

The group introduced themselves to each other at Vernon Eldritch's office at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Mass., filled with stock tickers, seismographs, and dozens of other unusual ticking devices that all seemed to be recording something. Eldritch asked them why they decided to follow up on his posting for people interested in pursuing the supernatural: Iris was looking for "that million-dollar shot" that would get her into the big times; Aggie wanted inspiration for her stories; Lil had seen "strange things" in her late-night bootlegging exploits; Val seemed to think there was treasure afoot; and Beez was told by Eldritch he had to come along if he wanted to "pass" Aegyptologie with a D-. Eldritch then told them about large 20'-cubed stones that have started showing up in Centralia, PA, and about the coal mine fires there; then he took to see the odd beastly sculpture that helped spawn this adventure. It matched the photo of a stone statue from the Himalayas, and yet was still warm from being forged (it had not been sculpted).

The team each spent \$20 to take the train to Centralia, where they ran into a "spiritual healer" named Ronan, who didn't want to be photographed for fear of it taking his soul. Ronan didn't care much for the modern attitudes of the group, and told them he was going to Centralia for the May Day celebrations, a very holy time for the largely Irish populace there. The huge book Eldritch had given Aggie was apparently quite engrossing and she could not put it down the entire trip.

Upon arrival at Centralia, they (mostly) tipped the porter and headed off to Anna Bloom's where Julius Etherton, one of Eldritch's Omega Gamma Omega students was housed. Iris took several photographs both on the train and at the station. Anna's house had some odd photographs which immediately got Iris' attention, and Anna's daughter Brava was busy at work making tea and dinner for the new guests. Anna reluctantly told of her husband's demise years ago in the mines, but did not go into detail, nor about the reason she'd cut her father out of the family photograph. Julius was in a very bad state, but Aggie managed to comfort him quite well such that he felt ready to eat with everyone else; then Aggie proceeded to help Brava in the kitchen, where she improved the meal significantly. Julius had been concerned that he'd seen things "shifting" outside but when pressed to explain himself, it seemed he might have just been a city boy scared of the rural nights. Julius and Beez seemed at complete opposite ends of the studious spectrum and Anna felt poorly about rooming them together (as did Julius). After some negotiation, Anna allowed the team to hire Brava for fifty cents a day, giving \$2 up front, although Brava's skills seemed limited to cooking, cleaning, horse riding, and--oddly enough--lockpicking. Aggie went off to sleep, but having only 2% of the large book to go, could not put it down that evening. Iris decided to sleep as well, thinking it better to scope out the territory the next day, but Beez, Val, and Lil decided to hoof it into town to find out some more information.

On the way, Val spotted a deer path that crossed the road, but noticed recent footprints (shoes) had passed along the trail. She amateurishly tried to follow but soon, for fear of getting lost, went back to the road and into town. Beez used his urban knowledge to locate a "spotter" for

the local speakeasy, really just someone's basement accessible by the storm doors. The spotter managed to upset Val's sensibilities, but not so much that she wouldn't patronize the establishment. There the gregarious barkeep informed them they had "whiskey, gin, and sawtooth," although when they'd order he'd ask if they'd had it before, and regardless would indicate that "it's not anything like that." The provenance of the booze seemed to involve having fallen off a truck, or having been made locally, and although the "whiskey" and "gin" didn't work out so well, the sawtooth went down quite well and Lil tried to get some family business going. She also looked for possible pickpocket targets, and found Boss Flannery, the foreman of the mines, surrounded by heavies. He bought her and the others drinks and offered them room 32 at the Palace, the small hotel in the same building. He told them the fires were started by ruffians from the workforce who were lobbying for better wages, and was astounded that they wanted to be paid for their days off for the May Day/Bealtaine celebrations. No one they had talked to expressed much concern about the great stones that had been appearing, which seemed odd to everybody.

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Val didn't feel too good after having some of the Sawtooth, so she headed up to room 32 at the palace, which was just upstairs in the same building: a brick building but with a rickety interior. The room itself was the top floor of the building, with two small beds and a few chairs and a pot-belly stove fired with coal. Lil and Beez were introduced by Boss Flannery to Raffy, who they were told was a man who would do various jobs for Flannery that others wouldn't do--Lil suspected this meant he was a hit man, but it really meant that for the most part he would be a scab and work when unions and such were on strike.

Back at the Bloom residence, Iris heard something creeping about, and heard a shriek from Julian's room. She rushed in to find him transfixed, apoplexical from having heard something outside as well. She looked and saw a recently made path in the bramble of the woods by the house. Not wanting to pass up a good story, she calmed Julian and dragged him downstairs, where Brava kept them from waking Anna, as Brava wanted to venture out as well (something Anna would never allow). They gathered their things and went in search of a path. Julian investigated the scene but found nothing; Iris then just started walking down the path. After a while they became disoriented and heard rustling ahead--a couple of eyes peered at them. Iris snapped a photo and found that the creature that faced them was a wolf--and it charged! Julius immediately high-tailed it into the night. Brava ran up to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Iris, grabbing a large stick along the way. The wolf bit Iris, who attempted to climb up a nearby tree, but the branch crashed down along with Iris back to the ground. The wolf then mauled Brava's left arm, leaving her screaming in pain. As the wolf reared to take down Iris, a man wielding a stone in one hand and a large cross in the other shouted, drawing the attention of the hairy beast. He hurled a stone its way, distracting it from the women, and as it reached him it took a bite at him--missing. As its head passed by he gave it a massive whack with his cross, knocking it quite flatly upon the ground--dead. He whistled and two more men appeared, all of them wearing clothes that looked rather antiquated and worn--the other men were wielding crossbows. They also had each blackened their faces with coal.

After a little struggle, the three men picked up Brava and hauled her to the Bloom house--clearly they knew their way about the woods. Iris called for Julius as she followed the men, but heard nothing in return. The man with the bloodied cross knocked on Anna's door, and Anna soon cracked it open and shuddered as she saw her daughter limp and bloodied in the men's arms. Aggie masterfully cleared the dining room table and the men laid Brava on it. Anna was exasperated and chastised Iris for having brought all their city wickedness into her home, and demanded to know what Iris and her daughter had been doing in the woods with the men. Aggie called up to Julius' room to see if he was around--he had not made it back. After Anna made some more indignant remarks toward the men, they left, leaving many questions. Anna then indicated that the men were somewhat un-Christian and began praying, and asked Aggie to pray with her.

What happened next was beyond the comprehension of all...but as Aggie mumbled words she thought were heavenly and righteous, a massive explosion of flame erupted in the corner of the house right behind them, as if the very maw of Hell itself had opened. Aggie and Anna both broke out of their genuflection to avoid the blast, and turning back noticed that a large creature stood in the middle of this inferno, human in stance but bulky and burning, as brilliant as the hottest coals when under the bellows. It had large bulbous eyes, fearsome claws tipped with licks of flame, and a curious plate on its forehead that captivated Iris' imagination. The beast moved without regard to the house's occupants, and moved to the kitchen, all about it taking to flame. In the kitchen it crashed an arm through the sink and causing a great steam as it melted the piping. Anna threw her bible at the monster, but only saw it incinerate before it could hit its target. She then threw her rosary at it as well, with similar effect. Iris and Aggie dragged Brava from the wreckage and called for Anna to follow them. The creature seemed uninterested in their actions and began to wander off into the forest. Iris, outside the house, tried to abet the blaze with a bucket of water from a hand water pump, but to no avail. The women now watched as Anna's house burnt almost entirely down to the ground, the only parts standing being the chimney.

Soon the men who had carried Brava returned. Anna, distraught, had no words for the men. Iris started to question who they were, and the man with the bloody cross said his name was Clog, and that his people were of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an old organization reaching back to Ireland, and they recognized many forces outside the Christian religious canon. Iris asked about the creature they'd just seen, and Clog told them of the legend of the Faces in the Coal, told by Indians from the area, who said that in the days before mining, lightning would sometimes strike the coal seams that were exposed on the ridge overlooking the town, and as the fires burned, the stones would come alive and figures would form and walk about the ridge. As the rains fell, the figures would return to the stone, the last thing visible of them their fiery visage as they kneeled and became as stone again.

Many years ago, Anna's husband had been a coal worker, and an accidental fire had caught in one of the seams. He went to survey the damage, and described a creature much as they had just seen in Anna's house. He "fought" the creature by trying to douse it, but in doing so had

scalded himself horribly, and succumbed to his wounds two miserable days later. However, that had been the last of the monsters until just a few weeks ago, when, after a fire set by the unionists, the creatures had apparently been awoken again. Since then, they have been placing large stones in a configuration baffling to the Hibernians, presumably building the foundations of something on a massive scale. The Order has done nothing to investigate or stop these actions, as it appears that these are forces that surpass human understanding, or even God's will. Clog then offered to guide the women to the city to join the others. They got to the Palace and woke the others to tell them of their findings. Everyone was pretty sleepy and tried to get some shuteye, since it was already 5 in the morning. Most were successful in sleeping in, except for Beez and Iris, who got up when the May Day parade began marching around the block. Beez went out to get some coffee and Iris took some pictures as well. The May Day celebration was extensive...there were mummers plays, jugglers...everyone in the town was involved somehow. Later on Raffy tried to buy some explosives from Mr. McCabe, but he would have none of it, didn't want to deal with a "scab" when his shop was closed.

The team finally grouped and decided to go to the mine, which was closed due to the celebrations. After a half-hour walk they reached the entrance, where they were greeted by a lone guard, who recognized Raffy and had been told that Flannery wanted him to investigate the mine fires. He was confused as to the rest of the group's presence, but didn't really question anything. He gave Beez a flaskful of his "whiskey," and when Beez took a heavy swig he got pretty excited...was ready to bring the fight to whatever lay in the mine. Immediately inside the mine were various tools; Beez took one of the electric jackhammers and blasted a B-shaped hole through the boards that were blocking off the older area, where the fires were raging. They found beyond the boards another room full of older equipment, including dynamite, and divided the goods among themselves. Iris noticed that indeed the far end of the room showed some light beyond it, and peeking around the corner she spied three of the creatures she'd seen at Anna Bloom's house the night before. They were slowly and mechanically trudging through the fire in the seam, and seemed to be gathering materials and constructing one of the massive 20-foot cubes that had been described by Eldritch.

Based on their conversations with Clog, they figured they could use the underground slurry pool for the mine to "extinguish" the monsters. On the far left of the large room the creatures were in was a small dam holding the slurry pool back. Raffy grabbed one of the bundles of dynamite and went around a back way to the edge of the slurry pool, on the top side of the small ten-foot dam, then decided to jump to the dam to try to set an explosive charge. He missed and fell to the foot of the dam, now inside the same large chamber as the monsters. They immediately saw him and charged. They were slow, lumbering creatures, although sometimes they would burrow into the ground, and seemed to travel faster when burrowing. He was somewhat invigorated when he saw his challengers, and expertly placed the explosives at the base of the dam, then ran away. The fiery creatures still charging, the dam blew and a conic blast of water began to flush out. Iris and Lily came through the old supply room; Iris of course took a picture of the creatures; Lily tried to take out one of the foes with a fiery bomb--it seemed to do nothing.

Beez, in the meantime, tried to blast his way through a small crack that led to the midpoint of the large room. He wasn't terribly successful, except in cracking it a little more open, and hurting himself a bit, but that didn't stop him from trying again. One of the hellish beasts dumbly stepped into the stream of water and began to freeze into stone. Seeing that the others were distracted by Lily and Iris, Raffy concocted a makeshift pipe bomb out of his oil lantern and a flashlight...however, in trying to throw it he realized he'd screwed part of his shirt into the shaft of the flashlight...so it exploded with him dead-center. He was horrifically damaged from the blast, but his hearing was pretty bad to begin with. Beez finally broke through and dragged Raffy's burning body through the hole to seeming safety. One of the creatures tried desperately to get through the small hole, while a smarter one burrowed to meet Beez on the other side and took a swipe at him with his fiery claws. Beez then had a relatively brilliant idea...he got away from the beast and slogged over to the far side of the nearby elevator, dropping Raffy off by the control buttons. He grabbed onto the side of the cart and gestured crudely to the demon. The demon rushed and swiped uselessly at Beez, then started to smolder through the bottom of the wood elevator. Raffy hit the Down button, but the creature had already burnt through. Beez deftly jumped up to the elevator shaft rafter and hung there as he watched the beast fall far down the shaft, the flaming elevator cart slowly following. Then he carefully walked his hands across the beam to safety. Iris and Lily had by this time run about to the edge of the slurry pond, grabbing buckets of water, while Aggie began fervently praying, much to the dismay of her comrades. Iris then reached the edge of the busted dam, and put down her bucket and jumped into the heavy flow, but even without any knowledge of swimming expertly landed on the other side of the water blast from the last creature, then beckoned it to her. It dumbly followed on foot, walking into the slurry river, where it quickly became doused. As it started to seize up, Iris got the strange impulse to remove the head plate and bulbous eye caps, which she expertly did. The creature's body then closed up and turned to stone, indistinguishable from normal rock except for a distinctive oval shape and slight scaled texture.

The team, having defeated the creatures, followed up by taking a few pictures, and trying to blow up the "stones" that had once been alive. When doing so, the rocks simply blasted. The cavern then became too steamy and gaseous from the slurry passing over the hot coals, and they had to retreat. They caught the train back to Boston later that day, and as they passed a few miles out of town they could see the old ridge Clog had spoken of from the Indian tales, and in front of that lay a field filled with many large stones--each in a distinctive oval shape and scaled texture. The coal fires were far from here; but just before the train turned a corner and began to accelerate down the valley, Iris glimpsed at the last moment the figure of Julius, sitting atop one of the stones, casually lighting a cigarette.