

THE MENHIR

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The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far
- Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Notable Asshole

The **Ocean** stretched on in every direction. It had no features, no discernable wildlife, and no end, from what Carter had been able to gather. No wind, either, which is why the surface was so flat. It looked like a great glass mirror, reflecting the pale blue sky back up at itself, making it impossible to distinguish the horizon from the heavens. Looking down at the ancient paddle in his hands, Carter sighed, his breath the only perceptible breeze. He could feel it prickling the hair on his forearms, his skin hungry for stimulus.

This was the twelfth time Carter had been to this place in as many nights. When this had initially started, Carter had spent the whole first night screaming flatly into the hull of the canoe, the salty acrid air refusing to carry his voice out past the circumference of his vessel. He had lay there, face down, willing the canoe not to tip, praying to ancient, nameless, unspecified Gods that he might be delivered from this place, until he had awoken in the morning, drenched with sweat, and still terrified that he had somehow fallen into that endless abyss. He had lain there gasping for a few moments, looking blearily around his room, until it dawned on him what must have happened. He sat there, drenched, and naked, fighting a war with fear over command of his diaphragm, and losing spectacularly. When at last he had his breath under control, he had thrown himself and his covers loose from his bed, and careened down the hallway into his modest kitchen. Throwing the freezer open, he had stood there, naked, peering in at the little white light, as if it might give him some hint as to what the fuck had just happened to him.

Carter had had bad dreams. Everyone did. His were worse than most. But he had never felt the pure unfettered isolation that he had felt while crying in the bottom of that boat. Carter had never loved water. It had started when he was young. He had been reading *Through the Looking Glass*, and had encountered the illustration of the nightmare which Carroll had named the **Jabberwock**. Long and distended, with teeth like a rat, the thing that had bothered Carter the most about the **Jabberwock** was that wrapped around its fat

belly was a man's waistcoat. Carter had originally thought this rather funny and nonsensical, but the more he thought about this waistcoat, the more sinister the implications of it became.

Perhaps the **Jabberwock** had seen a merchant making his way through the swamps, carrying his wares, and it had envied him. Perhaps it had waited there, in the peat bog, until his next pass. Perhaps it had risen up out of the water like some dark leviathan, and struck down the merchant in a fit pique, hoping to lessen its terrible envy. Perhaps, after savaging the corpse of the merchant, the **Jabberwock** had pondered its actions, and their futility. Perhaps it had realized that by consuming the merchant, it had not itself received the characteristics which it so envied. It had not, in fact, become human. And so, perhaps, it had put on the dead man's waistcoat, worn it as a grizzly trophy, in order to convince itself otherwise. And perhaps it waited there still, in the swamps, in the lakes, and in the streams, hoping to find another to consume, so that perhaps, this time, it may feel something different. Perhaps...

Two weeks after this revelation, Carter had been at his uncle's house, swimming in his pool, and he had recalled this line of thinking, and laughed gently to himself. It had been silly, to imagine this fantastic creature in every body of water. It lived through the Looking Glass after all, and not in the backyards of his relatives. There was no way, for example, that the **Jabberwock**, that great serpent, could have been in this pool with him.

Was there?

Carter had scrambled so fast that everything around him became a blur. Suddenly every leaf, every indistinct shape, every furtive shadow, betrayed the presence of that great beast. He clawed his way through the frigid water, bubbles rushing from his mouth as he screamed, finally vaulting himself out of the water, and crawling backwards like a crab before collapsing against the wall of his uncle's house. It was two hours before a member of his family had found him, and by that time, his lips were blue, and his body was shivering.

Since that day, Carter had always hated water, and had utilized every excuse available to him to avoid it. He had managed fairly well so far, citing erroneous inner ear problems, issues with digestion and various disorders of the skin. He had found a solution for the daydreams too, in the forms of alcohol and marijuana. Both brought his imagination down to a happy, manageable level, that didn't show him images of a mangy dragon in a waistcoat.

So, when he had awoken on the second night, back in that **oceanic** expanse, he had wept real tears for the first time since his Mum had died.

And then he had begun paddling.

The first thing Carter had observed about this place was a lack of fish. The water, for all its vastness, seemed to host no life whatsoever. No birds flew

overhead, and no whales swam beneath. He was alone here, save for his canoe. This fact, oddly enough, had not comforted Carter as much as he'd hoped it might.

Carter's second observation was that his first observation was entirely false.

Rising up out of the glassy, immutable surface of The [Ocean](#) was a great black crest. Carter recognized that the mountain probably wasn't much larger than the ones he had grown up near, but the fact that it had no need to compete with anything else on the landscape meant that its vastness seemed to eclipse the world. But there was something not quite natural about it. He felt like its shape was not quite chaotic enough to be natural. He was reminded of his trips to Wales as a child, his visits to ancient pagan places of worship. He remembered too, a word from a book he had read on those same pagan gods. [Menhir](#): An obelisk erected to bring forth some power from the earth. The [Menhir](#), as Carter would begin to call it in his head, didn't loom, so much as sit, patiently, like an anaconda, with its eyes barely breaking the surface of the water, waiting for a momentary lapse of attention on the part of its prey, some imperceptibly brief moment within which to strike. Carter felt sure that under the still water, the tower must be vast beyond human comprehension, a great slumbering monster. He made two resolutions in this moment. The first was to fight his fear of the water, and to use his canoe to approach the [Menhir](#). The second was that he would not take his eyes off of it until he awoke the next morning, just to reassure himself that the thing wasn't moving, breathing. Even now, as he looked at it, he felt he could see it shifting, gently.

After a few hours of hard work, Carter was pulling closer and closer to the [Menhir](#), when suddenly he was awake in his bed. He smiled to himself. If he was going to keep having this dream, at least he had found a way to survive in it.

The next night, something interesting happened. When Carter opened his eyes in his canoe, he found that he was in exactly the same place he had been when he had left the night before. It seemed that the [Ocean](#) paused for him when he wasn't here, and resumed where he had last left it. Again, he had hoped that this knowledge might reassure him, but once again, it failed to do so. It made him feel like this place was alive, despite its complete lack of...anything.

Shaking these doubts from his head, Carter began to drag himself through the mirrored [Ocean](#) in his canoe. He was getting fairly close to the [Menhir](#) now, and could make out what seemed like small spires in the rock, like little turrets and fortifications. It was a primitive village carved straight out of the face of a cliff, nearly uniform with the stone around it.

Despite this, there didn't seem to be anyone living in these little huts or spires. The **Menhir**, like everything else here, was empty. Carter briefly pondered what could have happened to the people who built these structures, if they had even been people at all, but decided this line of questioning was exactly the sort he had conditioned himself not to pursue. The last thing he needed was to panic and flip the boat.

He circumnavigated the jagged rocks surrounding the **Menhir**, and slowly approached it. It was bigger than he had initially thought, but still not as big as it looked. He wondered if perhaps he could find a little outcropping and haul himself up out of the **Ocean**, sit for a while on solid ground. The thought made him smile despite himself. As much as the immersion therapy had helped, he still would much prefer to be on dry land.

However, as he neared the **Menhir**, a feeling caught hold of him like a hand, tugging at the back of his neck. He was filled with a sudden, overwhelming dread. It was that feeling that some might call dream logic. The understanding that, as you walk down a hallway, if you open that one particular door in your dream, the one at the end of the hall, well-lit and inviting, it will be your undoing. You don't know why, and you have no proof, but you know it more deeply than you know yourself.

The **Menhir** was that door for Carter. He knew with perfect certainty that it was...wrong. He knew that must be the reason it was abandoned. The people before him had come to realize this terrible truth, and had gone to test their luck in the mirrored depths of the **Ocean**.

Carter gently turned the boat around, and gingerly edged himself out from the rocky tendrils of the **Menhir**, careful not to tip his boat.

He kept this course until he was roughly three kilometres from the **Menhir**, keeping a circumference just eclipsing the outermost rocky outcropping, and he began to gently circle the **Menhir**, watching it, thinking, and waiting. Then he woke up.

This routine of circling the **Menhir** every night became a sort of a ritual for Carter. Every night, he would lie in bed, preparing himself for another nightly watch. He felt stupid for thinking it, but it seemed to him that he was doing some great cosmic good. By watching over the **Menhir**, he ensured that it would never become unmoored, free from its eternal prison, and free to do as it saw fit. The **Menhir** was Satan in his burning pit, and Carter was the angel tasked with his containment. He had, for the first time in his life, a purpose.

And after two days, he hated this more than anything he had ever experienced.

Why him? Why had he been cursed with this task? Every night, he woke up in the canoe, exhausted and sore, and dreading another ten hours sliding silently through this sunken Tartarus within which he found himself gaoler. And on this, the twelfth night, he found another reason to hate this abyss.

He first became aware of the wave when he realized he could hear something. The first thing he had ever heard in this plane, other than his paddling. It was faint, but it was there. He turned and looked behind him, peering into the distance. Far away, on the opposite side of him from the [Menhir](#), he could see something growing, disrupting the perfect equilibrium between the sky and the [Ocean](#). It was a wave. A titanic leviathan of a wave. It must have been a kilometre high. And while it was approaching slowly, it was approaching. Carter yelped, the size of the colossus briefly flooding his senses, but he caught hold of himself and began to think. Perhaps, if he could get around to the other side of The [Menhir](#), he could use it to block some of the waves. He might still be thrown from his canoe, a thought which terrified him, but he might not be instantly crushed beneath the incredible weight of that mammoth wave.

And so, Carter began paddling.

His arms had gotten stronger during the nearly two weeks he had spent here, rowing himself around the [Menhir](#), so he arrived on the other side of the monolith faster than he had anticipated. He sat there, in his boat, noticing the tiny pull of the undercurrents on his boat, the wave slowly gathering more gallons of sympathetic water to its cause. All that was left to do now was wait. Carter wished more than anything else in his life that he had been given a book to read while he was here, so that he might pass the time better, and as he did so, he woke up.

As Carter milled his way through his work on that thirteenth day, he found himself unable to think of anything other than what he must face tonight when he got home. He kept glancing out of his window, half expecting to see some tremendous wave washing itself through his city, slowly trundling to destroy him and everything he knew beneath its brutal, crushing weight. He shivered, looking down at the papers in front of him, and threw up.

His boss let Carter have the rest of the day off. Apparently, Carter had looked like he was dying of some terrible, archaic disease, like tuberculosis or cholera, and his employer didn't want whatever was leaking out of him to affect his other employees. Carter thanked him and left.

That night, Carter drew himself a bath. Despite all the aspersiones he had cast over water in his life, baths had always held a strong appeal to Carter for reasons he couldn't fully explain. To Carter, baths were all the comfort and warmth of human interaction, without the necessary world and tedium associated with maintaining those relationships. Baths are warm, kind, inviting,

open. They are, in every way except the obvious, the inverse of the [ocean](#) in which he now spent all but his waking hours. Through the years, as Carter had developed his various tools for combatting his imagination and anxieties, baths had proved a potent weapon in that ongoing war. And so, Carter resolved that, if he was going to wade back into his dreams and combat whatever the [Menhir](#) planned to throw at him, he would come armed with his usual defenses.

After rolling a blunt, he went to his liquor cabinet and pulled out the bottle of Dalwhinnie that he had been saving for a special occasion, pouring himself a triple. He looked through his vast library and selected his copy of Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*, an old favourite he kept wrapped in yellow paper. He brought his spoils over to the bath and gently slid himself in, moaning as the warm water enveloped him. It had been months since he had given himself permission to have a bath, and the warm water greeted him like a lover, holding and caressing him. He read his book, smoking his blunt and drinking his scotch, feeling with that false confidence that only liquor can afford one that maybe someone else might take his shift in the [Ocean](#) tonight. Perhaps he had finally earned himself a reprieve after two weeks of hard work. Smiling, he put down his book, and closed his eyes, listening to the musings of Talking Heads playing in his bedroom that drifted down the hall, feeling the bath holding him in its arms...

And suddenly he was in the canoe. He sat there, hearing the wave roar as it drew ever nearer, trying to gauge when it would arrive. Not far off now, Carter suspected, maybe five or ten minutes.

He looked up at the [Menhir](#), and thought about Machen, and his reverence for the ancient worlds that came before us. Of Troglodytic cave people, small and impish. Of great unseen forces that we failed to understand, but to which we gave names like Bacchus and Dionysus, as if they were old friends. Carter wondered if, perhaps, this place he was in now was the origin of these ideas, or at least some part of the land that these myths called home. Perhaps other people been here before him, been witness to the same events he saw now. Perhaps Machen and Lovecraft too had served their terms as guardians of this vast, ancient evil that he now beheld in front of him. If it were true, Carter mused, he felt honoured. Valued in a way that he had never been before. Perhaps this place wasn't so bad after all. Perhaps this is what his life had been building to. Perhaps he would be the one to finally crack the code of this place and understand the [Menhir](#). The [Ocean](#). Perhaps...

And then the wave was upon him. It broke over the crest of the [Menhir](#) like a million white stallions, rampaging down the surface of the rock, wild and unbroken. Carter's last thought before the canoe was destroyed by the water was

how incredibly beautiful it had looked, cresting that great spire of stone, like dawn breaking over the treeline, and bleeding out onto a lake.

And then the water had him. Carter's eyes were shut, he had closed them while trying to brace himself within the boat. He felt the water around him, brackish and salty, and felt himself tumbling down and down into that great expanse beneath him. Realizing he had to act now if he ever hoped to get back to his canoe, Carter opened his eyes.

And then he saw **It**. And Carter understood.

He screamed, the air rushing out of his lungs into the **Ocean**, and the **Ocean** rushing into his lungs.

And he welcomed it.