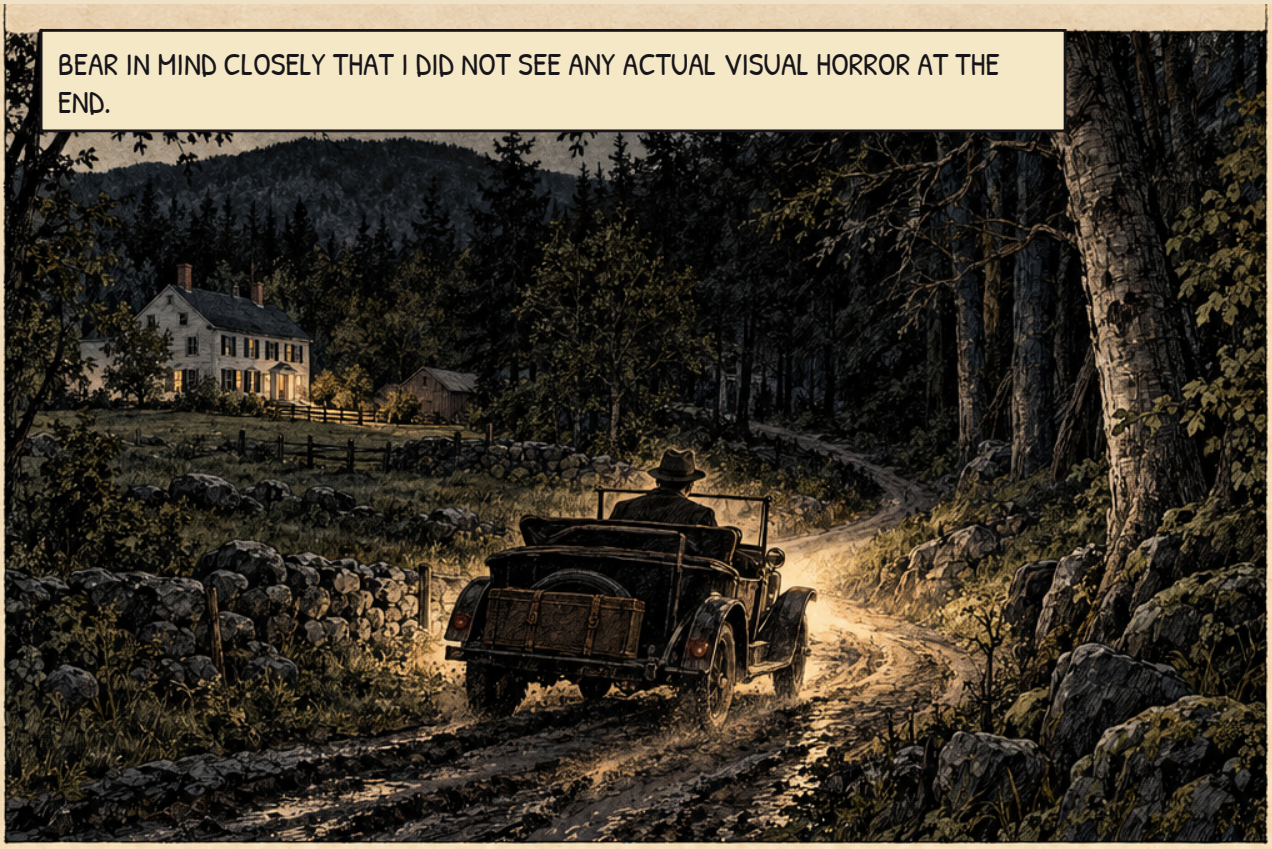
THE WHISPERER IN DARKNESS






IT BEGAN WITH THE VERMONT FLOODS OF NOVEMBER 1927.
THAT THING IN THE RIVER... IT WASN'T A MAN.
I WAS ALBERT WILMARTH, A LITERATURE INSTRUCTOR AND STUDENT OF FOLKLORE. I THOUGHT I KNEW THE EXPLANATION.


REPORTS FROM THREE DIFFERENT RIVERS DESCRIBED THE SAME STRANGE BODIES.
PINKISH. JOINTED. WINGED. NOTHING LIKE AN ORDINARY ANIMAL.
BUT OLD LEGENDS COULD GIVE DIFFERENT WITNESSES THE SAME MISTAKE.


THE HILLS HAD LONG BEEN AVOIDED. OLD TALES SPOKE OF HIDDEN BEINGS AND VANISHED SETTLERS.
THEY LEFT CLAW-MARKS BESIDE BROOKS.
THEY MINED BENEATH THE MOUNTAINS, THE STORIES SAID, AND CAME FROM THE STARS.


SIMILAR LEGENDS OCCUR EVERYWHERE. THAT DOES NOT MAKE THEM TRUE.


OUR ARGUMENT REACHED THE NEWSPAPERS OF VERMONT.


THEN A LETTER ARRIVED FROM A MAN NAMED HENRY WENTWORTH AKELEY.


MAY 5, 1928. AKELEY WAS FIFTY-SEVEN: EDUCATED, PRECISE, AND DEEPLY FRIGHTENED.
...I HAVE CERTAIN EVIDENCE THAT MONSTROUS THINGS DO INDEED LIVE IN THE WOODS ON THE HIGH HILLS WHICH NOBODY VISITS.
I HAVE SEEN FOOTPRINTS, AND OF LATE HAVE SEEN THEM NEARER MY OWN HOME... THAN I DARE TELL YOU NOW.

'I RECORDED VOICES IN THE WOODS. ONE WAS NOT HUMAN.'



'AFTER I BROUGHT THIS STONE HOME, EVERYTHING CHANGED.'



THEY SEEM TO BE TRYING TO GET THE BLACK STONE BACK AND DESTROY THE PHONOGRAPH RECORD...



'MY DOGS KEEP THEM AWAY. BUT I LIVE ALONE NOW. NO HIRED MAN WILL STAY.'



'I COULD JOIN MY SON IN CALIFORNIA. IT IS HARD TO ABANDON THE HOME OF SIX GENERATIONS.'



I DID NOT BELIEVE HIS EXPLANATION. I BELIEVED HE HAD ENCOUNTERED SOMETHING.



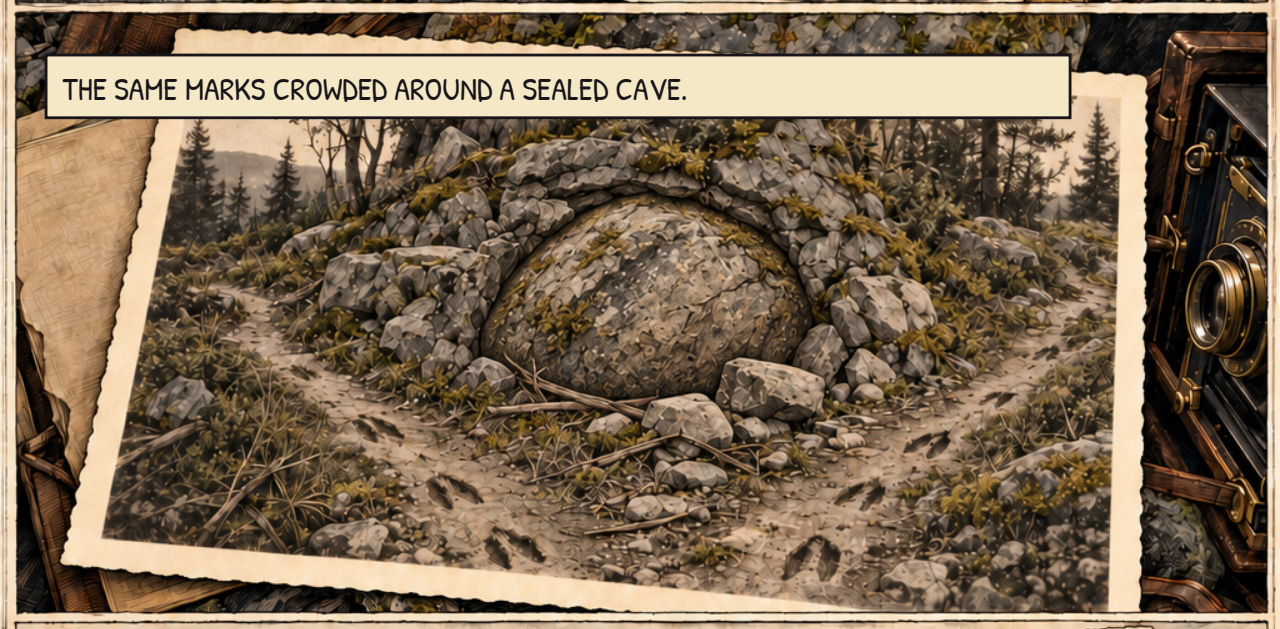
HIS REPLY BROUGHT PHOTOGRAPHS.

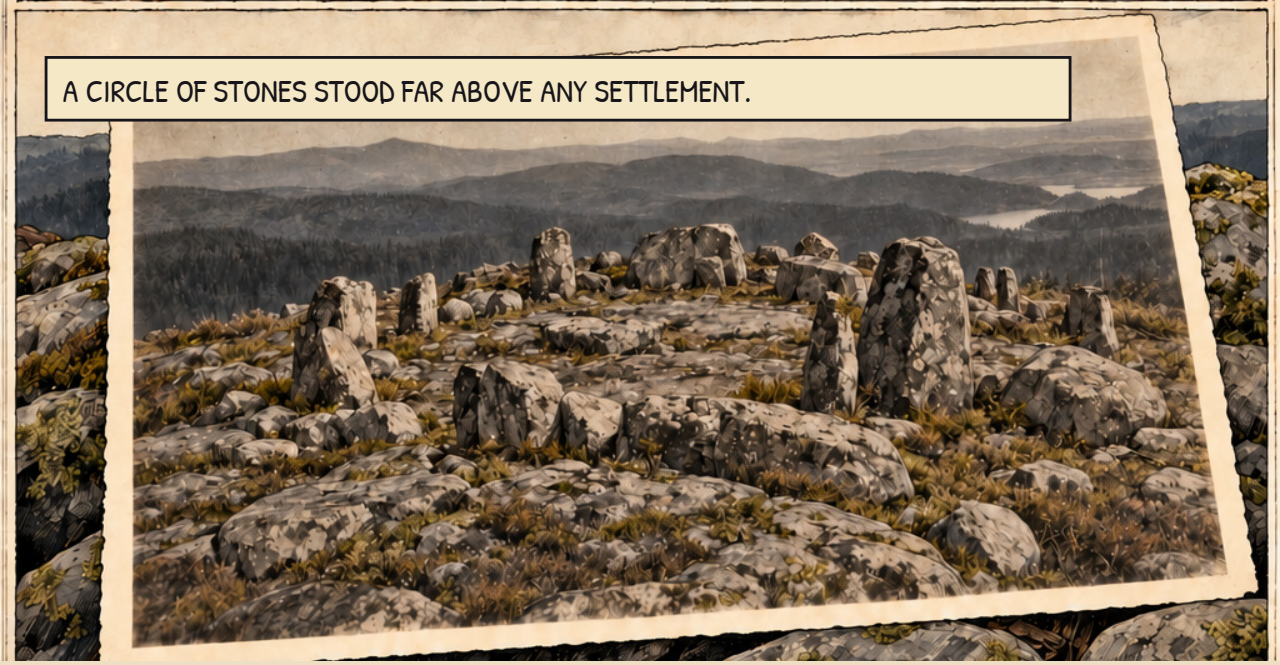


THEY WERE MUCH HARDER TO LAUGH AWAY.




THE PRINT WAS AS LONG AS A MAN'S FOOT, BUT SEEMED TO FACE BOTH DIRECTIONS.


THE SAME MARKS CROWDED AROUND A SEALED CAVE.


A CIRCLE OF STONES STOOD FAR ABOVE ANY SETTLEMENT.

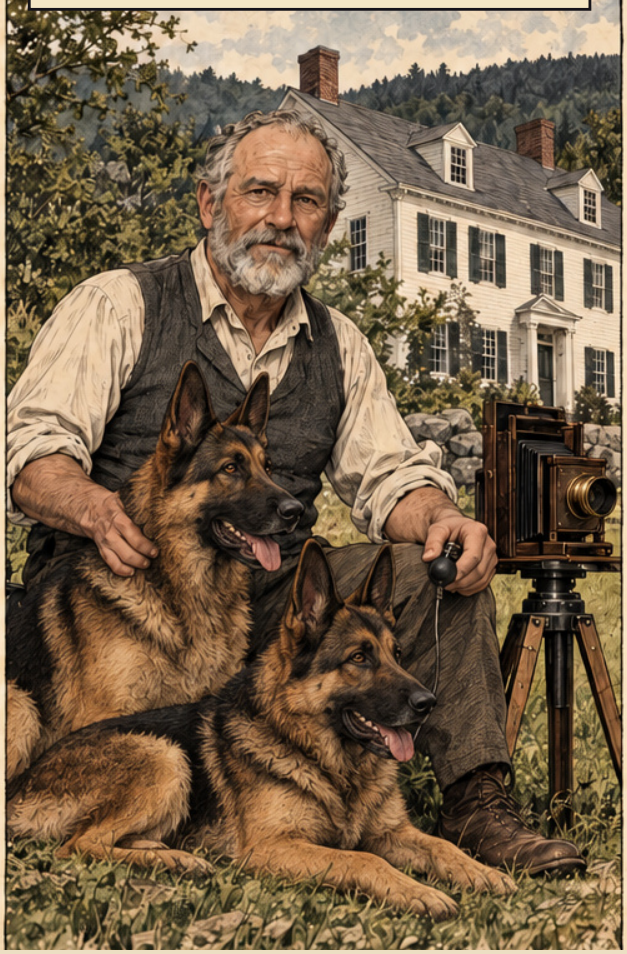
I RECOGNIZED HINTS OF THE STONE'S SYMBOLS IN BOOKS I WISHED I HAD NEVER READ.



YET THE MAN WHO SENT THESE PICTURES WAS CALM, EXACT, AND WILLING TO QUESTION HIMSELF.

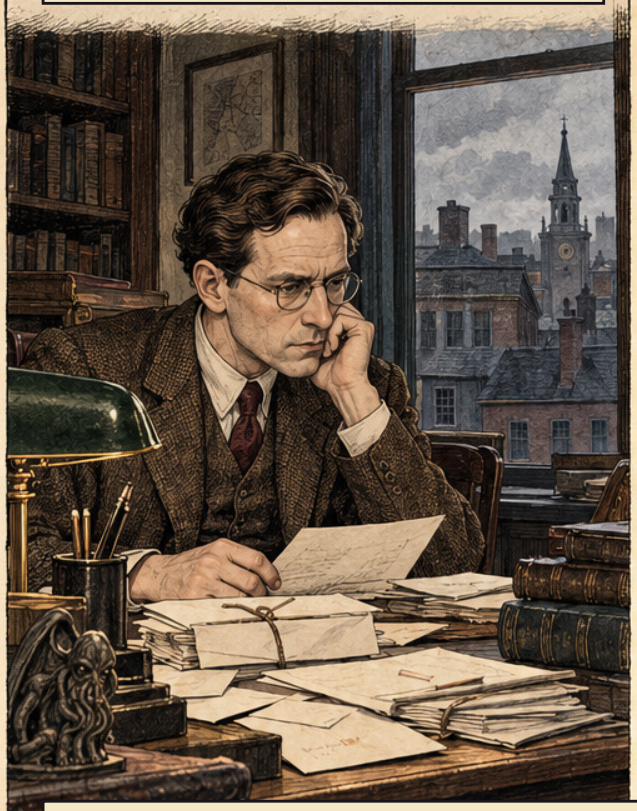


I COULD NO LONGER DISMISS HIM.

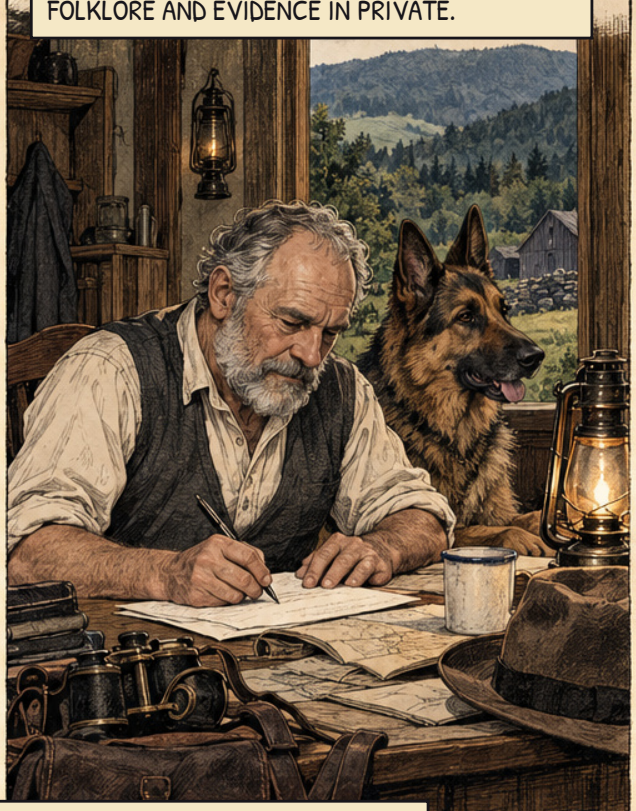



HIS NEXT LETTER JOINED THE LOCAL EVIDENCE TO A TERRIFYING ACCOUNT OF WORLDS BEYOND OURS.
NAMES I KNEW AS FORBIDDEN MYTHS ACQUIRED THE WEIGHT OF PLACES.

I STOPPED THE PUBLIC DEBATE.



THROUGH MAY AND JUNE WE COMPARED FOLKLORE AND EVIDENCE IN PRIVATE.



SOMETIMES LETTERS VANISHED. WE COPIED THEM AND TRIED AGAIN.

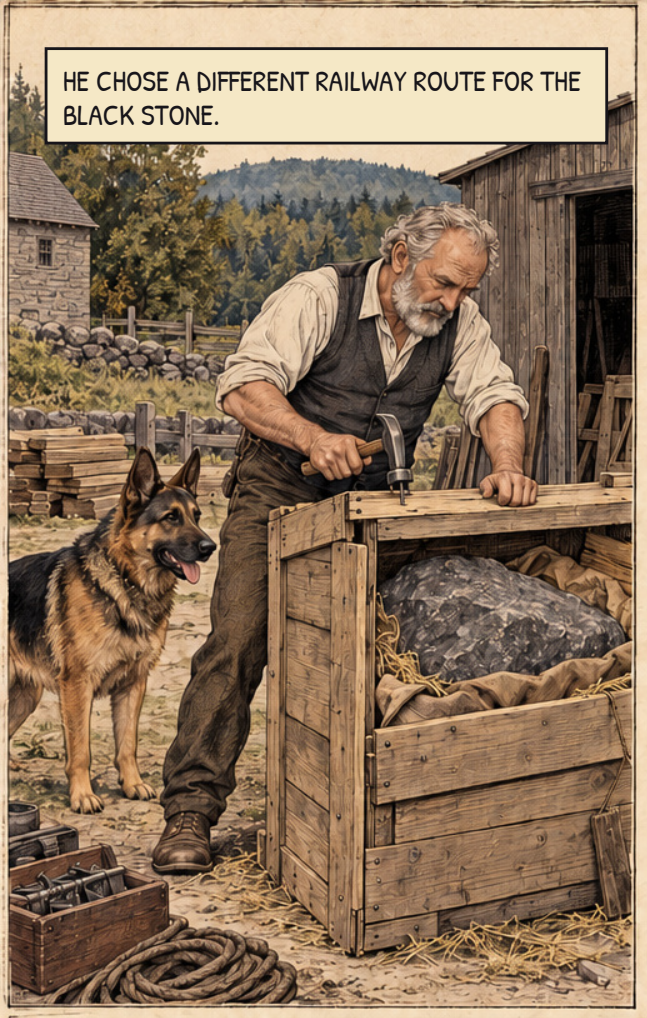



AT THE END OF JUNE, AKELEY SENT THE RECORDING FROM BRATTLEBORO.
HE NO LONGER TRUSTED THE NEARER OFFICES.
I BORROWED A PHONOGRAPH AND PREPARED TO LISTEN.

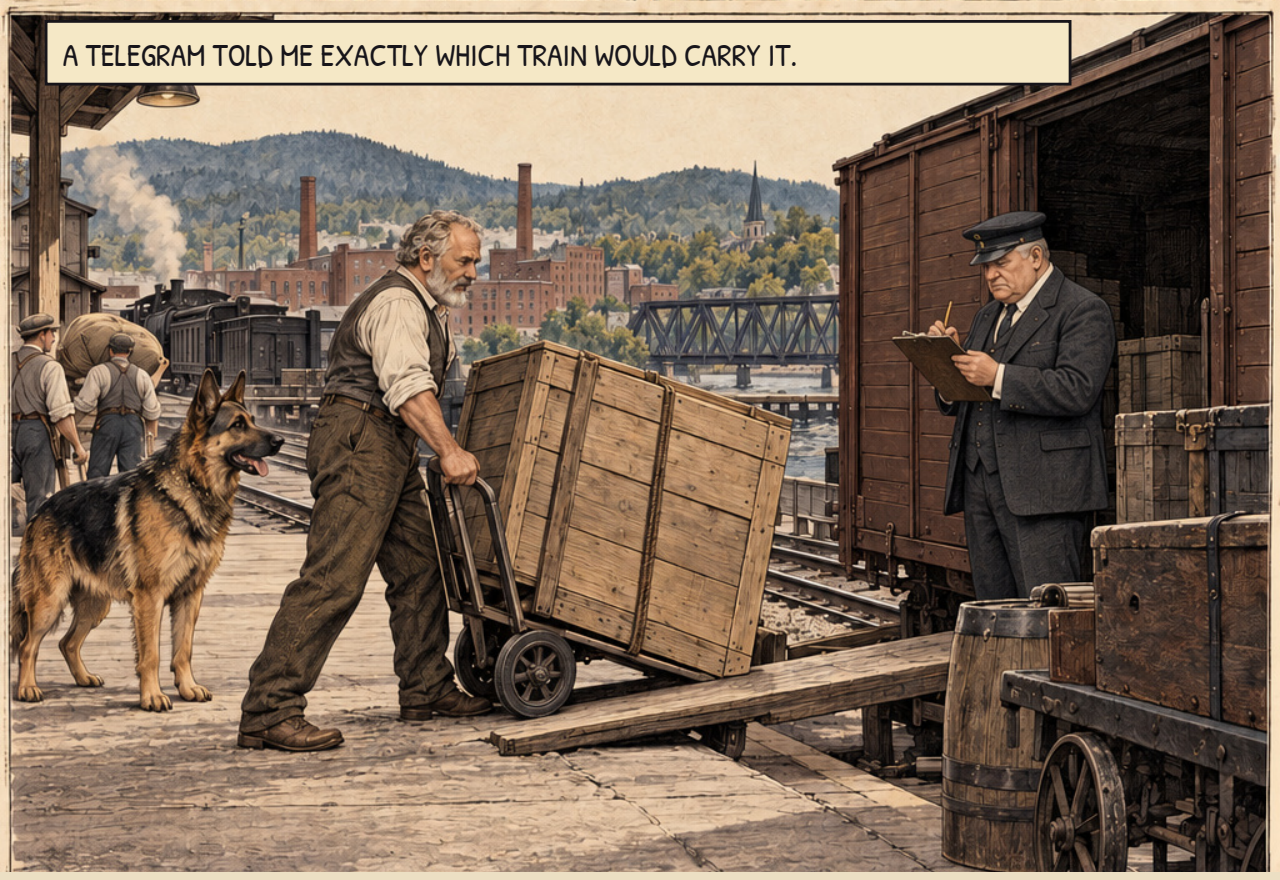

A HUMAN VOICE CAME FIRST: EDUCATED, MEASURED, ALMOST BOSTONIAN.
...SO FROM THE WELLS OF NIGHT TO THE GULFS OF SPACE, AND FROM THE GULFS OF SPACE TO THE WELLS OF NIGHT...


THEN ANOTHER VOICE ANSWERED. AN INSECT-LIKE DRONE SHAPED INTO ARTICULATE WORDS.
IÄ! SHUB-NIGGURATH! THE BLACK GOAT OF THE WOODS WITH A THOUSAND YOUNG!
THE CYLINDER STOPPED. I SAT STARING LONG AFTERWARD.


AKELEY SUSPECTED A LOCAL MAN, WALTER BROWN, OF SERVING THE VISITORS.
BROWN'S FOOTPRINTS HAD BEEN FOUND BESIDE THEIRS.
HUMAN ALLIES MADE THE DANGER HARDER TO RECOGNIZE.


HE CHOSE A DIFFERENT RAILWAY ROUTE FOR THE BLACK STONE.


ON JULY 18, HE DROVE IT TO BELLOWS FALLS.


A TELEGRAM TOLD ME EXACTLY WHICH TRAIN WOULD CARRY IT.


THURSDAY MORNING PASSED. THE CRATE NEVER ARRIVED.
NOTHING FOR YOU, SIR. IT WASN'T ON THE TRAIN WHEN IT REACHED BOSTON.

A CLERK REMEMBERED A STRANGER AT KEENE. HIS THICK, DRONING VOICE HAD MADE HIM STRANGELY DROWSY.

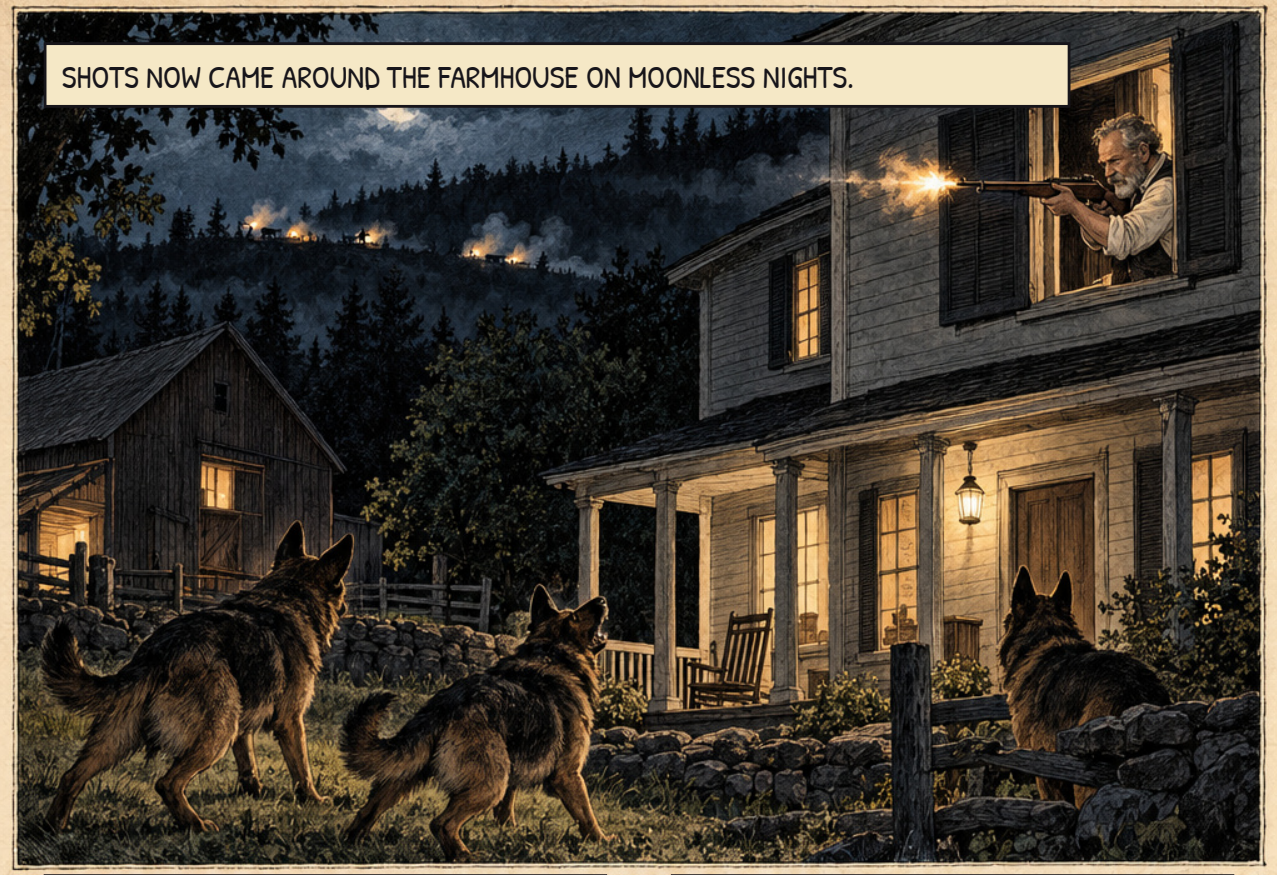


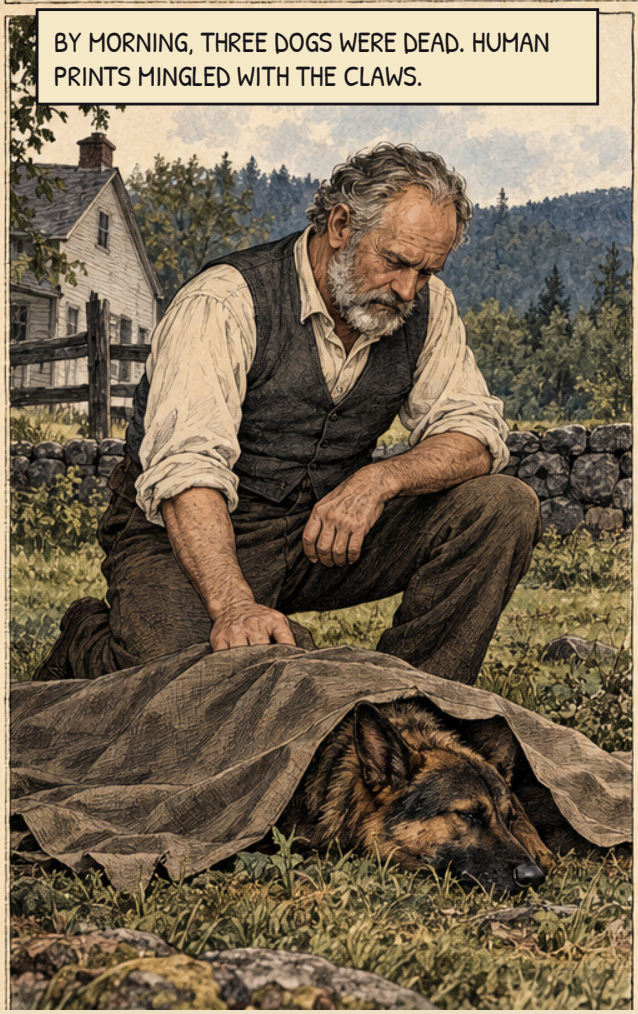


OUR INQUIRIES FOUND NO STONE AND NO TRACE OF THE MAN.




IN AUGUST THE ATTACKS GREW BOLDER.
A TREE BLOCKED AKELEY'S ROAD. HIS DOGS WARNED OF SOMETHING IN THE WOODS.
ON ANOTHER JOURNEY, SOMEONE FIRED AT HIS CAR.


SHOTS NOW CAME AROUND THE FARMHOUSE ON MOONLESS NIGHTS.


BY MORNING, THREE DOGS WERE DEAD. HUMAN PRINTS MINGLED WITH THE CLAWS.


WHEN HE TRIED TO TELEPHONE FOR HELP, THE LINE WENT DEAD.

I OFFERED TO COME AND HELP HIM REACH THE AUTHORITIES.



APPRECIATE YOUR POSITION BUT CAN DO NOTHING... HENRY AKELY



AKELEY HAD SENT NO TELEGRAM. THE STRANGER HAD EVEN MISSPELLED HIS NAME.




FOR A WHILE THE FULL MOON SEEMED TO HOLD THE VISITORS BACK.

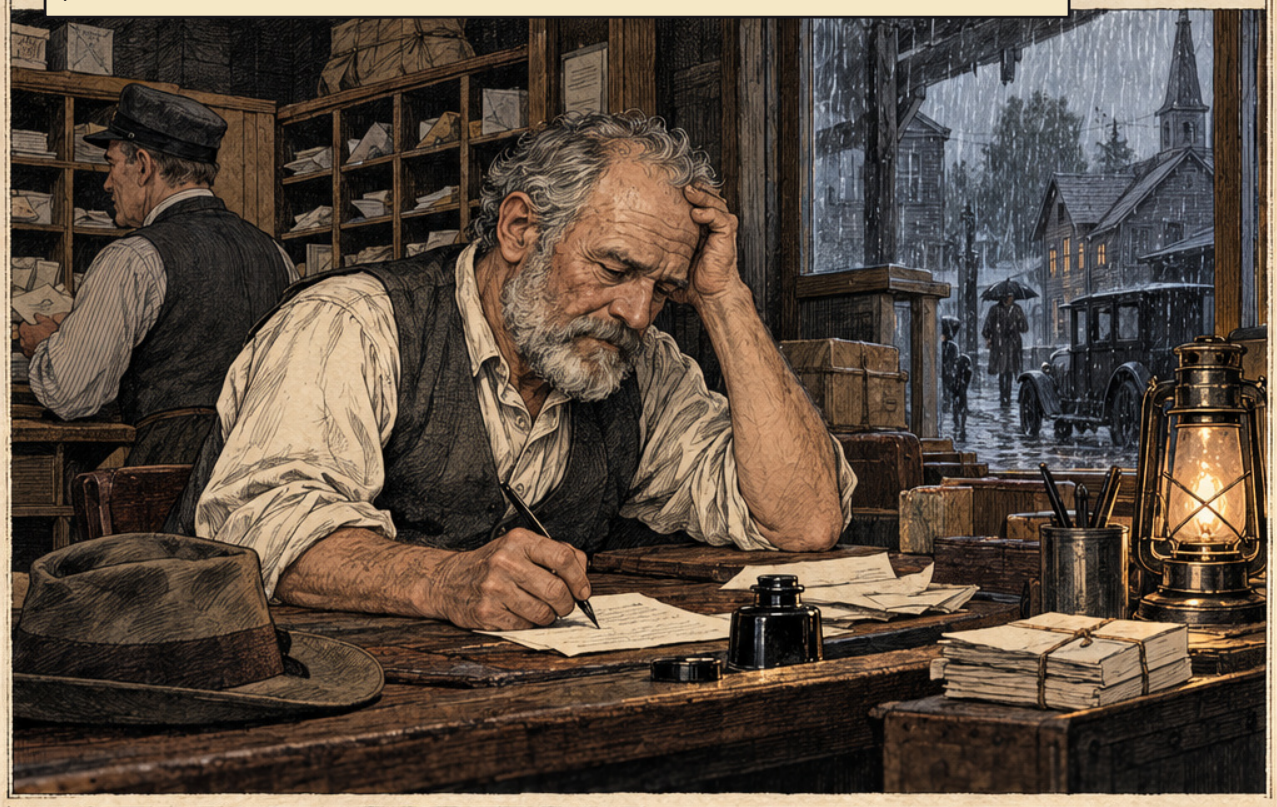

AKELEY SPOKE OF LEAVING. BUT HE WANTED TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO HIS HOME.


THEN THE CLOUDS HID THE MOON.
SOMETHING LANDED ON THE ROOF WHILE SHOTS CAME THROUGH THE WINDOWS.
AT DAWN THERE WAS GREEN SLIME AMONG THE BLOOD. MORE DOGS WERE GONE.


'THEY SPOKE TO ME LAST NIGHT. THEY WANT TO TAKE ME AWAY.'
...NOT ONLY TO YUGGOTH, BUT BEYOND THAT—AWAY OUTSIDE THE GALAXY AND POSSIBLY BEYOND THE LAST CURVED RIM OF SPACE.
'EVEN IN TOWN I FEEL LIKE A PRISONER. SOMETHING STOPS ME FROM ESCAPING.'


'ONE DOG KILLED PART OF A THING. I SAW IT. I TOUCHED IT.'
'I TRIED TO PHOTOGRAPH IT.'
'THE PHOTOGRAPH SHOWED ONLY THE SHED. IN A FEW HOURS THE THING ITSELF HAD VANISHED.'

THIS MAY BE GOODBYE—IF IT IS, WRITE MY SON GEORGE GOODENOUGH AKELEY… BUT DON'T COME UP HERE.



I URGED HIM TO LEAVE AT ONCE. I WOULD BRING THE EVIDENCE AND HELP HIM CONVINCE THE AUTHORITIES.



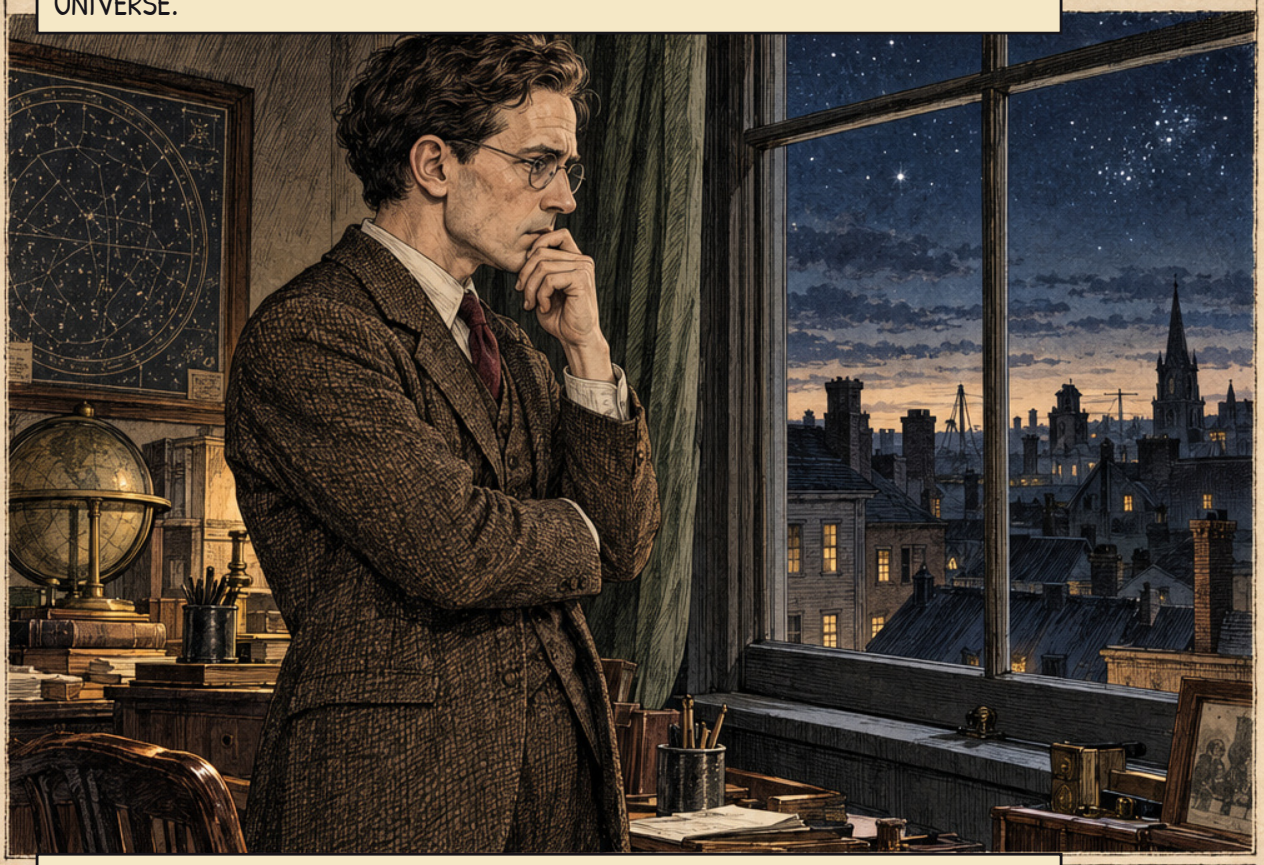

ON SEPTEMBER 8, A VERY DIFFERENT LETTER ARRIVED.
'ALL IS WELL. WE MISUNDERSTOOD THE VISITORS.'
'A HUMAN MESSENGER EXPLAINED EVERYTHING. OUR FEARS WERE FOOLISH.'

THE WORDS, SPELLING, AND RHYTHM SEEMED CHANGED. YET THE THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE WAS FAMILIAR.

'COME TO VISIT. BRING THE RECORD, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND ALL MY LETTERS.'

'TELL NO ONE WHERE YOU ARE GOING.'

THE PROMISE WAS IRRESISTIBLE: CONTACT WITH MINDS FROM OUTSIDE OUR UNIVERSE.



I AGREED TO COME, BUT CHOSE A DAYLIGHT ARRIVAL INSTEAD OF THE SUGGESTED NIGHT TRAIN.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1928.








MR. WILMARTH? MY NAME IS NOYES. AKELEY SENT ME.
AN ATTACK OF ASTHMA, I'M AFRAID. HE STILL INSISTS ON SEEING YOU.
HIS CULTIVATED VOICE SEEMED FAMILIAR. I COULD NOT REMEMBER WHY.


WE FOLLOWED THE WEST RIVER, THEN CLIMBED INTO QUIETER AND STRANGER COUNTRY.
YOU BROUGHT THE SCIENTIFIC MATERIAL, I TRUST?


THE FARM WAS UTTERLY SILENT. NOT ONE DOG BARKED.
THEN I LOOKED AT THE DUST.
I KNEW THOSE PRINTS. I HAD STUDIED THEIR PHOTOGRAPHS FOR HOURS.


THE STUDY IS ON YOUR LEFT. HE MUST KEEP OUT THE LIGHT.


INSIDE, AN ODD SMELL AND A FAINT VIBRATION DISTURBED THE AIR.


A WHISPER DREW ME TOWARD THE FAR CORNER.


FORGIVE ME FOR NOT RISING. YOU BROUGHT THE LETTERS AND THE RECORD?
YES. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU?
NOTHING. TOMORROW I SHALL BE STRONGER. WE HAVE SO MUCH TO DISCUSS.


THERE ARE MIGHTY CITIES ON YUGGOTH—GREAT TIERS OF TERRACED TOWERS BUILT OF BLACK STONE LIKE THE SPECIMEN I TRIED TO SEND YOU.
EARTHLY ASTRONOMERS DO NOT KNOW THAT WORLD YET. SOON THEY WILL.

A MEAL HAD BEEN SET OUT. AKELEY SAID HE COULD EAT NOTHING.

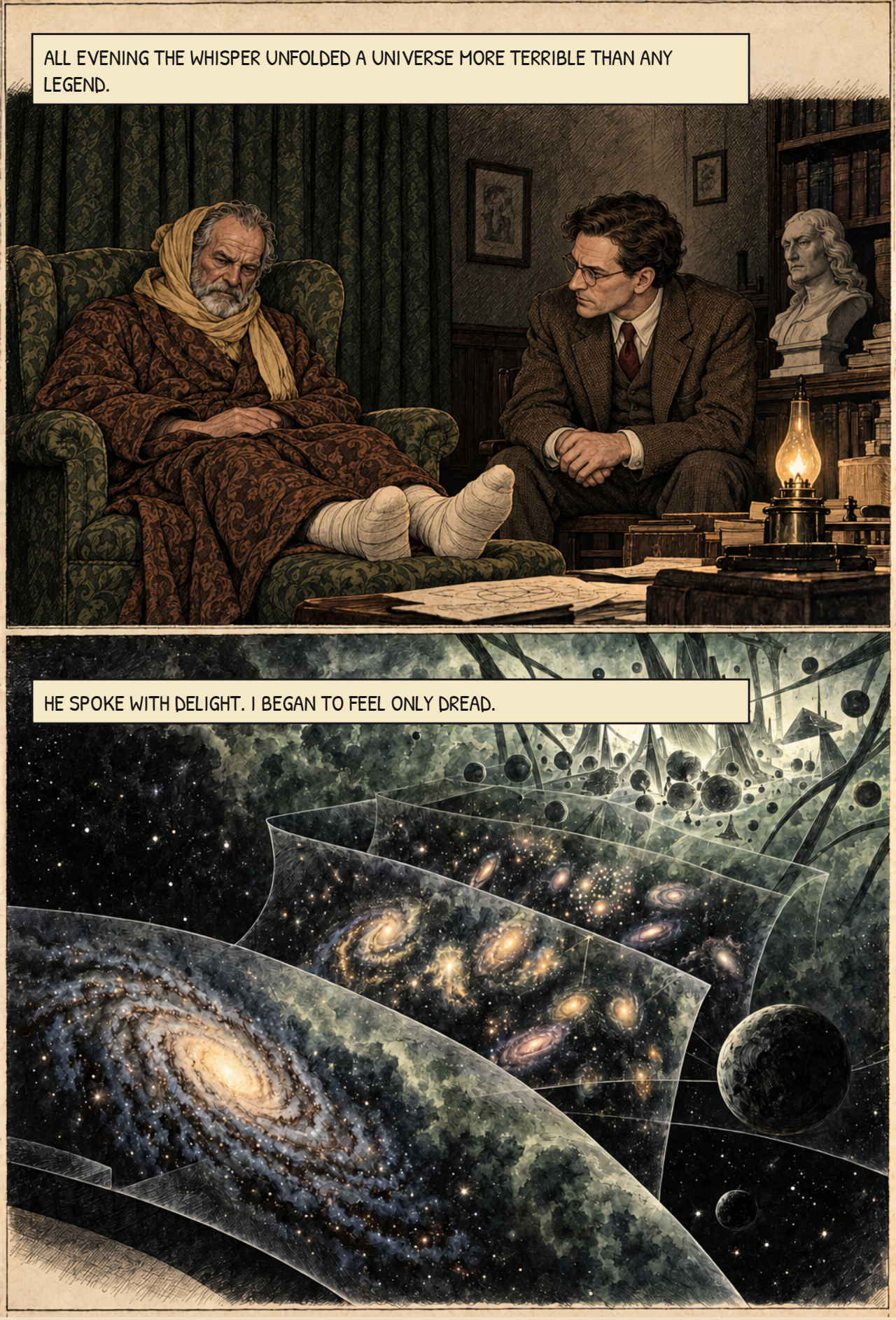


THE COFFEE TASTED ODDLY ACRID.

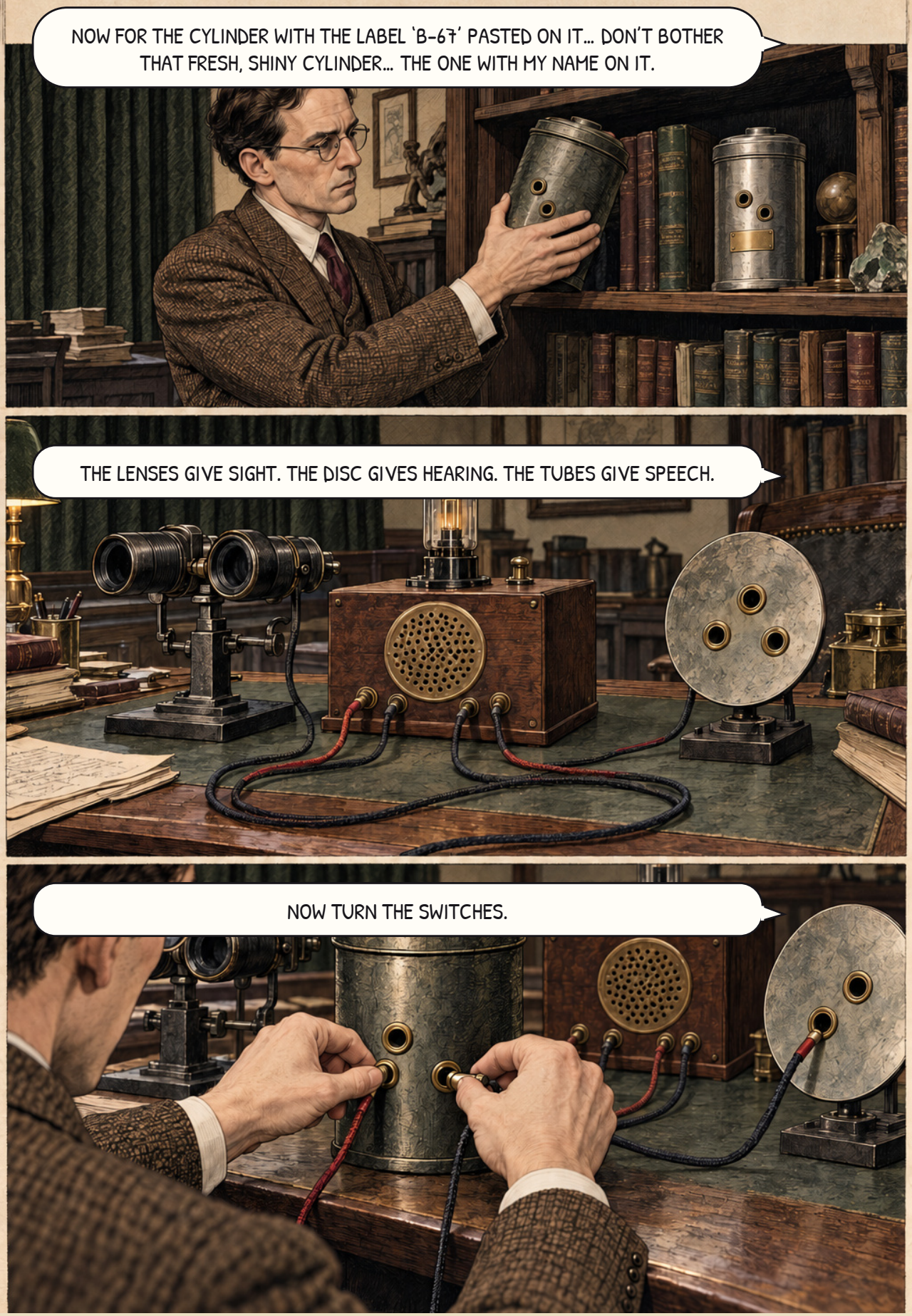


I POURED IT AWAY.




ALL EVENING THE WHISPER UNFOLDED A UNIVERSE MORE TERRIBLE THAN ANY LEGEND.
HE SPOKE WITH DELIGHT. I BEGAN TO FEEL ONLY DREAD.


THE WHOLE BODY CANNOT MAKE THE JOURNEY. THE BRAIN CAN.
THEY PRESERVE IT IN A CYLINDER, WITH INSTRUMENTS FOR SIGHT, HEARING, AND SPEECH.
YOU COULD COME WITH US, WILMARTH.


NOW FOR THE CYLINDER WITH THE LABEL 'B-67' PASTED ON IT... DON'T BOTHER THAT FRESH, SHINY CYLINDER... THE ONE WITH MY NAME ON IT.
THE LENSES GIVE SIGHT. THE DISC GIVES HEARING. THE TUBES GIVE SPEECH.
NOW TURN THE SWITCHES.


I AM A HUMAN BEING LIKE YOURSELF, THOUGH MY BODY IS NOW RESTING SAFELY UNDER PROPER VITALISING TREATMENT INSIDE ROUND HILL...


...I HAVE BEEN ON THIRTY-SEVEN DIFFERENT CELESTIAL BODIES—PLANETS, DARK STARS, AND LESS DEFINABLE OBJECTS...


I HOPE YOU WILL JOIN US. MR. NOYES MAY COME TOO.
YOU RECOGNIZED HIS VOICE ON THE RECORD, OF COURSE?
AT LAST I KNEW WHERE I HAD HEARD HIM.


I WANTED TO LEAVE. INSTEAD I WENT UPSTAIRS, WEAK WITH CONFUSION.
I KEPT MY REVOLVER AND FLASHLIGHT BESIDE ME.
OUTSIDE THERE WERE NO ORDINARY NIGHT SOUNDS. ONLY WATER AMONG THE HILLS.


DESPITE MYSELF, I SLIPPED INTO A TROUBLED SLEEP.
I WOKE TO A CAUTIOUS FUMBLING AT THE LATCH.


VOICES ROSE FROM THE STUDY: TWO BUZZING, ONE MECHANICAL, AND TWO HUMAN.
...LETTERS AND RECORD... FRESH, SHINY CYLINDER...
...WILMARTH... NOYES CAN WATCH...

THERE WAS CLATTERING, A STRANGE FLAPPING, THEN AN AUTOMOBILE LEAVING.



AFTERWARD, SILENCE. AND SOMEONE SNORING DOWNSTAIRS.



I MEANT TO WAKE AKELEY AND PERSUADE HIM TO LEAVE WITH ME.



FOR THE SLEEPER ON THE COUCH WAS NOT AKELEY AT ALL, BUT MY QUONDAM GUIDE NOYES.



I CLOSED THE DOOR QUIETLY.



ON THE TABLE STOOD THE FRESH CYLINDER BEARING AKELEY'S NAME.



LOOKING BACK AT THAT MOMENT, I CAN ONLY REGRET MY TIMIDITY AND WISH THAT I HAD BOLDLY CAUSED THE APPARATUS TO SPEAK.




THE CHAIR WAS EMPTY. THE GOWN LAY IN FOLDS; SCARF AND BANDAGES WERE ON THE FLOOR.
THE SMELL AND VIBRATION WERE GONE.
THEN MY LIGHT RETURNED TO THE SEAT.

I STIFLED A CRY AND FLED.



THE RIDE THAT FOLLOWED WAS A PIECE OF DELIRIUM OUT OF POE OR RIMBAUD OR THE DRAWINGS OF DORÉ, BUT FINALLY I REACHED TOWNSHEND.

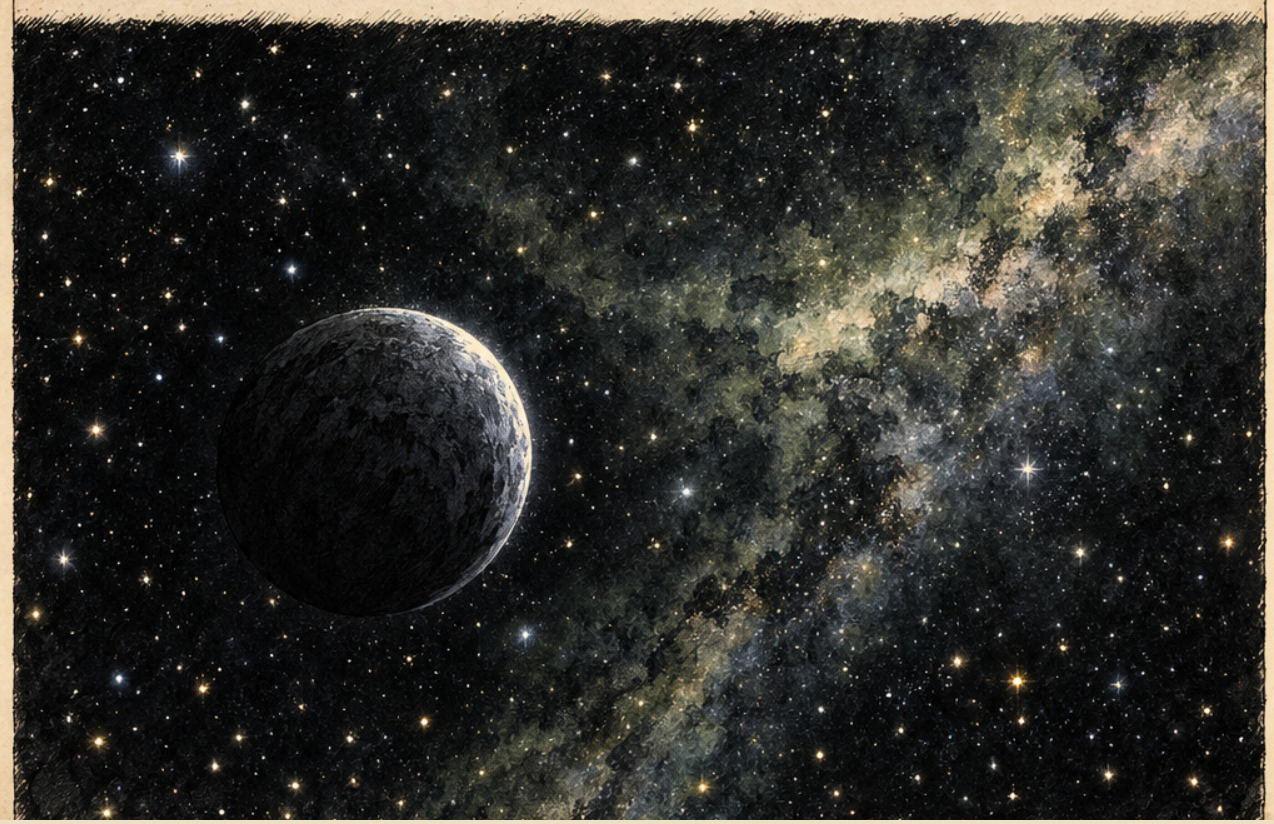



THE SHERIFF FOUND NO AKELEY, NO CYLINDERS, AND NONE OF MY EVIDENCE.
ONLY THE BULLET-HOLES AND THE VANISHED ANIMALS CONFIRMED PART OF THE STORY.
SOME CALLED IT MADNESS. OTHERS REMEMBERED THE SAME TRACKS AND VOICES.

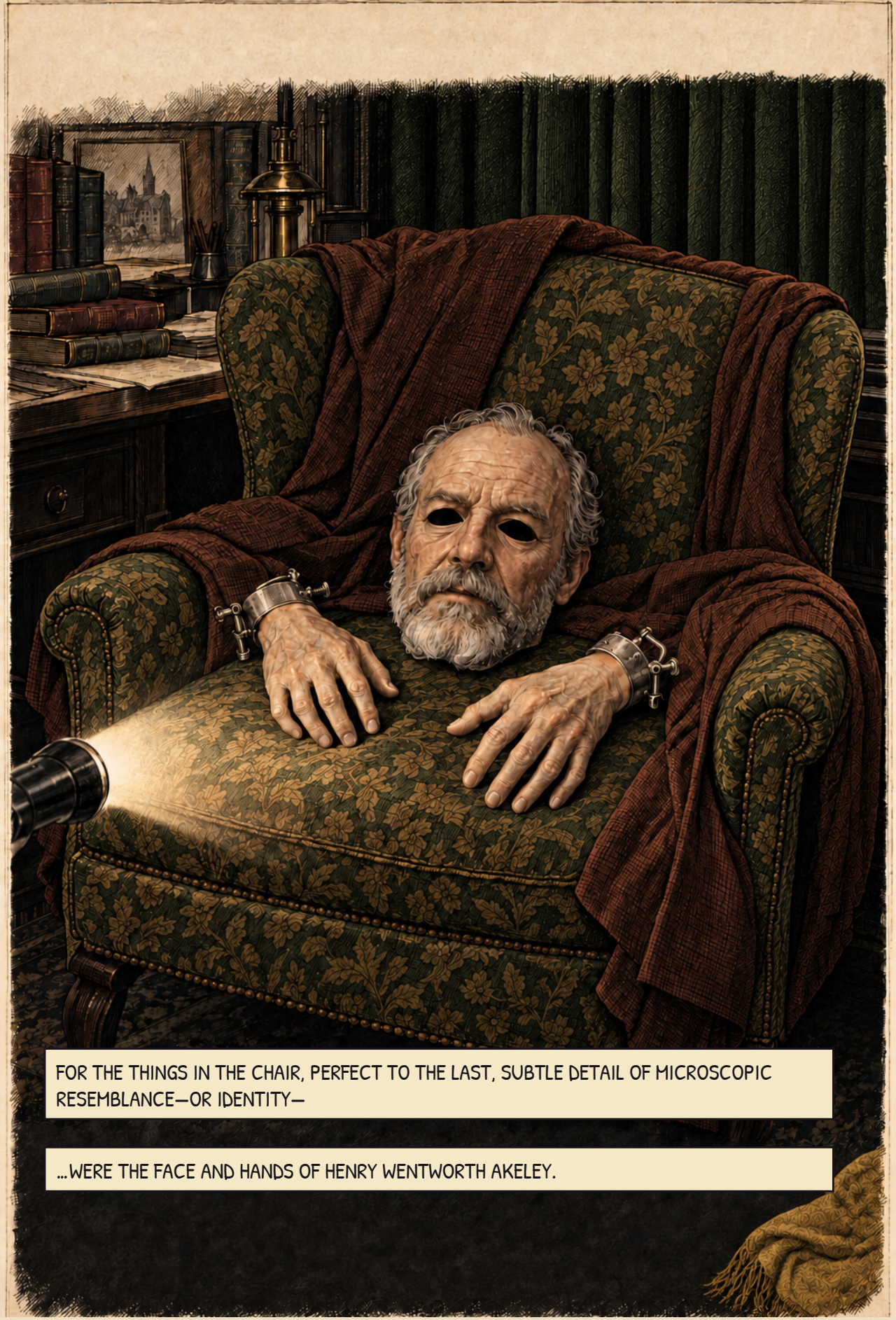
SOMETIMES I FEAR WHAT THE YEARS WILL BRING, ESPECIALLY SINCE THAT NEW PLANET PLUTO HAS BEEN SO CURIOUSLY DISCOVERED.



I COULD NOT STOP THINKING OF THE NAME AKELEY HAD USED: YUGGOTH.




BUT I HAVE NOT TOLD YOU WHAT LAY IN THAT CHAIR.
I HOPE—DEVOUTLY HOPE—THAT THEY WERE THE WAXEN PRODUCTS OF A MASTER ARTIST, DESPITE WHAT MY INMOST FEARS TELL ME.


FOR THE THINGS IN THE CHAIR, PERFECT TO THE LAST, SUBTLE DETAIL OF MICROSCOPIC RESEMBLANCE—OR IDENTITY—
...WERE THE FACE AND HANDS OF HENRY WENTWORTH AKELEY.