaps for her well-being it would be best to rent a hotel room for several days while I have the house inspected and the source of this infestation discovered and dealt with."

"Very well," Lydia replied and then instructed our maid to pack a bag for her and Nemesis.

I watched them depart from our manor house shortly before lunch, somewhat relieved that they would be far from whatever horror awaits. I have locked myself in my study, my dear friends. Outside my door, the walls hum with such intensity that the panes of glass within my window shake quite furiously. The humming is far louder and more frenzied than it was on that very first night, and I am, to be most forthright, rather afraid.

Should I perish to-night, my dear friends, know that I was rather fond of most of you. I have sent a parcel containing my research pertaining to the Ancient Order of the Black Worm to a newspaper of some esteem for though it is somewhat incomplete, I am of the mind that it is too important to be lost should I find myself in Valhalla this night.

Fondly Yours,

Nudeador Viking the Third

May 30, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Enclosed within this parcel you will find my notes on the illusive group known as the Ancient Order of the Black Worm. I send them to you in their somewhat incomplete state for I fear that I may soon meet my maker. At present the furious howling of the strange black things dwelling in my walls causes my manor house to shake to its very foundation.

If this unexplainable phenomenon does not end my life to-night than surely the fiends who brought about the untimely demise of our dear friend, Major Sebastian Bludd might very well do the same to me. I am certain that the recent spate of murders in our fair city is their doing as it appears to me that the victims have been individuals who bear more than a passing resemblance to me.

For some time now I have been followed by strange individuals when I travel upon the streets of our fair city. To be quite forthright, I have taken to carrying on my person at all times an automatic knife and disguising myself when I need to travel any great distance.

The likelihood that I shall meet an untimely end grows ever stronger with each passing day, and so I am of the mind that this information should be made known to the public, for even if I do perish, some other individual will have a place from where to continue to search out the truth of these vile fiends.

My troubling lack of sleep as of late has allowed me to read, in full, the tomes lent to me nearly a fortnight ago by Professor Q_____ of New York and from those documents piece together a fairly rudimentary account of the history of the illusive Ancient Order of the Black Worm.

While there is scarce little concrete information of this most secretive of orders Bartholomew P. Dunkirk's excellent *Cults of the Tang Dynasty* and Tomasso Gargano's controversial 1821 work, *A Treatise on the Origins of the Black Death*, have provided me with a foundation to begin my studies. I have attempted to fill gaps left by these accounts to the best of my ability, but truth be told I am, at heart, a captain of industry, not a scholar and so I am quite certain that my work lacks the intellectual zeal or linguistic flair of a thesis prepared by a tenured professor of an accredited university. It is my hope that this information, rough as it is, ultimately causes a light to be shone upon the vile crimes committed by these vile individuals.

A Brief History of the Ancient Order of the Black Worm

The earliest record of anything akin to the Ancient Order of the Black Worm comes from Imperial Chinese document dating back to the 9th century that recorded an incident that transpired in a village in Western China during the later days of the Tang Dynasty. In the village there was a certain religious order whose followers worshipped "a large serpent, black as jet, possessing neither eyes nor mouth. The creature was roughly the size of a gentleman and though it lacks a mouth is said to be able to speak."

The leader of this peculiar religion was, according to the Imperial record, was a wizard known as Lo-Pan, though this was more likely than not the fellow's given name. To be quite forthright were it not for Lo-Pan knowledge of this strange cult may have been lost to history, but Lo-Pan had begun gathering arms and armor and planned to arm his followers and march on the capital city, Chang'an, and declare himself Emperor. His plan was discovered and a military expedition was quickly sent against him.

A rather uneven battle was fought between the Imperial army and Lo-Pan's cultists, with the cultists being routed, though how much of this is exaggeration by the victorious army I cannot say. Those cultists who survived the battle were questioned before being subjected to the death of a thousand cuts. Each cultist said that they had taken up arms and marched because the serpent had commanded them to in a voice that "buzzed like locusts."

What became of Lo-Pan and the serpent is not known for neither were found after the battle. Second-hand accounts of the day say that Lo-Pan managed to evade capture by making use of "demonic magicks to fly from the field of battle like a crane."

I, myself, am a trifle skeptical that the fellow flew away quite literally, but it would not be beyond reason for him to have fled from the battle to the west and into obscurity. If he did escape he either remain inconspicuous or he assumed a new name, for this record is the sole instance of the wizard Lo-Pan appearing in the historical record. The same cannot be said for the serpent.

Much like Lo-Pan, what transpired with the serpent on the day of the battle is unknown, however, unlike the wizard, tales of a vaguely man-sized serpent lacking eyes and mouth, yet gifted with speech persisted in the centuries that followed, moving ever further west.

There are several tales of travelers and pilgrims traveling west from China encountering a strange gentleman cloaked and hooded speaking to them in a voice that sounded like insects and commanding them to do things that they found themselves compelled to do, I am interested solely in groups that can the Ancient Order of the Black Worm can trace their lineage to, and for

that we must go to Jerusalem shortly after the First Crusade.

As I am quite certain you are all woefully aware, the armies of Christendom won a great victory over the people who made Jerusalem their home. Though victory had been won the routes to the so-called "Holy" land were still unsafe for pilgrims coming from Europe and so a number of orders arose to defend these hapless fellows as they trekked through treacherous lands completely alien to them.

These orders included rather well known groups such as the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller, though there countless others, among them a rather forgotten order known as the Order of the Dragon. As with the other orders of the day they were, in theory, created to protect the "Holy" land from the "enemies of Christendom." From the onset, however, there were troubling rumors that the followers swore loyalty to neither the Pope in Rome nor any king in Europe, but rather a, "wyrn out of legend with skin as black as pitch that dwelled within the catacombs beneath their fortress in Jaffa." Suffice it to say that the order was soon deemed heretical and disbanded with its leaders put to death for idolatry, witchcraft and heresy.

I do not believe that the group ceased to exist completely, for once again, the wyrn was not discovered when the fortress in Jaffa was searched and soon thereafter tales of travelers encountering an unsettling cloaked figure in the wilds once again emerged, though once again the trail here goes cold for several centuries.

In Gargano's work, *A Treatise on the Origins of the Black Death*, he writes that, "Following the Crusades, a number of individuals returned from the Holy Land somewhat disenchanted with Christendom. While some returned to worshipping the old gods of Greece or Scandinavia in secret, there were others who had learned of darker things while in the Holy Land and brought these back with them to Europe. I speak, of course, of demons."

Gargano makes the claim that these demon worshippers were for a time, either unknown to or ignored by the Church, but claims that there came a time after which the Church had no choice but to intervene. He writes, "The most heinous act in perhaps all of history was committed by a group in Sicily known as *Seguaci del Drago* who worshipped a demon they referred to as The Black Dragon. In October of 1347 the, under the guidance of this demon, cast hexes that brought forth the plague that would come to decimate the European continent."

While I am somewhat skeptical of Giovanni's claims that the group was directly responsible for the spread of the Black Death throughout Europe it does seem to confirm that a version of the Order

of the Dragon survived and returned to the European continent following the Crusades. Gargano's further claims that the group and others of similar ilk were eliminated during the Inquisitions that followed the Black Death provide a logical explanation as to why there is no mention of the order for nearly one hundred years at which point a second Order of the Dragon emerged in what is now the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

This second version of the Order counted among its members noted fiend, Vlad Tepes, the lord who would serve as the basis for the vampyr in Mister Bram Stoker's recent novel, *Dracula*, so it comes as no surprise that rumors of black magicks and unspeakable cruelty surrounded the Second Order as it had its predecessor. Like the First Order of the Dragon, they were forced to disband shortly after their establishment, though I am quite certain that once more the group merely returned to the shadows, as they had done after arriving in Europe and following the Black Death, for there are clues that hint at their continued existence. Infamous murderess, Elizabeth Bathory, for instance, used a slightly modified version of the Order's crest as her coat of arms.

Once again, however, following her trial, any trace of this group vanishes from the historical record save for a brief mention in a letter penned by John Lambton, 1st Earl of Durham in 1836 to "a social club known as the Order of the Wurm," that he was considering joining, stating, "It (the Order of the Wurm) is descended from a rather ancient holy order and is quite selective when granting membership, unlike that rather detestable Hellfire Club that will allow any fellow with a few shillings in his coinpurse to join."

How the Ancient Order of the Black Worm came to be in these United States I cannot say, nor will I attempt to offer any hypothesis as to what the worm or dragon that this group is alleged to worship actual is. That being said, if this group is responsible for even a small percentage of the crimes that history levels against them they are far more dangerous than I had imagined when I merely thought them murderers.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

June 2, 190_

Mysterious Disappearance

Detectives are baffled by the most perplexing disappearance of a well-to-do gentleman from his home in Westchester. Nudedor Viking the Third, a British noble of some notoriety and former owner of the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. of New York, was last seen on the morning of the 29th of May by his wife, Lydia Viking and several servants before Missus Viking and the house servants departed from the manor house at approximately eleven o'clock for the Fifth Avenue Hotel where they rented rooms.

Detectives had been summoned by Missus Viking and inquired as to why she had taken up residence at the hotel without her husband. Missus Viking is reported to have replied that their residence had become infested by some manner of pest and Mister Viking had stayed behind to oversee the work of the exterminators. Her story was corroborated by the servants who had accompanied Missus Viking, as well as the Viking's young daughter.

The Viking home was searched and nothing of value was found to be missing, nor had any of Mister Viking's garments been removed from his wardrobe. Similarly neither his motorcar nor his carriage had been moved from the carriage house.

There was but one thing amiss in the house. According to investigators a foul odor permeated the hallway outside Mister Viking's study and there were a number of dark stains upon the walls and the door itself. When detectives attempted to open the door they discovered it to be locked from within and with a rather heavy set of drawers pushed up against it to prevent it from being opened (detectives claim it took three rather sturdy fellows to force the door open).

Within the room, however, they found scant little evidence as to what precisely had transpired there within for the room was, aside from the chest of drawers leaning against the door, rather fastidiously arranged with nothing out of place. Detectives have been left utterly poleaxed by this most peculiar disappearance.

It should be noted that Mister Viking was a member of the vile social group, the Hellfire Club and has, on several occasions since arriving in New York, been arrested for indecency, public fornication, sodomy and a number of similar crimes. It is the opinion of this news-paper that the fellow is more likely than not engaged in some debase act of lechery that his poor wife is not privy to.

June 8, 190_

My Dear Friends,

It has been quite some time since last I took to the pen and wrote to you, but I assure you I have a rather sound reason for my complete and utter lack of decorum. Some ten days ago I was abducted from my manor house by fiends I assume to be connected to the Ancient Order of the Black Worm. I suppose that I should count myself fortunate that they merely abducted me, for I have seen a number of news-paper reports of murders that seem to be their work.

I remember very little of my abduction save for the fact that it was night and I was alone in my study while that horrid mechanical hum wailed outside my door. The door had been locked and I had placed a sturdy chest of drawers up against it so I cannot rightly say how the fiends entered my study, or how they were able to subdue me, for the next thing I recall is awaking in utter darkness in a pit of flesh.

I refer to the pit in which I found myself as a pit of flesh for its walls felt not unlike uncooked meat and the smell...oh how that foul odor assailed my nostrils day in and day out. I once visited a slaughterhouse owned by an acquaintance of mine in Chicago and to be completely honest I would rather have smelled that foul odor for the rest of my life than to ever again smell the vile odor that permeated the pit of flesh. I cannot fathom a guess as to what the pit was actually made of for it was most difficult to see for within the pit it was, at all hours of the day, as black as pitch.

I would certainly have gone mad had I been alone in that vile pit, but there was another there with me. There was another gentleman within the pit who would, on occasion, speak with me. James, he said his name was and his voice was familiar, though for quite some time I could not place it. I asked this fellow of the pit and how he had come to be held within it, but like me, he remembered little that transpired before he awoke in the pit: a strange smell, an irksome humming.

When I slept my dreams were haunted by visions of Missus B____'s great gaping abyss of a quim and that cloaked figure mocking me, telling me, "Soon! Yes, soon," and so I slept little. James said that he too was harassed by a cloaked fiend who sat upon a great throne of gore as he slumbered.

In the hours or years that passed in that foul pit of flesh I became quite fond of my companion and told him as much and mentioned that his voice was quite familiar. "Have we perhaps met at

some point in the past?" I asked him.

James said that we had, some years ago in fair Britannia, though he had been better acquainted with my youngest sister, Lenore. In an instant I knew why his voice was familiar and I was filled with unbridled fury. The man I had been trapped in the pit of flesh with for Odin knows how long and commiserated with was none other than my most hated of all foemen, that second rate Vaudevillian, James Franco!

I am certain that most of you are well aware of the circumstances that brought about my burning hatred for James Franco, but for those of you who are not, some years ago he and my sister, Lenore, joined giblets. I do not fault him for this for Lenore is a rather comely woman with poise and grace and his advances were apparently not unwanted by my younger sister. Most unfortunately for poor Lenore was after dancing the blanket hornpipe with this rakish fellow she found herself with child.

To get the daughter of one of the wealthiest and therefore most powerful families in all of fair Britannia with child and then run off with some strumpet Spanish actress, as Mister Franco did, was behavior most uncouth in and of itself, but he compounded an already delicate situation by speaking freely of what had transpired with Lenore Viking to the muckraking scandal rags. Because of this my sister was thereby prevented from being able to "holiday in the countryside," and avoid public scandal. She was disowned by our father and other siblings for her youthful indiscretions and doomed to a marriage with a "new money" fellow far beneath her noble standing.

For years I had sought out James Franco in order to duel him or otherwise do grievous bodily harm to him and now he sat huddled a few feet away from me in the pit of flesh that had become our home. Dark thoughts filled my mind. Oh how easily I could grasp him about the throat and choke the life from him. I wondered if perhaps it would be more satisfying to merely pummel him with my fists until he ceased to live. But just as quickly as those thoughts filled my head they vanished.

"I am dreadfully sorry for what I did to your sister," he said. It sounded as if he were crying, "If you ever free yourself from this pit Nudedor, please let her know."

"If I free myself from this pit you are coming with me so you can tell her yourself," I found myself saying.

"I am afraid I cannot leave," he replied, "This pit...I am part of it now. I have been for some time

now and it will happen to you as well."

I felt along my arm and sure enough thin tendrils from the wall of the pit had attached themselves to my arm. I was able to pull them off, but not without a great deal of pain and a fair amount of blood. I moved closer to where James Franco's voice had originated from and felt the wall. He had told true. His body had more or less been enveloped by the wall of flesh. His face was still exposed and he had the use of one hand still.

I took his exposed hand in mine and thought to attempt to comfort him, but what words are there really to give to a man that is being consumed by a pit of flesh? And so I said nothing. I sat there for a while and must have drifted off to sleep. It was a dreamless sleep, the first I had had in quite some time.

When I awoke the light of the sun nearly blinded me. I looked around and found that I was no longer in a pit, but rather in a wooded area that was most unfamiliar to me. I was filthy and smelled of rancid meat and my arm was caked with dried blood from where I had torn the tendril out but I was otherwise unharmed.

I walked, with no idea where I was, until it was nearly dusk. As the sun began to set I emerged from the woods and came to a small town; Dean's Corners, Massachusetts the sign read. How I had come to be in Massachusetts I could not say, but I made my way down the main street, looking quite frightful I am sure, to the Western Union office and knocked on the door.

Quite fortunately for me telegraph clerk was still inside and he unlocked the door. He took one look at me and quite understandably began to shut the door again, but I begged him to stay and told him a version of my tale: that I had been abducted in New York and escaped my kidnappers in the wood and needed to telegraph my lady wife.

The telegraph man must have taken pity on me for he let me in and sent my wife a wire alerting her to my predicament and waited for her reply. The man then took me back to his home and allowed me to bath and provided me with a suit of clothes to wear and a meal to fill my belly.

As we dined he told me that I was quite lucky to escape from those woods alive for strange folk dwell there within: witches and "forgotten things." I nodded but said little. After supper the telegraph man told me that I could sleep out in his barn. I quickly agreed and crossed his property to the small barn around back and opened the door and after hanging my lantern on a hook climbed up into the hayloft and drifted off to sleep.

Come morning the telegraph man came into the barn accompanied by my darling Lydia. She had departed from New York as soon as she had received the telegraph and gotten a carriage from Boston to Dean's Corners at dawn's first light, since no driver would pass those woods in the dead of night. She offered to pay the fellow for the food I had eaten and the clothes I was wearing, but he would have none of it. I thanked the telegraph man profusely and told him if he ever found himself in New York to look me up for I owed him at least a meal. He said he would and then he and I parted company.

On the journey back to New York I told my dear Lydia the tale of what had happened to me. I am not entirely certain she believed any of it. To be most forthright I would not believe any of it either if someone told the story to me. Regardless, I am back in New York now and quite thankfully in one piece.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

June 13, 190_

My Dear Friends,

Since my ordeal I have been confined to bedrest like some blasted invalid on orders of a so-called doctor of medicine. Poppycock! To be quite forthright there is naught wrong with me physically so far as the doctors can determine though I find myself quite lethargic and desiring to sleep at peculiar hours. Though I am no doctor of medicine I would assume that losing all sense of time while in the pit of flesh brought utter ruination upon my natural sleep cycle.

To compound this already irksome condition, when I do slumber my sleep is restless. My dreams continue to be haunted by weird, alien landscapes that reek of flesh and disease. All about me there is a great hum and the voice of the cloaked figure mocking me, though he rarely shows himself to me any longer.

I mindlessly traverse forgotten underground tunnels of flesh beneath our fair city, as though I am a fleck of iron and there is some great magnet some distance ahead of me. It pulls me deeper and deeper into the caverns of flesh. The walls shudder and pulsate with each step I take.

It grows ever darker as I press on deeper and deeper in to the cavern. It is soon so dark that I can scarcely see a few inches in front of my face. I take from my coat pocket a box of matches and strike one.

It flares and all about me there is a great howl of agony and the voice of the cloaked figure screams for me to stop. The match quickly burns out and the howling ceases. I strike another and again the very walls cry out in pain and it is here that I awake.

I wonder now if perhaps these abominations are somehow affected by open flame. The humming from the wall outside my study seems to have fallen silent during my absence so I will have to locate another colony of those vile black worms to put my hypothesis to the test. I shall write you again once I have. I suppose first I shall have to convince the doctor of medicine and my lady wife that I am well enough to leave my chambers. No easy task to be certain.

Fondly Yours,

Nudeador Viking the Third

June 14, 190_

My Dear Friends

I have carried out my experiment last evening in the dead of night. When all in my manor house were quite soundly asleep I crept from my domicile quiet as a sneak-thief. I was somewhat poleaxed by how utterly silent the streets of our fair city were. In a city as bustling as New York the streets are never truly silent, and yet on this night had I dropped a pin there upon the walkway it would have sounded like a cannon being fired.

I soon found myself on W____ Street, standing before the great hall of the Ancient Order of the Black Worm. Oh how loathsome that building looked in the dead of night! Like some great forgotten beast it loomed in the darkness waiting to devour any soul foolish enough to approach it. On this night, I must confess that I was a most dunderheaded fellow indeed, for approach the building I did.

With lantern in hand I walked up to the door. From within I could hear a faint humming. It was quite obvious that somewhere within the building were a number of those foul black worms. I took from my satchel a bottle of lamp oil and quickly doused the door to the hall with it. I then took from my coat pocket a box of matches and struck one.

I dropped the match into the puddle of lamp oil pooling beneath the door and in an instant the entire door was ablaze. Unearthly shrieks and howls of agony could be heard coming from within the door and an odor not unlike that of overcooked beefsteak filled the air. Whatever the writhing black things were, they could seemingly be destroyed by fire.

With this knowledge gleaned from my experiment, I fled into the night, for I am quite certain that the constabulary of this fair city looks down about intentionally set fires as severely as they do the Socratization of a doxie's fundament in an alleyway behind a public house and have little desire to be once more deprived of my liberty by such narrow-minded fellows as that.

I have decided to destroy the cloaked figure, for I am quite certain that he is the lynchpin in this entire sordid affair. Most unfortunately I do not have any inkling as to where he might be found and few leads left to follow. Perhaps I must go back to the beginning and attempt once again to speak with Mister B____, though I am uncertain what a gentleman in his condition will actually be able to tell me.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

June 15. 190_

Terrible Inferno on Water Street

In the early morning hours of 14th June a most terrible fire broke out at the immense brick building on 55 Water Street. The building which was valued at roughly \$150,000 and had previously occupied by a social club by the name of the Ancient Order of the Black Worm.

Fire companies were summoned to the scene shortly after three o'clock in the morning and after a brief scuffle between two rival fire companies involving fisticuffs was resolved they set to work extinguishing the inferno but found the building to be so completely filled with flames that they were certain it would prove to be a total loss.

In spite their best efforts shortly before sunrise the flames were well beyond the control of the fire companies and the flames soon extended to the buildings on either side of the hall. As the sun rose, the walls fell, demolishing the hall and the adjoining dwellings. One gentleman was reportedly injured while leaping from the second floor of the building to escape the flames, but no fatalities or even other injuries are reported.

The blaze is believed to be the work of a firebug, though the detectives dispatched to the scene would not elaborate as to what lead them to come to this conclusion. Should anyone possess any information on the fire, they ask those individuals kindly step forward so that this vile arsonist can be captured.

June 19, 190_

My Dear Friends,

It has been some time, I know, since last I took to the pen and wrote to you, but following my experiment I thought it to be in my best interest to not bring any undue attention to myself. That is not to say that I have been idle this entire time.

This past week-end I paid Mister B____ a visit at the sanitarium he currently calls his home. Again I was able to convince an orderly to let me speak with the fellow in private by handing him a slip from my billfold.

I must confess that when I saw Mister B____ I was crestfallen, for he had the look of a corpse. He was gaunt and pallid with wild looking eyes that were sunk deep in his skull. His hair was a tangled mess of oily locks. His right hand was bandaged with grimy looking gauze, from which a foul miasma seemed to emanate.

Mister B____ seemed to recognize me, though his gaze was fearful, like a dog who had been beaten. "Why have you come here again?" he asked nervously, "Who has sent you here?"

"No one sent me my dear Mister B____," I replied, "I have come of my own accord for I need your help. I would not bother you here if I did not think there was some other way to resolve my problem."

"Problem? What problem do you speak of?" asked Mister B____, his eyes darting about wildly.

"The cloaked figure..."

Mister B____'s lip trembled, "You have seen him then? Spoken to him I suppose. You know what he is then?"

I told Mister B____ that I did not completely comprehend what the cloaked figure was, but I had seen him and spoken with him at least in my dreams and very possibly upon a gripcar some weeks ago and explained that I needed to locate him so that I could kill him.

Mister B____ shook his head and said, "I know where to find him but fear that I cannot help you Nudedor, for you see, that thing hold my wife in thrall. If that foul things should be destroyed, so too will all those who have been bent to his will."

"Have you seen your lady wife as of late my friend?" I asked.

Mister B_____ shook his head and said that she would not visit him in a place such as this and had stopped sending even letters some weeks ago. He did not know what had become of his wife of the horrible things that grew inside her. I had no desire to inform my friend that he had been cuckolded by an unknowable evil but saw no other way by which to locate the Lord of the Worms and vanquish it and so I told him what I had seen.

He wailed and shook his head in denial, for he knew what I said to be true. He wept softly for some time before finally saying, "I know. It was from her that I took that accursed cube to begin with. She called it an egg and said her children were inside. I did not want her to end up in a place like this, and so I took it from where she kept it and meant to dispose of it. I hoped that if it were gone she would return to her senses, but as I held that foul thing, a madness took me. I scarcely recall what transpired the night I lost it or many nights that followed."

"Where is the cloaked figure?" I asked again.

"There is a building upon Water Street. Number fifty-five if I recall. It is a large brick building that you have probably walked past without notice dozens of times. His followers gather there," Mister B_____ said, "Beneath that building there are caverns that reek of spoilt meat."

I told Mister B_____ that I knew of the building and had razed it to the ground several days earlier.

"That would not have affected the caverns," Mister B_____ replied with a certainty, "There are other entrances to the caverns. I was taken there once, after I lost the cube. They brought me from this very room and kept me in a great pit of flesh for several days before returning most of me."

I looked to his bandaged right hand. The same tendrils in the pit of flesh that had devoured James Franco had taken undoubtedly taken Mister B_____’s hand as well.

"I vaguely recall a forest," Mister B_____ replied, "It was not near here though for we rode for many hours by carriage to get there."

I knew then where the entrance was for I, myself, had gone through it not that long ago. I would have to return to the forest outside of Dean’s Corners, Massachusetts. I thanked him for his time and told him that I was dreadfully sorry for what had happened to him, and promised to make things right once more so that his hardships would not have been in vain.

And so, dear friends, I have purchased a ticket to Boston for Monday morning. If, you do not hear from me again I hope that you know that I was quite fond of most of you. I have left instructions with my lawyer, the most excellent and triumphant, William S. Preston Esquire to execute my last

will and testament should I not return within one week's time.

Sincerely,

Nudeador Viking the Third

June 21, 190_

My Dear Friends,

I fear this will certainly be the final time I ever take to the pen and write to you for last night something occurred that I will certainly be blamed for and since few will believe the horrible truth as to what brought about those most unfortunate series of events I am of the mind it would be far better for me to depart from these United States at once under an assumed name.

When last I wrote you I had a tenuous lead on the location of that vile cloaked figure who haunted my dreams and sought to bring ruination upon us all. My hunch proved to be correct and I located an entrance to the great catacombs of flesh that Mister B_____ had spoken of in the forests outside of the hamlet of Dean's Corners, Massachusetts.

As my time is somewhat short, I shall forgo detailing my quest to locate the entrance to these caverns. Suffice it to say It involved a gypsy, a visit to a university library, an ancient tome, and the dark arts, and when all was said and done, I found myself within a vast tunnel of flesh.

I carried with me a rucksack with a number of supplies: rations, water, a length of rope, a lantern and lamp oil, matches, a compass, a pocket watch, a sabre, and though I find them quite loathsome, a pistol and a box of bullets. I was certain the bullets and sword would be utterly useless against the cloaked figure, but was uncertain of what I would discover as I trekked through the winding tunnels of the caverns of flesh.

The compass proved quite impotent in the caverns for the needle spun about quite wildly, but it mattered little, for as in my dream I felt myself pulled in a particular direction. On occasion the tunnels would fork and yet I never once doubted which passage I must take.

The pocket watch also was utterly useless for it stopped the very instant I entered the caverns and no amount of winding would get it to start again, though the very moment I left the caverns of flesh it began to tick along normally. Because of this I cannot rightly say how much time transpired while I was in the caverns. It seemed, at the time, as though that ten days or so had passed in the tunnels, but the calendar I now look at makes that an impossibility.

Regardless, I journeyed in those tunnels for a considerable amount of time, alone but for my thoughts and that ever incessant buzzing. O how I came to hate that ever present noise that echoed through those caverns of offal.

The walls quivered as traveled ever deeper into the stygian abyss, pulled by some unknown force

and my nostrils stinging from the foul odor of gangrenous flesh. If the Puritans tell true, and Hell does exist, these tunnels, my dear friends, were not far from what that place is sure to be. Through this hell I journeyed until I came at last to a rather commonplace door. A door of simple mahogany. My dear friends, what I am about to say may sound utterly incredibly, my I assure you that it is the truth. The door that stood before me was the very same door that had once led to my study. I was quite certain that it was the same door from which some unspeakable horror had emerged to join giblets with the witch I had hired to destroy the accursed thing. The same door that had gone missing that same night; vanished from my storage shed.

I turned the knob and opened the door and stepped through the portal. I emerged in a cellar and in an instant knew precisely where I was. There are few cellars in these United States that I could emerge in unexpectedly and know instantaneously where I was, but this cellar in which I found myself was one of them, for I was somehow in the cellars beneath my old Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

It is true that while I owned the place I had spent little time in the cellars but I was quite certain that a doorway to a great series of tunnels and caverns of flesh did not exist when I was the proprietor of place. I assume that Messrs. Harris & Blanck must have added it since I sold the factory to them some months ago.

Again I feel drawn, as if by a magnet to the staircase and make my way from the cellar into the factory proper. Even at this hour there are a number of girls hard at work, crafting Triangle brand shirtwaists. There has been a noticeable decline in quality since I left the factory to be certain, but they are still a fine shirtwaist indeed.

Few of the women on the factory floor notice me, and those that do are more likely than not recent hires for they are not familiar to me, nor I to them. They continue sewing on buttons and leave me to my task.

I continue to press upwards and it is not long before I find myself before the door to my old office. I turn the handle and the door creaks open. In the gloom of the darkened room I can make out the vague form of a figure seated at my old desk. I am certain that it is the cloaked figure that has haunted me these past two and a half months.

It stands and suddenly seems far too large for the room. Even crouched its head touches the ceiling and its arms drag upon the floor like some great ape. It laughs its queer buzzing laugh and had I eaten at all that day I would certainly have sicked up all over the room.

I notice some motion behind the cloaked figure and again the figure laughs and in mechanical voice said, "Step forward my pets."

From behind him oozed forward Missus B_____ and the witch, nude with their middles engorged and breast sagging obscenely. I must say, my dear friends, that in my years I have joined giblets with a number of gentlewomen that would not be considered beauties in the classical sense, but each of them in their own way was not without her own charms, but the two women who emerged from the shadows, bosoms oozing vicious black filth, were without a doubt completely charmless and no sum of money could have enticed me to dance the blanket hornpipe with either of them.

I could see movement from within the witch's belly as I stood there before them, and knew that I must act quickly lest all be lost, and so my dear friends, I took from my rucksack my bottle of lamp oil and hurled it at them. It shattered upon the floor. The cloaked figure again laughed and I was filled with rage.

I hurled my lantern at them as well and it too crashed to the floor. A fire rose from the floor and engulfed the cloaked figure, Missus B_____ and the witch. They howled. It was a hideous sound, like a million locusts screaming as they devoured everything before them.

Black tendrils flailed about from the burning creatures lashing out towards the walls. Leaving tiny, wormlike creatures to scurry down the walls towards safety. I could not let a single one escape or this would all repeat itself again.

I turned and fled down the stairs of the factory, slamming each and every door behind me and barring it shut so that none of those vial creatures could escape. It is quite possible that in doing so I may have doomed some poor girl to a fate she did not deserve, but often we must make sacrifices for the greater good.

I emerged in an alleyway behind the building and joined the crowd that had assembled to watch the building burn. I saw the fire companies arrive to battle the blaze. Sometime later the blaze had been extinguished and I no longer heard that Odinforsaken humming coming from the factory.

And so I returned home and set about making arrangements to depart these United States, for as I said above, few will understand or believe why I had no choice but to put the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory to the torch as I did last night. And so my dear friends, I bid you all a fond farewell. I trust you and I shall never again intercourse with one another, and though that thought fills me with a

great deal of melancholy, I will always have fond memories the vast majority of you and our esteemed social club.

I am evermore,

Your humble servant,

Nudeador Viking the Third