

**The Search for the Anima as described by
Captain Thomas Hunt**

Captain Log, 23rd entry

Date and location unknown

THE situation we seem to be in is a very peculiar one. For some reason I still fail to understand, my officers and I have entirely lost our sense of time and direction. We vividly remember sailing out of our home port cheered by our loved ones but our actions and itinerary, once the land was out of sight, is lost to us all.

I know from reading my previous entries that we have proceeded northbound as prescribed by our orders and that, on the 17th of September, we traded goods with local fishermen but this information was as new to me as if I was reading a foreign account of a mission as, were it not written by my own hand, I would have believed it to be a counterfeit.

Likewise, our longitude and latitude is unknown. Above us the sky is obscured by a sombre grey mass of clouds that prevents us from distinguishing our top mast, let alone the stars. Even the sun has been consumed by this menacing mist. Also quite worryingly, a good portion of our supplies have already been used and seven crew mates are gone as well as two of our six small crafts. This desertion would have gone totally unnoticed if it wasn't for the empty hammocks as no one has any memory of the faces of those missing. I had to go through our crew register to find their names.

Nevertheless, we shall proceed as calmly and safely as possible northwards until the sky clears and allows us once again to fix our position at which point I shall, with regards to our supplies and distance, decide whether to continue or abort our mission.

Captain Log, 24th entry

Date and location unknown

THE situation previously described has continued for what appears to be an other twenty-one days. I presume our position to be more northerly than I had previously imagined as the nights seem very short, lasting no more than a few hours. The rest of the day is relatively bright although never before could I have imagined a light as dull and undefined as this suffocating, never changing, unbearable glow above us. Whispers can now be heard among the men that the clouds are wicked, cutting us off from the eyes of God. As foolish as it may seem that I fail to disagree entirely with them. Never before have I seen such persistent weather.

There seems to lie within this sky something almost palpable. A sense of vitality or of an entity that one can perceive but never fully grasp - like the elusive smell of a woman's perfume when one enters a bright and fresh room, a clue to a former presence that has now vanished and that you can only sometimes notice but eludes you when you actively try to grasp the sensation. Speaking of sensations, we have all lost our sense of taste and smell. Much like the light, all our food seems undefined and tasteless. Although I do not doubt it is expertly cooked by Mister Galliant, it stays elusive both in taste and consistency. As of now, it is certainly the dulllest food I have ever eaten, even compared to the worst ships.

As it happens, we can barely finish our serving no matter how trivial the quantity and our provisions, at this rate, shall last for many months even if we might not hold out so well. Likewise the air is both odourless and still, not a breeze has been felt on deck since what we now call our awakening and our once lively sails now hang, useless and forgotten. The whole crew too has become listless, wandering helplessly on deck without paying attention to time or direction. It should be our duty, both me and the officers, to occupy them, but even for ourselves, the idea of mustering enough energy to direct them seems out of reach.

I was so puzzled by this elusiveness of reality that I went to the spice cabinet when everybody lay sleeping or resting and picked up a small barrel of black pepper and put it to my nose. There, finally, could I get a faint odour of land and spice, a last tenuous link to our home that I feel will soon have vanished too, absorbed by the sky and the sea around us. Leaving us blank, numb and shallow on this strange and dark sea.

Short entry on the sea

THE sea we find ourselves on is a gentle, kind and repetitive one. The waves rise and fall calmly, steadily rocking our boat in a motherly way, trapping us alive in an inescapable rhythm to which we slowly succumb. I have caught myself, to my own surprise, getting carried away by this motion, my mind simply starts drifting away being awoken later, not knowing how long or how deep my mental absence was. It has happened to me many times writing these pages and I must make a conscious effort to then start writing again. In the case of one of our hands on board, Mister Smith, it seems that his mind simply never came back. He indulged in the dreamlike state a fraction too long and as a result may well be lost to us for ever. We care for him as best we can, feeding him and washing him, but I doubt we shall ever hear his voice or catch a look from his eyes again. I almost envy the faith of this holiest man of all.

Captain Log, 25th entry

Date and location unknown

I have stopped counting the days; I now even doubt that anybody will ever read these lines. The reason that I have stopped counting the days is that no day can be distinguished in any conceivable form from another. We have been absorbed and consumed by what ever place this is, as I do not believe that this place holds any link to neither space nor time in the sense that we are accustomed to. Nor do I believe that it belongs to humans, that it is fit for humans. Some more sailors have sunken to sleep. Some others are gone. Most are here with me doing nothing - only Mister Frederick is still somewhat active, walking furiously around the boat, manically scribbling in his notebook or shouting at confused mates to help him carry his camera from one place to another. The mere sight of him is usually enough to leave me exhausted for hours.

It feels like my mind is escaping me, perspiring through my grey skin, drifting out of my nose and eyes into the vastness that surrounds us. The only reason I have decided to write this entry today is that a most peculiar event happened, although I cannot say to have been surprised - nothing is very surprising anymore. Suddenly, throughout my ship, all the crucifixes on board caught fire spontaneously and without any apparent reason.

Strangest of all was the reaction of the men: most just stared blankly into the flames that were menacing to engulf the whole ship, a lively orange light illuminating their otherwise sorry faces. They simply stared absorbed like a moth to a candle, until, after what appeared to be an eternity but must actually only have been a few handful of seconds, Mr Lavalanche started shouting and kicking them into life. It had been a long time since the ship had seemed so lively and all the crosses were quickly put out and carried to my quarters. An hour or so later Mister Frederick, as energetic as ever, came to ask if he could have one of the blackened crosses, to which I obliged. In all this ineptitude his madness shines like an unbearably bright light and I tried to make him leave me as soon as I could before he started rambling again about the surprising beauty and calmness of the sea. He is as maniac a photographer as I am a deluded captain.

I think I shall write more often from now on.

Short entry on our Orders

OUR orders for this mission were to try to locate and rescue the expedition that had set sail two years and a half previously. The day we set sail seems like another lifetime from now. It seems one cannot exist in both universes at the same time and I cannot remember exactly my role or my loved ones in the previous world. Anyway, our orders were quite unspecific: sail to the Anima's last estimated position and follow her planned route until, with God's help, we may discover her, or her fate, and bring to her all the assistance we may or bring back any information we shall find. As my order says, the Anima had been sent to "explore and prospect to the best of Her abilities" an uncharted territory in the distant North-East.

I am now quite certain of what has happened to the great ship, the question now is who might come and save the saviours ?

Captain Log, 26th entry

Date and location unknown

A great fever of excitement came upon our vessel today. A grand mass of rock and forest emerged from the mist as we approached, presenting itself to our land-starved eyes. It is the first coastline we have seen in what must now be many months, and almost seemed to me to be the first I have ever seen. Without any wind to propel our ship, I do not know what forces drove us to this place but quickly some oars were produced and at my command the men rowed the ship to prevent any collision. We followed the coast line at great effort until night time when we anchored in a small rocky cove. No signs of life were seen and the vegetation was different from anything I had previously encountered. We shall disembark and make camp tomorrow, as I doubt we will find a more welcoming harbour or any signs of civilisation. Never before can I remember encountering such lands as these. Despite my assumptions of our position being very northern, the land is mostly green. The air has a very strange palpableness around here. I lack the right words to correctly express the feeling of it. It is not exactly a temperature although it gives shivers to the soul but seems to tighten against one's skin as we move through it, seemingly resenting our agitation. It has a peculiar feeling of density and heaviness, as if it was trying to cling onto us and nest within our hair and pores. It is an awful feeling, sensing that the air we breath would rather see us breathless. The vegetation here is taller and greener than it has ever been given to me to observe. Despite this, the land seems old, and I know it might sound

displaced, but resentful too. It is not quite dying but it possesses a sort of numbness or passivity within itself. I never thought I could say this about trees, but in them lies some anger and sadness. As someone - I cannot remember who - said very eloquently: It seems that time here cannot heal wounds and that, a long time ago, a great many of them were inflicted onto this place.

Captain Log, 27th entry

Date and location unknown

AFTER a long day we managed, not without difficulties due to the diminished condition of the men, to unload most of the supplies needed for a temporary camp. We made tents out of our sails and established a guard throughout the day and night as a precaution, not knowing what lies beyond the distant tree line. This sudden change of setting seems to have greatly affected to the moral of the men. Laughter and talk could be heard for the first time in many weeks. An other surprise was the discovery, contrary to all probabilities, of some signs of previous occupation of the cove. It even seems that it might have been used before by stranded sailors such as ourselves. We found a partially buried rowing boat some distance inland. Inside there was a small chest containing a few relics, mostly valueless. I wonder what happened to these people. I cannot say if this finding is a good or a poor omen for ourselves, time will say. I have a bad feeling about this land. My first preoccupation will be to resupply our ship with fresh goods, I shall also try to explore further inland and determine the nature of this country. God willing, we shall be sailing back home in a few weeks.

Captain Log, 28th entry

Date and location unknown

I estimate it has been more at least three weeks since we landed and our party is in disarray. We had been building our camp for the first few days when the noises started coming from the tree line. It went on throughout the days and nights and no one could find sleep. Some even went as far as to ask, if not demand, to be stationed back aboard the ship. As we lay in the darkness in our makeshift tent, an odd rattling and whispering seemed to envelop us. The cold, too, came to haunt us, creeping into our minds. And in the few occasions when I actually manage to fall asleep the feeling, as it is as much a feeling as a sound, continued to haunt me in my dreams, urging me to wake up, to flee or to fight and I did always wake up frail and shivering. Those on guard duties were the most severely affected - I have seen some men age ten years in the course of a night, and I had to suppress a near mutiny when Mr Wayn, one of the mates on duty, disappeared. He was one of the youngest aboard and much liked by the men, only thirteen when we left port. He was quickly found, dead, naked in the forest's edge, having shot himself in the head his face still griped by an expression of a most primal fear. To my greatest shame, he is now the 16th man to disappear on this cursed expedition. Most of the others have disappeared from equally mysterious causes.

I fear I might not be able to lead the men for very long. Already I can feel both my influence over them and my resolve to hold it weakening. Some have already left and we can now occasionally hear confused talks and screams coming from the forest. The next people to die here will die away from the eyes of God. No salvation is to be found through death on this land. Death here only grants a cold and purposeless wandering through the limbo of existence, I fear.

Captain Log, 29th entry

Date and location unknown

SOMETHING is watching us. I can feel it, feel its pervasive gaze, its presence emanating in pulsing waves. Who, but the devil, could create this elusive hell, this purgatory of the senses. Judgment is upon us, but who might be our jury? Dreams haunt me at night, dreams of places I have never visited, of people I have never met, of actions I have never taken. They haunt me by day, merging with reality until they become one. Most of the men have fled, some into the forest, some back to the ship, while some others are lost, still in camp but nonetheless wandering aimlessly. Mr Frederick left today with a few men he's been ordering around for a couple of days. Before parting he looked at me and said «How wonderful this land is, how invigorating, how new and beautiful and fresh it is don't you think ?» He is insane. I am insane too. There is no pain in this madness though, only a slow dilution of faith and meaning and purpose and identity. You may lose everything here but your own insanity. It is a forced reunion with one's own mind, no wonder men are killing themselves.

Captain Log, 30th entry, Date and location unknown

THE preparations for our return will never be finished now. The men are gone - at least most of them; only a handful have stayed. A dozen or so. Occasionally I can still see a glimmer of hope as they watch me, waiting for a command, waiting for a direction from the leader of this lost expedition. They look up thinking that I shall provide comfort and refuge through authority but truth is I am as lost as they are. The only thing I can now provide them with is a facade of fortitude, maybe some drive, no matter what the direction may be. This skeleton crew would not even be able to sail our ship. We embarked one last time to retrieve some supplies and equipment before boarding on the small crafts to map the coastline. It is no doubt useless, but not more so than any other activity we might take on now. We paddled westward on a calm sea for 4 days, stopping at night and starting early in the morning. After the pandamonium of camp life this quiet journey through eerie fog and piercing clear white water soothes me. On the morning of the 5th day, we came to the estuary of a large majestic river, emptying itself into the sea. Without any hesitation our three small vessels altered course and went up the water. I have seen this place before I think, in my dreams but I cannot be certain of it, it just appeared so familiar.

Captain Log, 31th entry

Date and location unknown

W^E went up the same river for an other 8 days. Calmly, peacefully gaining ground on the monstrous body of water, each bend revealing another one, then an other one. We lost sense of time even more and merged into the landscape. The horrible feeling we shared on the beach has all but disappeared; we are now part of this land, accepted even welcomed to it. Today, as we stopped for a rest, I walked up a hill to gain some perspective. What I saw bemused me - land, nothing but untamed land as far as the eyes could see, our river cutting through the virgin forest, no animals and no sound, no insects, no birds, nothing really. And far away, almost too far to be seen, another great body of water, a second river almost as large as ours, a ribbon of silver silk on the landscape. What source can produce two grand rivers like them? It almost seems like all the oceans in the world come from this place.

Captain Log, 32nd entry

Date and location unknown

THIS morning we saw them. I am sure it is them that we could hear in the cove and now, in the early hours of the day, they finally revealed themselves to us. Hundreds upon hundreds of them. Thousand of long black shiny bodies intertwined together on the opposite shore. Snakes, an infinite number of snakes. They flattened the whole vegetation with their long and hard bodies. A few tree collapsed under their collective weight. As the sun came in we could see a million of shiny eyes watching us from across the water. Tasting our scent with their small flickering tongues. «Can they cross do you think Captain?» said Mr Vaughan. In my heart I knew they probably could, I had the feeling they could do anything they pleased in this land - there wasn't any force to oppose them. They are the true masters here; we are mere amusement to them. Quietly we gathered our equipment and left. They watched us as we started paddling, not producing any sounds other than the low vibration of hundreds of thousands of scales rubbing one another, a gentle hum that echoed on the water and in our spirit.

Captain Log, 33rd entry
Date and location unknown

Two more died today, we are now eleven.

Captain Log, 34th entry
Date and location unknown

OUR rations are still mostly intact, despite the very small amount of food we eat our expedition gets on with the work without much fuss. Our bodies have simply lost taste for food it seems.

Captain Log, 35th entry

Date and location unknown

W^E had to abandon our crafts as the river finally split into a hundred small streams. We tried going up one of them, but were quickly stopped by a waterfall and shallow water surrounded by two large cliffs. We have now reached the source of the great river. How long this has taken, I do not know. Time has little relevance here. We might continue by foot now.

Captain Log, 36th entry

Date and location unknown

Just near the waterfall, three bodies were discovered. Dead men not from our group. How strange that we should find them here by chance and even stranger is the fact that they belonged to the expedition we were suppose to find. I cannot remember it's name but I can recall that I used to be anxiously concerned with finding it. That was before, of course, I don't think it has much importance now. This made me laugh a lot: here in the middle of this immense forest lay three men I was supposed to save - their bodies just sitting there, still and stiff. How terribly silly. The men all laughed too. All this is very amusing: even their small weak diminished corpses, contorted in a quite comical way, how trivial. They had each been tied up to a different tree in clear view of one another, at which point each man's chest had been opened up and a single rib had been broken off, which was then used to stab them in their throat letting them suffocate in their own blood. I wonder what motives the people that did this to them had - it seems like quite an extreme measure. What peculiar motives must have animated them? What an unexpected way of dying it must have been for them too. They were all still smiling; I suppose they were happy to see new faces. I am happy to see new faces, even dead ones. One of the man in our group insisted heavily on burying them so we did, mainly to please him.

This however did him no good since, as we picked them up a thousand grasshoppers came out bursting from their wounds and, for a few moments, engulfed us in a buzzing cloud of life before vanishing into the woods. I hadn't noticed at the time but that person seemed to have accidentally killed himself in the confusion, blowing his own brain out. We conveniently buried him with the others.

Captain Log, 37th entry

Date and location unknown

I have become demented myself. I read my previous entry and I cannot remember any of it. Here is a place where insanity rules, where madness prevails over dignity or faith. Hope? There is none. Pleasure is forbidden, only sin is permitted, encouraged. An existence filled with painless suffering is all one can hope for in this cruel wilderness. God has forsaken this place. Now only man inhabits it.

Captain Log, 38th entry

Date and location unknown

As we advanced through the forest today, my mind travelled back home to my loved ones. It had been a long time since I last thought about my life there. A great sadness engulfed me as I wondered and walked - a sadness not constituted by resentment or anger, but dwelling on all that could have been and all that was instead. All I had missed out on and refused myself; all that had taken its place and filled up the cracks of opportunities that were left open. There is an awkward beauty that sometimes lies within such sadness. An acute sense of being, that joy fails to provide, a rush of awareness that awakes all parts of the body into existence. I shall always favour such sadness over indifference. I almost feel privileged to still be able to feel such an emotion. Here especially in a land that forbids true feelings of any kind, other than lust and deception, it oddly seems to me to be something one can be proud of, that I should be proud of - a pride in having still such a truthful and honest feeling. In someways, it reassures me. I suppose that to feel such woe can only, I hope, be an indicator of some remnants of humanity and love that has endured somewhere within myself - as sadness can only be the equal pendant of love.

We camped in a clear field today. It could well be man made or so it seems. I daren't let myself be fooled into hope but maybe we shall soon meet other people here. All I hope for now is a chance get back to see my people again.

THIS is an entry by John Frederick. Our late captain is now dead and I have taken the liberty of recuperating his journal. I shall try to clarify some points about our journey in this land.

Our captain came across a local tribe that sacrificed him and his accomplices to the snakes. The people that inhabit this land accomplish this by taking away a left rib which they believe to contain the essence of the person and that in so doing they shall be left in peace by the horde. His passing didn't surprise me: our Captain was too weak, too scared. He couldn't appreciate the great potential that true wildness provides. Sanity is only for the weak-minded people. Insanity, when correctly managed, is the most rewarding. I tried talking to him, showing him the way when we first came onto this land. I told him to leave the others and join me. I tried to give him, as it was given to me, the chance to expand his potential and leave his previous self behind but he didn't dare. «Can't you see that you are mad?» he told me. I knew I was mad but I tried explaining to him, still. I said to him: «But why don't you look around you, can't you feel it? All this land and all this energy, all the things that are happening around us. All this untarnished beauty and all that there is to see and do still. This beautiful clear precise lasting madness that surrounds us, you would be mad not to be mad in such a place. Madness is the great answer to our situation, a gift of our body to our mind». Still he couldn't do it, like most men he couldn't change or allow himself to let go fully. He always reached for control, when abandoning oneself to one's senses might sometimes really be the only way forward. When one cannot control one's faith, one should embrace the unknown and take it with him as the great form of comfort, and solace and companionship.

In truth, all who have died here were simply culled by the land, putting unfit people out of their confusion. It is amusing how, for most people, simple honest violence makes the mind go unnatural, whereas clinical, institutionalised, organised horrors won't make them blink at all. These horrors will even seem to them to be entirely acceptable as long as they remain controlled or supervised and explained rationally to them. They simply cannot cope with mindlessness, whereas I thrive on it. Nothing has to make sense to be truly beautiful as long as it is honesty that perspires through our pores, and not a false claim of respectability.

The great counter-balance to that human hypocrisy are the snakes, the beautiful beasts of this land. Such elegance and grace they carry with them. I came upon them as we were walking through the forest. Firstly the atmosphere lost its essence and the air became thicker, pushing us almost to our knees, driving us down into the malleable brown earth, almost completely preventing us from moving. A long powerful body then slid out of the foliage to my left. It glided towards me, its amber eyes shining in the damp obscurity of the canopy, piercing through the thick jelly that the air had become. Its body gracefully slid on top of rocks and branches. Its scales were perpetually adjusting to his movements, firmly pressing against its skin as a magnificently crafted, perfectly fitted armour. Its skin shone like a grand veil of deceitfulness that glimmered and obscured itself as a flickering star filled summer night sky does here in the vegetation-induced darkness. It observed me as it came ever closer. When it stopped I could almost touch it, the vivid blood-red tongue vibrating languorously, longing for sensuality. I could almost grasp its essence, older and greater than I could comprehend. Its presence came crushing into my person.

I could neither escape nor hide nor did I feel the need to. After sometime, as it came, it went away. Then after, an endless flow of oiled bodies went past us, without any interest. When all were gone I noticed my former comrades had disappeared. I felt a great sense of accomplishment from this, I knew they had chosen me. I was grateful to know that my fellow shipmates had finally served a higher purpose. And proud too, knowing I had led them to this opportunity to meet their fates.

The land can do nothing but ploy beneath this horde of serpents. They belong here, or more precisely, have made the land belong to them. I feel long ago this place was different than it is now. It used to be brighter and denser, more tolerant yet less free. Not as truthful. I cannot say what change this snake brought here, what chains of events He might have caused, but since those days He has claimed this garden as His realm and here all creatures are servants to Him.

The natives, the descendants of the first humans, they bow to the curse of their condition. Never again shall they rise to grace, to the status they have enjoyed before and never will they be allowed to disappear. They cannot leave and they cannot stay. They are set to endure the punishment of their ancestors, while all candour and grace and individuality slowly leaves their bodies. They now are only inhabiting a slender, elongated pale empty shell that survives without purpose, kept breathing by ignorance and fear. A crudely made crosswork of hard salient bones and slim tight muscles. Only the women have an occasional look of realisation, swept away by sadness. A hint of love perhaps, that is the only treasure they seem to hold and nourish.

I know not the full scale of this country but the locals believe it to be some sort of infinite forest that extends beyond a great mountain range. They call that the lost land and none dares to explain to me why. They have also mentioned a legend of a couple who managed to escape from this land. Although the people here talk with me in what seems a universal tongue, they fear me and believe me to be some malevolent agent they call Cherubin. A great evil that was apparently cast upon the earth. As a result they keep, most times, their distance from me and try to win me with gifts and rituals. All this is very interesting and I'm beginning to see some future use to that influence. I have heard rumours of a forbidden fruit that only grows on a specific tree out in the forest. This will be my next destination. I feel this might be the true source of power that animates this place. Once I find it I shall send my camera and this book away back to the ship and set it loose to be carried away by the sea, it shall be, as I am, freed from the terrible grasp of control and consciousness.

Whatever happens then on is out of my power but I cannot see the point of carrying these remnants of the old world with me any longer after that. All that will come to be I shall see with the eyes of a free man and the determination that a lost mind provides to the daring.

All is well.