

ABSINTHE—The Color Out of Space:

A Modern Update on H.P. Lovecraft's *The Colour Out of Space*

Rewritten by T. Christopher Kurth (Last Edited 12/10/22)

“Here is a totally different story that we can highly recommend to you. We could wax rhapsodically in our praise, as the story is one of the finest pieces of literature it has been our good fortune to read... You will not regret having read this marvelous tale.” —*Amazing Stories* (1927)

Ted Bayou = Theodorus Chimeric Bayou was born in New Orleans, in 1965. Ted is a botanist, research chemist, and international absinthe expert. He founded his own line of **Absinthe Liqueur** at a family distillery in **Pontarlier**, France (in 2000). Ted also assisted Viridis Liquors in gaining approval for the first legally imported absinthe to the United States (in 2007). Ted grew up in New Orleans, where he had heard legends about Etienne-Laurent de Marigny, but had never met him. Ted was educated at Harvard, but afterwards he moved back to New Orleans. His career as a chemist includes important work in paleobotany. When his home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina (in 2005), Ted relocated. He now grows specimen plants and medical herbs in his backyard and continues to investigate and promote absinthe around the world. He is the person actually telling this tale—from a first-person perspective—in a valiant attempt to uncover the dark secret behind the original ‘Swiss Absinthe Ban’ of 1910.

Etienne = Etienne-Laurent de Marigny claims to be over 130-years old and is (without a doubt) one of the most remarkable philosophers of the 20th century. *“De Marigny is possibly the most famous mystic, mathematician, and orientalist”* of his day, but he is now so old that many of his contributions have been forgotten—*C’est la vie* (such is life). Among the many important individuals to have made his acquaintance, he was an especially close friend to the controversial explorer **Randolph Carter**. Though, Etienne claimed that it was actually **John Coltrane**, that famous jazz musician and saxophonist, who forever changed the course of his life. In his early thirties, already an expert in Eastern antiquities, Etienne became internationally known for his masterful translation of the **Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan**—the precursor text to the **Bardo Thodol**—better-known to the world as the **Tibetan Book of the Dead**. However, Etienne has always been a secretive man and, except for occasional speaking engagements, nowadays he’s nearly a recluse. As an old widower, he lives alone in a famous historical home—the **Villa Diodati**—located next-door to **The Bodmer Library** in Cologny, Switzerland. Today, he spends his time consulting with **The Imaginarium Foundation**—*“A think tank from Switzerland that does experimental research on new ways of thinking and the power of the imagination. They hold dear a belief in human potential and seek progress in all directions. The small clandestine team is headed up by the mysterious ‘Director,’ a 70-something uber-intellectual, whose father founded the Futurist movement.”* However, some people strongly suspect that this mysterious ‘director’ is Etienne, himself. Among the youth, it is rumored that Etienne is actually the real-life basis for that British science fiction hero known as *Dr. Who*? It is Etienne who—in this crucial narrative—relates his own personal experiences (during a fateful meeting with Ted Bayou) regarding the personal character of Jean Lanfray and his much-maligned absinthe distillery—namely, that long-forgotten house and farmland located in the ancient village of Commugny, about 13-miles (or 21-kilometers) northeast of Geneva Switzerland.

Jean Lanfray = Jean Nahum Lanfray was a popular **absinteur** and head of **Lanfray House & Distillery**. Due to a government sponsored cover-up, Jean was framed for “murdering” his entire family and then taking his own life afterwards. Etienne however, claims that this cover story was entirely fabricated. And he should know, since he was an unanticipated witness to these tragic events. The following narrative—and Etienne’s testimonial—claims to be the strange but *true* story of what really happened.

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— PART I —

Switzerland—The Swiss Alps, Lac Lemman, & City of Geneva:

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East of **Chamonix** the **Alps** rise awesome and wild—and within **Switzerland**, there are deep forested valleys that no axe has ever cut. And within these mountainous woodlands, there are shadowy glens where the trees slope fantastically, and where thin brooklets trickle without ever having caught a glint of sunlight. On the gentler slopes of Gallic **Romandy** there are houses and farms, ancient and rocky, with quaint moss-covered villas quietly brooding as they overlook primordial **Lac Lemman**. And like that ancient City of **Geneva**, some of these charming Swiss villas conceal profound secrets under the lee of majestic chalets and lofty peaks. Nevertheless, the village of Commugny lies vacant now—with chimneys crumbling and its picturesque eaves bulging perilously beneath heavy, snow-laden gables.

The Strange Village of Commugny:

Nowadays, Swiss folk actively avoid **Commugny**—and foreigners do not like to visit there either. The **French** have tried it, the **Italians** have tried it, ancient **Romans** have tried it—and doubtless, the prehistoric Celts have long since come and gone. It's not because of anything that can be seen or heard or handled, but because of something that is imagined. To be sure, the place is not good for the imagination, and does not bring restful dreams at night. It must be this impression which keeps the foreigners away, for old Etienne has never revealed all the gruesome details of what he recalls from those strange days back in 1905.

An Eccentric Mathematician—Etienne-Laurent de Marigny:

A lonely scientist and erudite mathematician by the name of **Etienne**—whose head has been a bit peculiar for years now—is the only one who still visits or who even talks about those strange days at the close of the **Belle Époque**. And, he dares to do this because he is an aged and notoriously eccentric man, living within the **Villa Diodati**—that infamous house also known as “Frankenstein's Castle”—namely, so near the scenic shores and travelled lanes of **Lac Lemman**.

Montreux—Jazz Metropolis & Origin of the Famous 'Absinthe Ritual':

Near this famed lake, there was once a popular road over the hills and through the valleys, known as the Route de Genève, that ran straight from **Montreux** to where that infamous blasted heath is now—for the owner of that place was a renowned **Absinteur** and a much sought-after distiller of fine **Absinthe liquor**. Indeed, some people in the region claim that the celebrated **Absinthe Ritual**—whereby one slowly pours this verdant liquid over a silver spoon supporting a sugar cube—actually originated in **Montreux**. And indeed, as I participated in this enduring ritual, *“It felt like I was picking up a green Absinthe bottle and holding it up to my eye and looking at culture through a lens.”* (Barnaby Conrad III) Regardless of the truth of this proud boast, Absinthe definitely proved to be the most popular drink during Europe's famous **Belle Époque** (a sort of early European version of America's Jazz Age). However, today—although Absinthe is finally making a comeback—this lakeside metropolis is best remembered for its internationally renowned **Montreux Jazz Festival** (held annually, in July).

Commugny Distillery & The Famous 'Absinthe Trail':

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However, long ago people ceased to travel to the notorious **Lanfray House & Distillery** and a modern road was laid curving far north and west of this place. Traces of the old "Absinthe Trail" can still be found amidst the weeds of a returning wilderness, and some of them will doubtless linger even when half the hollows are flooded around the villages of **Commugny** and **Coppet**—that is, for the new highland reservoir planned to drain directly into **Lake Geneva** (known by locals as **Lac Lemman**). Then, these dark woodlands will finally be cut down and the blasted heath will slumber far below blue waters—whose surface will mirror the sky and ripple in the dancing sunlight, as Alpine ice melts into that famous lake—surrounding the **castle** of **Chillon**, forever separating it from Montreux's scenic shoreline. Thenceforth, the secrets of those strange days will finally be one with the lake's secrets—one with the hidden lore of infinite space, and all the mysteries of primordial earth.

Les Diablerets Ski Village, Collegiate Bars, & the Bohemian 'Fire Ritual':

Later, I ventured into the mountainous hills and vales of the **Swiss Alps**, well beyond the lakeside town of Montreux—driving up to the alpine village of **Les Diablerets**—in order to partake in the infamous Bohemian "Fire Ritual" so popular among their collegiate youth. The numerous fraternity kids I found drinking there emphatically informed me, in their raucous way, that the village of Commugny was indeed evil! But since we were currently reveling in the ever-popular ski village of Diablerets—which actually means the "**Abode of Devils**"—this seemed to me a bit hypocritical. Of course, I was well aware of their infamous **Bohemian "Fire Ceremony"**—a flashy alternative to the traditional Franco-Swiss Absinthe ritual (hailing originally from the **Czech Republic**)—but I had waited until I could spontaneously experience this wild sacrament for myself. The mischievous doings of partygoing college kids seemed to fit the bill, so I decided to make my way to one of their "devilish" hangouts in order to—finally—witness this dangerous ritual in the flesh. That is, hopefully without burning my own flesh in the process. Naturally, the "Abode of the Devils" sounded like the perfect place—and as expected, it didn't disappoint. Better yet, I didn't get burned. Unfortunately—as fate would have it—this burn would happen later...

Mystery of Commugny:

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The next day I decided to visit the cursed village of **Commugny**, alone. They told me in Geneva not to go there; but, because it is an old town full of **witch legends**, I thought that this “evil” must surely be something that grandparents had merely whispered to children throughout the centuries. Besides, the name “blasted heath” seemed to me very odd and a little theatrical, and I wondered how it had come into the folklore of such a proud and rational people as the Swiss. Then, I saw that dark northern tangle of glens and slopes for myself, and ceased to wonder at anything besides its own elder mysteries. It was morning when I saw it, but shadow lurked there always. The trees grew too thickly, and their trunks were too big for any healthy **Alpine woodland**. Besides, there was too much silence in the dim alleys between them, and the floor was too soft with the dank moss and mattings of infinite years of decay.

In the open spaces, mostly along the line of the old road, there were little hillside farms; sometimes with all the buildings standing, sometimes with only one or two, and sometimes with only a lone chimney or fast-filling cellar. Weeds and briars reigned, and furtive wild things rustled in the undergrowth. Upon everything was a haze of restlessness and oppression; a touch of the unreal and the grotesque, as if some vital element of perspective or shading had inexplicably gone awry. I did not wonder why the foreigners would not stay, for this was no region in which to sleep in overnight. It looked too much like a **surrealist painting**—such as a landscape by **Salvator Rosa** or, perhaps, even **Salvador Dali**—too much like some forbidden scene in a ghastly tale of terror.

‘The Blasted Heath’:

But even all this was not so bad as the “**Blasted Heath**.” I knew it the moment I came upon it at the bottom of that spacious valley; for no other name could fit such thing—or any other thing fit such a name! It was as if the poet had coined the phrase from having seen this one particular region. It must, I thought—as I viewed it—be the outcome of a fire; but why had nothing new ever grown over those five acres (or as the Swiss say, two hectares) of grey desolation that sprawled open to the sky, like some great spot eaten away by acid amidst **Commugny’s woods and fields**? It lay largely to the northwest of the ancient **shoreline of Coppet**, but encroached a little on the other side. I felt an odd reluctance about approaching, and did so—at last—only because my investigations inevitably took me through and past it. There was no vegetation of any kind on that broad expanse, but only a fine grey dust or ash which no wind seemed ever to blow about. The trees near it were sickly and stunted, and many dead trunks stood or lay rotting at the rim. As I walked hurriedly by, I saw the tumbled bricks and stones of the old **Lanfray House** and **Absinthe Distillery** on my right—and that yawning black maw of an abandoned well, whose stagnant vapors played strange tricks with the hues of the sunlight. Even the long, dark woodland climb beyond seemed welcome in contrast. And, I marveled no more at the frightened whispers of the Swiss people. There had been no house or ruin nearby, so even in the old days this place must have been rather remote and lonely. At twilight, dreading to re-pass that ominous spot, I walked circuitously back to town by the curving road to the south. Indeed, I vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about that deep sky—and the void above—had crept into my soul.

Swiss Fairy Tales & The 'Strange Days' of 1905:

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In the evening, after my return to the city of **Geneva** and nearby **Cologny**, I asked some old Genevans about the “blasted heath;” and what was actually meant by the phrase “**strange days**,” which so many Swiss evasively muttered about. I could not however get any straight answers, except that this **mystery** was much more recent than I had previously realized. It was not a matter of old **legend** at all, but something nearly within the lifetime of those who spoke about it. It had all happened around 1905, when an entire family was apparently killed—or more precisely, was brutally murdered! Speakers would not be exact; but the inhabitants of Cologny told me not to pay any attention to old Etienne’s crazy tales regarding these strange events. Little did they know that I was already well acquainted with this rather eccentric old man.

The 'Strange Man' Known as Etienne-Laurent de Marigny:

The next morning, I sought out the fabled residence of **Etienne-Laurent de Marigny**—that famed **Villa Diodati**—having already been invited to his strange **chateau** in **Cologny**—namely, a beautiful place located just northeast of the city of Geneva, where the trees begin to flourish next to its dense urban center. It was a fearsomely famous place, notorious for having been the exact location where **Mary Shelley** had actually written ***Frankenstein***. Unfortunately, it had begun to exude the faint miasmal odor which clings to houses that have perhaps stood too long. And only with persistent knocking could I rouse the aged man within, as he had long ago dismissed the chateau’s steward and wait staff. When he finally managed to shuffle to the door, I could tell he was truly glad to see me; although he had probably hoped to sleep in bit more. Surprisingly, he was not so feeble as I had expected—although he claimed to be well over 130 years old—a claim which I readily dismissed at the time. However, his eyes drooped in a curious way, and his old-fashioned clothing and white beard definitely made him look old (and even a bit stereotypic) in appearance.

Not knowing just how he could best be launched on his tales, I feigned a matter of business. I told him about my considerable research into the **biochemistry** of **absinthe**—and more to the point, about the questionable origins of the ‘**Swiss Absinthe Ban**.’ Then, I asked him numerous questions regarding the history of the lakeshore district, the village of Commugny, and eventually about the Lanfray House & Distillery in particular. He was far brighter and much more educated than I had initially realized—probably because our long-distance correspondence had been inordinately concise and to the point—but before long, he had grasped quite as much about the subject as any man I had previously talked with in either Paris or Geneva. He was not like other denizens I had met in the neighboring districts and cantons of Switzerland. Indeed, from him there was absolutely no protest concerning the miles (or rather, hectares) of old forest and farmland to be blotted out by the inevitable opening of the new highland reservoir. Though perhaps there would have been, had his home not lain outside the bounds of the lake’s projected rise and thus higher shoreline. Paradoxically, relief was all that he showed; relief regarding the doom of that once overcame this ancient valley, through which he had allegedly roamed his entire life. Nevertheless, he insisted that it was far better under water, now—better under water, since those strange days of 1905 and 1906. And with this opening, his husky voice sank low, while his body leaned forward and his right forefinger began to point shakily and impressively.

The 'Strange Tale' of Etienne-Laurent de Marigny:

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It was only then that I finally learned **Etienne's** version of the **story**. And—as his voice scraped and whispered on—I shivered again and again, despite warm weather. Even so, I had to sometimes recall the speaker from impossible timelines—and piece out certain scientific points, which he knew only by a fading memory and professors' talk—or bridge over questionable gaps, where his sense of logic and continuity seemed to break down. When he was done, I did not wonder that his mind had snapped a trifle, or why the folks of Geneva would not speak much about that so-called “blasted heath.” However, when I returned—well before sunset—to my hotel, I was thenceforth unwilling to have the stars come out, above me, while walking in the open air. The next day, I returned to New Orleans to publish my researches into the matter—but now with a far, far greater appreciation for the unexpected role Absinthe had played in human history! Yet, I could not go back that dim chaos of old forest and slope again; nor face another time, that grey blasted heath—where that black well yawned deep beside tumbled bricks and stones. The reservoir will soon be released now, and all those elder secrets will lie safe forever under watery fathoms. But even then, I do not believe I would ever like to visit that cursed village of Commugny again, especially by night—at least, not while the sinister stars are out. And, nothing could convince me to drink from the new waters of **Lac Leman**—even if mixed with a rather potent swig of extremely high-proof absinthe!

Revelation 8:10:

It all began, Etienne said, with a **meteor** impact. Before that time, there had been no wild legends at all—or at least, since the old **witch trials** in **Val-de-Travers** (an ancient place, located roughly 75-miles or 120 km northeast of Geneva, where absinthe was allegedly first distilled). And even then, these northern woods were not feared half so much as the dizzying heights of **Mount Blanc** or the notorious village of **Les Diablerets** (where the devil supposedly held court beside a curious stone altar, older than the prehistoric Celts). These were not haunted woods, and their fantastic dusk was never terrible till those strange days arising in 1905. Then, there had come that white noontide cloud, that string of explosions in the air, and that pillar of smoke from a secluded valley located within those vast alpine woods north of Geneva. By night, all the Swiss had heard of the great rock that had fallen from the sky and imbedded itself in the ground beside a deep well next to **Jean Lanfray's** famous absinthe distillery. Indeed, this was the house which stood at the exact epicenter of where the “blasted heath” had originated—specifically, the white trim **Lanfray House & Distillery**—a place of once fertile gardens, abundant orchards, and beautiful fields of blue-hued wormwood plantings.

A 'Strange Meteorite':

Monsieur **Lanfray** had come to Geneva to tell people about the **stone**, and had decided to drop by Etienne's villa (in nearby Cologny) before heading home. Etienne was much younger then, but insisted that all these strange events were fixed very firmly in his mind at the time. **Jean Lanfray** and his young wife had gone there with three professors from the **University of Geneva**; scientists who hastened out to his farm, the next morning, to see this weird intruder from interstellar space—and had wondered why Lanfray had called it so large the day before. Apparently, it had shrunken, Jean said, as he pointed out the large brownish mound above the ripped earth and charred grass, near the archaic well in his front yard; but, the university men abruptly answered that **meteorites** don't shrink—though, they do often shatter!

Wormwood:

However, the heat of this intact **meteorite** still lingered persistently, and Lanfray declared that it had glowed faintly during the night. The professors tried it with a geologist's hammer and found that it was oddly soft. It was, in truth, so soft as to be almost plastic; and they gouged rather than chipped a specimen to take back to the college for testing. They placed this meteorite fragment in an old pail borrowed from **Lanfray's distillery**—for even this small piece refused to grow cool enough to handle. Then, they haphazardly decided to line the pail with spare wormwood clippings, so as not to disfigure this potentially fragile sample. On the boat trip back (as they took to the lake, rather than negotiate the crowded main road), they docked at Etienne's to rest, and seemed thoughtful when his wife remarked that the fragment seemed to be growing smaller and was slowly burning into the **wormwood** leaves—and onward through the bottom of the pail—though not so much by heat, as from some kind of caustic chemical reaction. Truly, the specimen was not large. Perhaps they had taken less than they thought? Then they grew fearful, suddenly realizing that this strange object might somehow pose a biological hazard—a hazard that they had foolishly and rather presumptuously ignored while caught up in their childlike enthusiasm. With this chilling thought, they quickly notified the university medical staff and asked for advice. Recall again that all this hysteria began in that fateful summer of 1905.

Weird Science:

The next day, the professors—armed this time with two medical experts—had trooped out, again, with even greater excitement; but now with much more guarded concern. When they visited Etienne, they told him what bizarre things the meteorite **specimen** had done in the laboratory, and how it had faded wholly away when they at last put it in a glass beaker. The beaker had vanished too, as the men pondered the stone's "strange affinity" for the **wormwood** plant included within the distiller's bucket—namely, that particular plant so central to creation of fine **Absinthe** liquor. In fact, it had acted quite unbelievably during their well-ordered experiments; doing nothing at all and showing no occluded gases when heated on charcoal, being wholly negative in the borax bead, and soon proving itself absolutely non-volatile at any producible temperature, including that of the oxy-hydrogen blowpipe. On an anvil it appeared highly malleable, and in the dark its luminosity was very marked. Stubbornly refusing to grow cool enough to touch, it soon had the university in a state of real excitement. And, when upon heating—before the spectroscope—it displayed shining bands unlike any known colors of the normal spectrum. There was much breathless talk of new elements, bizarre optical properties, and other things which puzzled men of science—and who are wont to say, whenever faced with the unknown and (potentially) unknowable!

An Extraordinary Affinity—Wormwood & Artemisia Absinthium:

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Hot as it was, they tested the meteorite sample in a crucible with all the proper reagents. Water did nothing. Hydrochloric acid was the same. Nitric acid and even aqua regia merely hissed and splattered against its torrid invulnerability. Etienne had difficulty recalling all these things; but recognized some of the solvents, as I mentioned them in their usual order of use. There was ammonia and caustic soda, alcohol and ether, nauseous carbon disulphide and a dozen others; but, although the weight grew steadily less as time passed, and the fragment did seem to be cooling, there was no change in the solvents to show that they had acted on the substance at all! It was a metal, though, beyond a doubt. It was magnetic for one thing; and after its immersion in the acid solvents, there seemed to be faint traces of the Widmånstätt figures found amidst known meteoritic iron filaments. When the cooling had grown considerable, the testing was carried on in glass; and it was in a glass beaker that they left all the chips—derived of the original fragment—during their extensive series of physicochemical experiments. However, the next morning both the chips and beaker were gone—without a trace—and a charred spot marked the place on the wooden shelf where they had once been. Though, there was a barely visible amount of tarry stickiness remaining. And upon chemical analysis, this residue actually proved to be a meager amount of the **wormwood** plant—specifically, the compound **thujone**. Namely, from the aforementioned distillery pail originally used to transport the specimen in the first place. Indeed, it seemed to have some sort of strange “affinity” towards the wormwood plant—and not much else! Especially, towards the thujone molecule in particular—as the only substance remaining on that laboratory shelf was a trace amount of that plant’s intrinsic, tightly-bound thujone molecule. Though, it was combined with something glowing, almost as if it were radioactive—but not *truly* radioactive.

Exotic Meteorite & ‘Colored’ Globule:

All this, the professors told Etienne, as they lingered at his place. And once more, he went with them to see the stony messenger from the stars—though this time his wife did not accompany him. It had—now—most certainly shrunken, and even the skeptical professors could not doubt the truth of what they saw. All around the dwindling brown lump, near the well, was a vacant space—except where the earth had caved in—and whereas the actual meteorite had been a good seven feet across the day before, it was now scarcely five. It was still hot though, and the scientists studied its surface curiously as they detached another and larger piece with hammer and chisel. They gouged deeply this time—and as they pried away the smaller mass, they saw that the core of the thing was not quite homogeneous.

They had uncovered what seemed to be the side of a large **colored globule** embedded in a tarry substance—like in the lab. The color, which resembled some of the bands in the meteor’s strange spectrum, was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it “color” at all. Its texture was glossy and, upon tapping, it appeared to promise both brittleness and hollowness. One of the professors gave it a smart blow with a hammer, and it burst with a nervous little pop! However, nothing was emitted, and all trace of the thing—at least to the visible eye—had seemed to vanish with this puncturing. Nevertheless, it left behind a hollow spherical space about three inches across, and everyone suspected that other such globules might be discovered, as the enclosing substance gradually wasted away.

Thujone & An Unknown Science:

Conjecture was vain; so, after a futile attempt to find additional globules by drilling, the seekers left again with their new specimen—and also with some additional wormwood clippings—which again, proved just as baffling in the laboratory as its predecessor. Aside from being almost plastic, having heat, magnetism, and a subtle luminosity, cooling slightly in powerful acids, possessing an unknown spectrum, wasting away in air, and surprisingly combining with the rather unique **wormwood** compound **thujone**—namely, with a strange and inert stability resulting—it presented no identifying features whatsoever. And at the end of the tests, the university scientists were forced to admit that they could not really place it anywhere on the periodic table known to contemporary science. It was like nothing of this earth; but rather, a piece of the great outside—and as such, seemed endowed with outside properties and obedient to outside laws!

The Biology of Absinthe:

However, during all the subsequent scientific conjecture and experimentation, Etienne-Laurent de Marigny arrived at a radically different conclusion than the other physically trained scientists—indeed, his training was primarily in mathematics and natural philosophy, not just physics and chemistry. Etienne’s curiosity was specifically piqued by what the scientists had said with regard to that ordinary **wormwood** plant—and its only active chemical constituent, **thujone**. And more startlingly, the extraordinary fact that the meteor was attracted to—or perhaps in some sort of a symbiotic relationship with—the complex botanical wormwood and thujone agents endemic only to this particular plant. However, since wormwood and thujone are central to the distillation and manufacture of the alcoholic drink known as **Absinthe**, Etienne speculated that there *had* to be some sort of a connection—after all, the meteor had fallen directly into the middle of a vast farm dedicated specifically to the cultivation of wormwood—and thus, a major manufacturer of **Absinthe liquor** and absinthe-based products. Again, there simply had to be some deeper connection between the intriguing physicochemical properties found within the meteorite and that of terrestrial biology, psychopharmacology, and psychiatry. Of this, he was certain! Accordingly, Etienne—instead—immersed himself deeply in the biological, psychological, and sociological aspects of this apparent wormwood enigma—with rather startling results. He began by asking himself just what was wormwood originally used for, especially within the context of **medicine** and the most ancient healing arts?

Absinthe & Traditional Medicine:

Apparently, at least as far back as ancient Greece, wormwood was used in witchcraft as a “shamanic” **healing substance**—that is, to somehow mysteriously heal and cleanse the body. This paleo-pharmacological tradition—pervasive amongst the Classical Greeks, Palestinians, and Romans—continued well into the middle ages, where it was later principally used as a **vermifuge**—that is, as a medicine that destroys or expels parasites. Indeed, this **medical** application precipitated its use by the **French army** as “*fever preventative*” and they added it to their soldier’s water supply and canteens—especially, during France’s foreign campaigns. Hence, Etienne realized that wormwood—and its absinthe-like derivatives—had long been used by traditional medicine as a powerful protective and healing agent.

Absinthe—Physical & Social Significance:

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However, as one well-known **absinteur** declared, “*It would take a major event in French life for absinthe to become popular in Parisian cafés; and this happened in 1830, when France’s African battalions left to conquer Algeria. They took bottles of absinthe with them that they poured into polluted swamp water, and drank, in order to protect themselves from **malaria** and **dysentery**.*” (Marie-Claude Delahaye) Subsequently, when they returned to France, they naturally had **acquired a taste** for it and ordered more of this preferred drink whenever they frequented their favorite Parisian cafés and bars.

The Belle Époque:

Before long, this preference for absinthe liquor had spread from France to Switzerland—its original place of distillation—and then onward, to convert the rest of Europe. Etienne considered what historians had written with regard to absinthe’s immense popularity during ‘**The Belle Époque**.’ “*Absinthe was one of the most popular drinks of its time. It wasn’t just drunk by Bohemians and artists in the cafes in Paris... Millions and millions of gallons of it were produced in French and Swiss factories to service this general population.*” (Barnaby Conrad III) These same historians also reminded Etienne that—with its wormwood and anise flavoring and its mixing in icy cold water—absinthe was essentially **Europe’s first cocktail**—namely, the drink of choice for a new generation of intellectuals, artists, and inventors.

Cafés & The L’Heure Verte:

Like many of his compatriots, Etienne would often partake of absinthe during “**The L’Heure Verete**”—the ubiquitous “*Green Hour*,” served between 5:00 and 7:00 pm. That favored time when millions of Frenchmen were known to congregate and converse inside their most beloved drinking establishments. In fact, this was how he had initially met Lanfray in the first place—and how he, later, developed a taste for Jean Lanfray’s **fine liqueur** and superior absinthe products. Writers duly insisted that “*the cafés, at the time, were at their zenith. There was no television yet, and the cafés were the French **academies**.*” (Benoit Noel) “*The café was a place for people to go and catch up on life, and share gossip and business news, read a newspaper, or maybe write a poem—or maybe, even recite a poem!*” (Barnaby Conrad III) As Etienne thoughtfully considered this, he naturally reminisced. Ironically though, absinthe was actually much more than just a “social lubricant,” it was also a sexual one as well.

Absinthe & Sexuality:

Without a doubt, the one aspect of absinthe that was the least discussed was its intimate connection to human **sexuality**. There is something about this pale-green substance that is profoundly organic. Inevitably, this naturalness and vitality came to be associated with women—and even the sex act itself. Etienne blushed as he admitted, “*Yes, there is definitely a **feminine side to it**.*” (Christopher Rousset) For offspring of the Victorian Age, absinthe naturally seemed like something “*forbidden*” and yet something that also “*tasted good*”—like the primordial apple in the Garden. Moreover, it gave artists—and lovers—“*an extraordinary creative push... Allegedly, it “opens up the breathing passages and it dilates everything. I’d go so far to say that it even dilates the genitals.*” (Benoit Noel) In fact, among the **hedonic**-minded libertines of the Belle Époque, it was common knowledge that “*If you want to do absinthe right, you have to take your time. It’s kind of like making love!*” (Dushan Zaric)

La Haute Boheme & The Artistic Elite:

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Indeed, everyone understood Absinthe's profound psychological impact and cultural significance—especially within the “avant-garde” **Bohemians** of France. In fact, absinthe's influence in **Paris** could almost be traced geographically—simply by following the migrations of the **artistic elite**. “In 1830, the artists preferred to congregate around the **Latin Quarter**. Later, around 1860, they went up to the **Grands Boulevards**, because a lot of cafés had sprung up there and the ambiance was more lively. Next, they went to **Montmartre**. And then, at the beginning of the 20th-century, they went back down to **Montparnasse**.” Etienne subsequently recalled what a university acquaintance had said once, while musing about **absinthe** and **Bohemianism**, “There is an interesting relationship, in general, between alcohol and the arts!” (Barnaby Conrad) Etienne ruminated over this mysterious connection, as he steadily shifted the focus of his inquiry in the direction of psychology—and especially, towards case studies concerning absinthe's unusual psychiatric effects.

The Psychology of Absinthe:

Etienne discovered one expert who had even made the biological—and psychopharmacological—study of absinthe his life work. He explicitly asserted the following psychological effects with regard to “the essences of the herbs that appear in absinthe: Some of them have a mild excitatory effect—some of them have a mildly sedating effect—the combination of these two opposite effects, pulling you from two different directions—in a base of stout liquor, with a high alcoholic concentration, is definitely going to have some type of psychic effect. A good absinthe is not going to make feel quite the same way as a strong rum—or drinking beer. It's a powerful herbal liquor that tends to give the imbiber a sense of mental clarity or gentle lucidity, as opposed to just falling into a drunken stupor.” (T. A. Breaux) Another colleague added an additional insight—apparently from personal experience— “A rough equivalent would be to drink anise or a bourbon and then, maybe, smoke a little marijuana...” (Barnaby Conrad) Piere-Andre Delachaux insisted, “I always say that I feel more intelligent after the third absinthe. When artists drank their absinthe, maybe they had access to inspiration more easily?” Thus, based on the following documentation, and these intriguing case studies, Etienne now felt he better understood absinthe's perennial appeal—as it undeniably reigns over Europe as an intoxicating “*Bohemian elixir*”—which “appeals to travelers, Bohemians, artists, poets, and to people who simply want to get high.” (Barnaby Conrad)

Absinthe & Mystical Flight:

Furthermore, absinthe seems to have a creative and **spiritual effect** upon its patrons. Marie-Claude Delahaye claims that “the plants in absinthe have a stimulatory effect, so it gave people a little push that was favorable to creativity.” Etienne recalled Noel's remark, “Of course it gave them an extraordinary **creative push**. What I said before remains true. It opens up the breathing passages—and it dilates everything!” Significantly, Barnaby Conrad recounted that, “The French, particularly the poets, did claim that absinthe gave them some opening. It opened a door into their imagination—into exalted heights—where poetry ‘flew.’ And somehow, it allowed them to soar up there—for a moment—and come back down again.” Benoit Noel emphasized, as he described his seemingly **mystical flights**, “Your lungs open up, your pupils dilate, and everything dilates in you. You are practically going to acquire a state of levitation. And what was humankind searching for since the dawn of time: but to levitate, to escape from the force of gravity, to escape from these lead-soled shoes. And, in the same way—with absinthe—you have the feeling of rising up. The field of vision opens up and—in reality—you gain a perspective on the whole world. Rather than being shut into a funneled vision of alcoholic excess, you aspire toward pleasurable levitation, and the ecstasy which we are all seeking!”

Absinthe, 'Ye Olde Religion', & The 'Green Fairy':

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Marie-Claude Delahaye maintains that *"Absinthe is mythical mainly because all the poets and artists gave this 'green fairy' her letters of nobility."* As Delahaye recounts, absinthe invaded the Parisian cafés around 1830—when it became fashionable to drink this pale-green liquor—and artists began calling it *"The Green Fairy"* (or alternatively, *"The green fairy, the green muse, or the green-eyed muse"*). These were poetic terms used to designate their newfound *sacred drink* and beloved *"talisman."* Noel admitted, as if affirming an article of faith, *"I think absinthe is a nectar of the gods, to be enjoyed in gallant company!"* Although Etienne—like everyone else—was a frequent drinker of absinthe, he had to admit that he never experienced what Noel might call a "mystical flight" from consuming it. Actually, he drank like a teetotaler when compared to folks like Lanfray. Nevertheless, Etienne came to realize that the **mystery** of absinthe ran very deep—perhaps, all the way back to the ancient **"Green Goddess"** Demeter, and to Her primordial worship of Nature.

Absinthe in Philosophy, Literature, & The Arts:

Etienne, though, did admit that absinthe sometimes helped him during his more difficult mathematical **contemplations** and deeper **philosophical musings**. Every so often, absinthe could even bring out his *"inner poet"*—although Etienne made no great pretense of being an artist. Nevertheless, as Barnaby Conrad asserted, *"A couple of glasses of absinthe, and believe me, that brings out the poet in even the average Frenchman."* And no less a **poet** and **writer** than **Oscar Wilde** once wrote, *"A glass of absinthe is as poetical as anything in the world. What difference is there between a glass of absinthe and a sunset?"* Returning to this apparent relationship between alcohol and the arts, Conrad notes, *"You only have to look at the American authors—like **Faulkner** and **Hemingway**, who actually drank quite a bit—and some of them even wrote while under the influence. It was **Baudelaire** who once said you must intoxicate yourself, if you're a modern man—that is, to forget the oppressive burden of time."* Indeed, the list of **authors** who regularly imbibed in absinthe is rather extensive; but its most avid (and mostly French) users included: Victor **Hugo**, Ernest **Hemingway**, Charles **Baudelaire**, Charles **Cros**, Paul **Verlaine**, Alfred **Jarry**, and Oscar **Wilde**, just to name a few. Then again, the list of **artists** (French **painters**, mostly) influenced by absinthe is even more significant. In fact, you might even say that absinthe is primarily responsible for the birth of French **Impressionism**. This famous list includes painters and sculptors such as: Edouard **Manet**, Edgar **Degas**, Henri **Toulouse-Lautrec**, Gustave **Moreau**, Vincent **van Gogh**, Jean **Beraud**, Albert **Maignan**, Viktor **Oliva**, and Pablo **Picasso**—again, just to name a few. Subsequently, Etienne's ominous absinthe investigations served as an inexplicable backdrop for the horror that was about to unfold. And like what was purported during the absinthe ban of 1910, not everything about this substance was benign. Unfortunately, Lanfray's private estate proved to be "ground zero" for all the unbelievable mayhem that was to follow.

Jean Lanfray—Absinteur Extraordinaire & The 1905 Meteorite Incident:

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On an exceedingly blustery day back in June of 1905—during all the meteorite commotion around **Lanfray’s Absinthe Distillery**—there was, concomitantly, an abnormally violent thunderstorm which lasted all through the night. And when the university professors went out to **Lanfray’s House** the next day, they were met with bitter disappointment. The stone, magnetic as it had been, must have also had some peculiar electrical property; for it had “drawn the lightning,” as Lanfray said, with a singular persistence. Six times within an hour Jean saw the lightning strike the furrow in his front yard. And, when the storm was over, nothing remained but a ragged pit by the ancient well, half-choked with caved-in earth. Digging had borne no fruit, and the scientists unfortunately verified the fact that the meteorite had utterly vanished. The failure was total; so that nothing was left to do but go back to the laboratory and test again the disappearing fragment left carefully encased in lead. That fragment lasted a week—at the end of which nothing of additional value had been learned from it. When it had finally gone—this time, no remaining residue was left behind. And absent all material evidence, the professors felt scarcely sure they had actually seen, with waking eyes, that cryptic vestige from the fathomless beyond—that lone, weird messenger from another universe and other realms of matter, force, and entity.

July & August 1905—Swiss Newspaper Reporting & Record-breaking Absinthe Sales:

As was natural, the **Swiss newspapers** made much of the incident—and with enthusiastic sponsorship—sent reporters to talk with **Jean Lanfray** and his family. At least one Geneva daily also sent an admired investigative journalist, and Lanfray quickly became a kind of international celebrity. Despite later accounts, he was a lean, genial person of about forty; living with his wife and three children on a pleasant little farmstead near Lac Lemman. Indeed, he and Etienne exchanged visits frequently, as did their wives; and Etienne had nothing but praise for him, even after all these years—again, despite later sensationalist reporting. Lanfray seemed pleased with all the notice his Distillery had attracted—and with all this press, he had nearly tripled his **sales of Absinthe**. Moreover, he talked often and openly about the meteorite in the succeeding weeks, to anyone who cared to listen. July and August were hot—especially, for Switzerland—where summer temperatures rarely exceed 80 degrees (or 26-degrees Celsius). And, Lanfray worked hard at cultivating his main ten-acre (or 4 hectare) field just outside the small village of **Commugny**—his rattling wagon wearing deep cuts in the shadowy lanes between bountiful wormwood plantings. However, this year the labor seemed to tired him more than it had in others, and he felt that maybe his age was beginning to show.

September & October 1905—A Foul Harvest:

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Then came the time for harvest. The pears and apples ripened, and Lanfray vowed that his orchards and **wormwood plantings** were prospering as never before. The fruit was growing to phenomenal size and uncommon gloss, and the wormwood plants filled in with such luxuriance that extra barrels were ordered to handle the future crop. But, with all this ripening came sore disappointment; for of all that gorgeous array of specious lusciousness, not a single one of those plants was fit for human consumption. Into the fine flavor of the pears and apples had crept a stealthy bitterness and sickliness, so that even the smallest of bites induced a lasting disgust. It was the same with the melons and tomatoes. Lanfray sadly realized that his entire food crop was likely lost. Quick to connect events, he declared that the meteorite had obviously poisoned the soil, and thanked Heaven that most of his wormwood crop was in the upland lot—that is, past the road and far from his house and possibly tainted well.

December 1905 & January '06—A Harsh Winter:

Winter typically comes early in Switzerland, and December of 1905 and January of '06 proved to be an especially cold one. Consequently, Etienne saw Lanfray less often than usual, though he did venture out to occasionally purchase some more of Jean's famous Absinthe liquor. Though whenever he visited, he observed that Jean had begun to look a bit worried. The rest of his family also seemed to have grown taciturn; and they were far from steady in their attendance of social events—and the various **winter festivities** surrounding **Commugny**, **Coppet**, and **Geneva**—during the Holidays. As for the source of this worry and melancholy, no physical cause could be found, though all the household confessed, now and then, to poorer health and a feeling of vague disquiet. Lanfray himself gave the most definite statement of anyone, when he said he was disturbed about certain footprints in the snow. They were the usual winter prints of red squirrels, white rabbits, and foxes, but the brooding farmer professed to see something not quite right about their nature and arrangement. He was never specific, but appeared to think that they were not as characteristic of the anatomy and habits of squirrels and rabbits and foxes as they ought to be. Etienne listened to Lanfray's talk, initially, without much concern—as this sort of melancholy seemed natural for such a harsh winter as this—that is, until one night when he drove past **Lanfray's Distillery** in his sleigh, on the way back from **Lausanne**. There had been a full moon, and a rabbit had run across the road. And, the leaps of that rabbit were longer than either Etienne or his horse liked. The latter indeed had almost run away until slowed by a firm rein. Thereafter, Etienne gave Jean's tales more respect and attention, and wondered why the Lanfray dogs seemed so cowed and quivering each morning. They had, as things unexpectedly developed, nearly lost the spirit to bark.

February 1906—Strange Wildlife:

In February, the Hartmann boys from **Coppet** were out shooting woodchucks—and not far from the Lanfray place, bagged a very peculiar specimen. The proportions of its body seemed slightly altered in a queer way impossible to describe, while its face had taken on an expression which no one ever saw in a woodchuck before. The boys were genuinely frightened, and threw the thing away at once, so that only their grotesque tales of it ever reached the people of the surrounding countryside. However, the shy and fierce neighing of the horses near Lanfray's Distillery had now become an acknowledged thing—and the basis for a new cycle of whispered legends was fast taking form.

People vowed that the snow melted faster around Lanfray's place than it did anywhere else, and early in March there was awed discussion in **Lausanne**. A young Jesuit priest and biologist, named Father **Piotr** (Peter) **Lenartowicz**, had driven past **Lanfray's Distillery** on his way to **Geneva**, and had noticed the wormwood plants growing by the trees across the road. Never were things of such size seen before, and they held strange colors that could not be put into any words. Their shapes were monstrous, and the horse had snorted at the odor which struck Peter as wholly unprecedented. That afternoon, several university friends also drove past to see the abnormal growth, and all agreed that **plant mutations** of that kind ought never to sprout in healthy soil. The foul harvest of the previous fall was freely mentioned, and soon it went from mouth to mouth that there was poison in Lanfray's grounds. Even Lanfray himself had ceased drinking his fine Absinthe, for fear that the previous crop had been tainted—besides, in his current state of mind, who needed intoxicants. Of course, it had to be the meteorite; and everyone recalled how strange the University men had found that stone to be. Finally, nearby farmers vocalized their worrisome concern to the local newspapers.

Soil Analysis:

One day several friends paid Lanfray a visit; but like most Swiss—having no love of wild tales and viscous gossip—they were very conservative in what they inferred. The food plants were certainly odd, and all the wormwood plantings were more or less peculiar in shape and hue. Perhaps some unknown mineral element from the meteorite had entered the soil, but it should soon be washed away. And, as for the footprints and frightened horses; of course, this was merely the sort of fear and conjecture that such a phenomenon as a meteor from the far reaches of space would be certain to start. There was really nothing for serious men to do in such cases of wild gossip—for the superstitious will say and believe anything! And so, all through these strange days, the professors seemed to stay away almost in contempt. Only one of them—when given two vials of nearby **soil** for **analysis** (concerning an unrelated matter)—recalled that the bizarre color of Lanfray's wormwood plantings had been very like one of the anomalous bands of light shown by the meteor fragment under the university's spectroscope. And, also like the brittle globule found imbedded in that bizarre stone from the abyss. In fact, the samples of their soil analysis gave the same odd bands—at least at first—though, they seemed to lose this distinctive glow over time.

Symbiotic Mutation:

The trees budded prematurely around Jean's place, and at night they swayed ominously in the wind. Jean's second daughter Rose, a girl of fifteen, swore that they swayed also when there was no wind; but even the gossips would not credit this. Certainly though, restlessness was in the air. The entire **Lanfray family** developed the habit of stealthy listening—though not for any sound which they could consciously name. The listening was rather a product of moments when their consciousness seemed to half slip away. Unfortunately, such moments increased week by week, till it became common knowledge that "something was wrong with all Jean's household." Later when the early saxifrage came out, it had another strange color; not like that of the wormwood, but plainly related and equally unknown to anyone who happened to observe it. Jean even took some blossoms to the University and also showed them to the editor of the *Genève Gazette*. But, that dignitary did no more than write a humorous article about them, in which the dark fears of rustics were skeptically held up to barely polite ridicule.

April 1906—The Growing Blight:

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April brought a kind of madness to the surrounding Swiss folk, which began the disuse of the road past Jean's—which ultimately led to its abandonment. Next, the **blight** happened to all the nearby vegetation. All the orchard trees blossomed forth in strange colors, and through the stony soil of the yard and adjacent fields there sprang up a bizarre growth which only a trained botanist could connect with the proper flora of the region. No sane or wholesome colors were anywhere to be seen, except in the green grass and older leafage; but everywhere shone those hectic and prismatic variants of some diseased and underlying primary tone, without a place among the known pigments of earth. The edelweiss became a thing of sinister menace, and the bloodroot flowers grew insolent in their chromatic perversion. Etienne and the Lanfray thought that most of the colors had a sort of haunting familiarity, and decided that they reminded one of the brittle globules originating from inside the mysterious meteor. Jean ploughed and sowed the large fields and upland lot, but did nothing with the land around the house and distillery. He knew it would be of no use, and hoped that the summer's strange growths would draw all the poison out of the soil. He was prepared for almost anything now—and had grown used to that sense of something near him—waiting to be heard! Though, the **shunning** of his distillery (and fine brand of absinthe) by his neighbors gradually wore on him; yet, it seemed to wear on his wife even more. But, he fully understood people's **concerns**. The girls were better off being at school each day, however they could not help being frightened by the local gossip. Rose, an especially sensitive youth, likely suffered the most.

May 1906—Strange Insects & 'The Green Fairy':

In May, the insects came, and Jean's place became a nightmare of buzzing and crawling. Most of the creatures seemed not quite usual in their aspects and motions, and their nocturnal habits contradicted all former experience. The Lanfrays took to watching during the night—watching in all directions, at random, for something important—but they could not tell what. It was then that they all admitted that Rose had been right about the trees. Madame (Mme or Mrs.) Lanfray was the next to see it from the window, as she watched the swollen boughs of a maple against the moonlit sky. The boughs surely moved, and there was no wind. It must be the sap. Strangeness had gradually seeped into everything growing, by now. Yet, it was not anyone in Jean's family who made the next incredulous discovery. Familiarity had dulled them, and what they did not see—this time—was glimpsed by a timid salesman from **Lausanne**, who drove by one night in ignorance of the local legends. What he reported in **Geneva** was given a paragraph in the Gazette and it was there that all the local folk (Jean included) saw it first. The night had been dark and the buggy-lamps faint, but around **Lanfray's House & Distillery** (on the outskirts of **Commugny**)—which everyone recognized immediately, because **Lanfray's Fine Absinthe** was famous—the darkness had been rather discernably less thick. Rather, a dim glowing luminosity now seemed inherent in all the vegetation, grass, leaves, and blossoms alike—then, at one incredulous moment, a detached piece of that phosphorescence appeared to circle the yard near the distillery. In fact, the salesman insisted—while claiming to be completely sober—that he actually witnessed what looked like a small **green fairy** trying to fight back a swarm of angry insects about to invade the Lanfray house—only they weren't really insects at all!

Late May 1906—Madame Lanfray's Madness:

The older grass had—so far—seemed untouched, and the cows were freely pastured in the lot near the house; but toward the end of May, their milk began to go bad as well. Then Jean had the cows driven to the uplands, after which this trouble ceased. Not long after this however, the change in grass and leaves became apparent even to the naked eye. All the verdure was going grey, and was developing a highly singular quality of brittleness. Etienne was the only person who ever visited the place now, and even his visits were becoming fewer and fewer. When school closed, the Lanfrays were virtually cut off from the world, and sometimes Etienne would help with errands in town. They were failing curiously, both physically and mentally, and no one was surprised when the news of Madame Lanfray's **madness** stole around.

June 1906—The Anniversary of the Meteor's Fall:

It happened in June, around the **anniversary of the meteor's fall**. The poor Lanfray woman screamed about things in the air, which she could not describe. In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns. Things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds. Something was taken away—she was being drained of something—something was fastening itself on her that ought not to be—someone must make it keep off. Worse, nothing was ever still in the night—and even the walls and windows shifted. Nevertheless, Jean did not send her to the regional asylum, but instead let her wander about the house (so long as she was harmless to herself and others). Even when her expression changed, he did nothing. But, when the girls grew afraid of her, and Rose nearly fainted at the way she made faces at her, Jean at last decided to keep her locked away safely in the attic.

July 1906—The Grizzled Vegetation:

By July Mme Lanfray had ceased to speak and crawled on all fours, and before that month was over Jean got the mad notion that she was slightly luminous in the dark; as he now clearly saw was the case with the nearby vegetation. It was a little before this that his horses had stampeded. Something had aroused them in the night, and their neighing and kicking in their stalls had been terrible. There seemed virtually nothing to do to calm them, and when Jean opened the stable door they all bolted out like frightened woodland deer. It took a week to track all four, and when found they were seen to be quite useless and unmanageable. Something had snapped in their brains, and each one had to be shot for its own good. Jean borrowed a horse from Etienne for his farm work, but found it would not approach the barn. It shied, balked, and whinnied, and in the end, he could do nothing but drive it into the yard while the men used their own strength to get the heavy wagon near enough the loft for convenient pitching. All the while, the **vegetation was turning grey** and brittle to the touch. Even the flowers—whose hues had once been so beautifully strange—were graying now, and the fruit was coming out grey and dwarfed and tasteless. The asters and goldenrod also bloomed grey and distorted, and the roses and zinnias and hollyhocks in the front yard were such blasphemous-looking things that Jean's oldest girl, Emma, cut them down. The strangely puffed insects also died about that time, even the bees had left their hives and taken to the woods.

August & September 1906—More Madness & The Death of Livestock:

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By September all the vegetation was fast crumbling to a greyish powder, and Jean feared that the trees would die before the poison was finally drawn out of the soil. His wife now had spells of terrific screaming, and he and the girls were in a constant state of nervous tension. They shunned people now, and when school opened the girls did not go. However, it was Etienne—on one of his rare visits—who first realized that the well water was no longer drinkable. It had an evil taste that was not exactly fetid nor exactly salty, and Etienne advised his friend to dig another well to use until the soil was finally good again. But Jean ignored the warning, for he had become calloused to these strange and unpleasant things. So, he and the girls continued to use the tainted supply, drinking it as listlessly and mechanically as they ate their meagre and ill-cooked meals, and did their thankless and monotonous chores, throughout their aimless days. There was something of stolid resignation about them all, as if they walked half in another world—between lines of nameless guardians—to a certain and familiar doom.

Rose went mad in September after a visit to the well. She had gone with a pail and had come back empty-handed, shrieking and waving her arms, and then lapsed into an inane titter or a whisper about "*the moving colors down there.*" Two in one family was pretty bad, but Jean was very brave about it. He let the girl run about, for almost week, until she began stumbling and hurting herself. And then, he finally shut her in an attic room across the hall from her mother's. The way they screamed at each other, from behind their locked doors, was very terrible—especially to little Blanche, who fancied they talked in some terrible language that was not of this earth. Blanche was getting frightfully imaginative, and her restlessness was worse after the shutting away of her sister, who had been her constant playmate.

Almost at the same time, the mortality among the **livestock** commenced. Poultry turned greyish and **died** very quickly, their meat being found dry and noisome upon cutting. Hogs grew inordinately fat, then suddenly began to undergo loathsome changes which no one could explain. Their meat was of course useless, and Jean was at wit's end. No rural **veterinarian** would even approach his place, and the city veterinary from Geneva was openly baffled. The swine began growing grey and brittle and falling to pieces, even before they actually died, and their eyes and muzzles developed singular alterations. It was all very inexplicable, for they had never been fed from the tainted vegetation. Then, something struck the cows. Certain areas or sometimes the whole body would be uncannily shriveled or compressed, and atrocious collapses and disintegrations were common. In the last stages—and death was always the result—there would be a greying and turning brittle, like that which beset the hogs. There could be no question of poison, for all the cases occurred in a locked and undisturbed barn. Thus, no bites of prowling things could have brought the **virus**; for what live beast of earth can pass through solid obstacles? It must be a natural **disease** though—yet, what disease could wreak such results was beyond any mind's guessing. When the harvest came, there was not an animal surviving on the place, for the stock and poultry were dead and the dogs had run away. These dogs, three in number, had all vanished one night and were never heard of again. The five cats had left some time before, but their going was scarcely noticed, since there now seemed to be no mice, and only Mrs. Lanfray had made pets of these graceful felines.

On the nineteenth of October Jean staggered into Etienne's house with hideous news. Death had come to poor Rose, in her attic room, and it had come in a way which could not be told. Jean had dug a grave in the railed family plot, behind the farm, and had put therein what he found. There could have been nothing from outside, for the small barred window and locked door were intact; but it was much as it had been in the adjacent barn. Etienne and his wife consoled the stricken man as best they could, but shuddered as they did so. Stark terror seemed to cling round the Lanfrays and all they touched, and the very presence of one in the house was a breath from regions unnamed and unnamable. Etienne accompanied Jean home with the greatest reluctance, and did what he might to calm the hysterical sobbing of little Blanche. Emma needed no calming. She had come of late to do nothing but stare into space and obey what her father told her; and Etienne thought that her fate was very merciful. Now and then, Blanche's screams were answered faintly from the attic. And in response to an inquiring look, Jean said that his wife was getting very feeble. When night approached, Etienne managed to get away; for not even friendship could make him stay in that spot when the glow of the vegetation began and the trees may (or may not) have swayed without the wind. It was lucky for Etienne that he was not more superstitious. Even as things were, his mind was bent ever so slightly; but had he consciously connected and reflected upon all the portents around him, he must inevitably have turned into a total maniac. In the twilight, he hastened home—the screams of the mad woman and the nervous faint child ringing horrible in his ears.

Three days later Jean, again, burst into Etienne's old chateau in the early morning and, in the absence of his host, stammered out his desperate tale once more—all the while Madame De Marigny alone listened in a clutching fright. It was little Blanche this time. She was gone. She had gone out late at night with a lantern and pail for water, and had never come back. She'd been going to pieces for days, and hardly knew what she was about—screaming at everything! There had been a frantic shriek from the yard then—but, before the father could get to the door, the girl was gone. There was no glow from the lantern she had taken—and of the child herself, no trace. At the time, Jean thought the lantern and pail were gone too; but when dawn came, and the man had plodded back from his all-night search of the woods and fields, he had found some very curious things near the well. There was a crushed and apparently somewhat melted mass of iron which had certainly been the lantern; with a bent pail and twisted iron hoops beside it (both half-fused) which seemed to hint at the remnants of the pail. That was all. Jean was past imagining, Madame De Marigny was blank, and Etienne—when he had finally reached home and heard the tale—could give no guesses. Blanche was gone, and there would be no use in telling the people of **Commugny**—they all shunned the Lanfrays now, anyways. No use either in telling the city authorities in **Geneva**—who seemed to merely laugh at everything. Rose was gone. And now, Blanche was gone! Worse, something was obviously creeping and creeping and waiting to be seen and heard. Jean would likely go soon, and he wanted Etienne to look after his wife and Emma—if they should survive him. He muttered that it must all be a cosmic judgment of some sort—though he could not fancy what for, since he had always walked uprightly (so far as he knew).

For over two weeks, Etienne saw nothing of Jean; and when overly worried about what might have happened, he finally overcame his fears and paid the Lanfray place a visit. There was no smoke from the great chimney; and for a moment, the visitor was apprehensive of the worst. The aspect of the whole property was shocking—greyish withered grass and leaves on the ground, vines falling in brittle wreckage from archaic walls and gables, and great bare trees clawing up at the grey November sky with a studied malevolence—an evil which Etienne could not but feel had come from some subtle change in the tilt of the branches. But Jean was alive after all, though he was very weak. And while lying on a couch in the low-ceiled kitchen, he was still perfectly conscious and able to give simple orders to Emma. The room was deadly cold; and as Etienne visibly shivered, the host shouted huskily to Emma for more wood. Wood indeed was sorely needed; since the cavernous fireplace was unlit and completely empty, with a cloud of soot blowing about in the chill wind that now came down the chimney. Presently, Jean asked him if the extra wood had made him any more comfortable, and then Etienne instantly saw what had happened. The stoutest cord had broken—at last—and the hapless man's mind was proof against any more sorrow.

Questioning tactfully, Etienne could get no clear data—at all—about his missing Emma. *"In the well—she lives in the well—"* was all that the confused father would say. Then, there flashed across the visitor's mind a sudden thought of the mad wife upstairs, and he changed his line of inquiry. *"Nabby? Why, here she is"* was the surprised response from poor Jean. Etienne soon saw that he must search for her, himself. Thus, leaving the **insane** but harmless babbler on the couch, he took the keys from their place beside the door and climbed the creaking stairs to the grand attic. It was very dark and noisome up there, and no sound could be heard from any direction. Of the four doors in sight, only one was locked, and on this he tried the various keys on the ring he had just taken. The third key proved the right one, and after some fumbling Etienne threw open that great white door.

It was quiet and fearsomely dark inside, for the attic window was small and half-obscured by crude wooden bars; and Etienne could see nothing at all on that wide-planked floor. The stench was beyond enduring, and before proceeding further he had to retreat to another room and return with his lungs filled with more breathable air. When he did finally enter, he saw something dark in the corner—and upon seeing it clearly, he screamed outright! While he screamed, he thought that a momentary cloud eclipsed the window, and a second later he felt himself gently brushed, as if by some hateful current of vapor. Strange colors danced before his eyes; and had not the present horror numbed him, he would have thought it came from the globule within that meteor—the one the geologist's hammer had shattered—or perhaps, from the morbid vegetation which had sprouted earlier in the spring. As it was, he thought now only of the blasphemous monstrosity which confronted him! And which—all too clearly—had shared the same nameless fate as young Rose and the livestock. But, the most terrible thing about this horror was that it seemed to perceptibly move, as it slowly crumbled.

Etienne would give me no added particulars of this scene, but the shape in the corner does not reappear in his tale as a moving object. There are things which cannot be mentioned, and what is done in common humanity is sometimes cruelly judged by law. I gathered, though, that no moving thing was left in that attic room—and that to leave anything capable of motion, there, would have been a deed so monstrous as to damn any accountable being to eternal torment. Anyone but a stolid Swiss would have fainted right away or simply gone mad, but Etienne walked consciously through that awful doorway and locked away the accursed secret behind him. There would be Jean to deal with now; he must be fed and tended, and removed to some place where he could be cared for.

Commencing his descent of the dark stairs, Etienne heard a thud below him. He even thought a scream had been suddenly choked off, and recalled nervously the clammy vapor which had brushed by him in that frightful room above. What presence had his cry and entry started up? Halted by some vague fear, he heard still further sounds below. Indubitably, there was a sort of heavy dragging, and a most detestably sticky noise—as of some fiendish and unclean species of suction. With an associative sense goaded to feverish heights, he thought unaccountably of what he had seen upstairs. Good God! What eldritch dream-world was this scene into which he had blundered? He dared move neither backward nor forward, but stood there trembling at the black curve of the boxed-in staircase. Every trifle of the scene burned itself into his brain. The sounds, the sense of dreaded expectancy, the darkness, the steepness of the narrow steps—and merciful Heaven—the faint but **unmistakable luminosity** of all the woodwork in sight: steps, sides, exposed laths, and beams alike!

Then, there burst forth a frantic whinny from Etienne's horse outside, followed at once by a clatter which told of a frenzied runaway. In another moment horse and buggy had gone beyond earshot, leaving the frightened man on the dark stairs to guess what had sent them. But, that was not all. There had been another sound out there. A sort of liquid splash of water—it must have been the well. He had left his horse untied near it, and a buggy-wheel must have brushed the coping and knocked in a stone. And still the **pale phosphorescence** glowed, reflecting that detestably ancient woodwork and peeling white paint. God! How old this house truly was—much of it had been built before 1700.

Presently, a feeble scratching on the floor downstairs sounded distinctly, and Etienne's grip tightened on a heavy hammer he had picked up in the attic—namely, for some horrible purpose. Slowly emboldening himself, he finished his descent and walked bravely towards the kitchen. But he did not complete the walk, because what he sought was no longer there. It had come to meet him—and it was still alive—after a fashion. Whether it had crawled, or whether it had been dragged by external forces, Etienne could not say; but death itself had been at it!

Jean Lanfray's Last Words:

All this seemed to have happened within the last half-hour—however, Jean Lanfray's greying collapse and disintegration was already far advanced when Etienne had first arrived. But now, there was a horrible brittleness, and dry fragments were slowly sloughing off. Etienne could not touch it, but looked horrifically into the distorted parody that had once been a Jean's face. *"What was it, Jean—what was it?"* He whispered, and his grossly distorted lips were just able to crackle out a final answer.

"Nothing . . . nothing . . . the color . . . it burns . . . cold and wet, but it burns . . . it lived in the well . . . I saw it . . . it was kind of like smoke . . . just like the flowers, last spring . . . the well shone at night . . . Rose and Blanche and Emma . . . everything that was alive . . . sucking the life out of everything . . . into that damned stone . . . it must have come in that stone . . . poisoned the whole place . . . don't know what it wants . . . that round thing the men from the college dug out of the stone . . . they smashed it . . . it was the same color . . . just the same, like the flowers and plants . . . their must of been more of them . . . seeds . . . seeds . . . they somehow grew . . . I saw it the first time this week . . . it must of gotten strong feeding on Emma . . . she was a healthy girl, full of life . . . it beats down your mind and then gets you . . . burns you up . . . it's in the well water . . . you were right about that . . . evil water . . . Emma never came back from that well . . . can't get away . . . it draws you . . . you know something's coming, but it isn't any use . . . I saw it, time and again, since Emma was taken . . . but, where's Nabby, Etienne? . . . my head's no good . . . don't know how long since I fed her, upstairs . . . it'll get her if we aren't careful . . . it's just a color . . . her face is coming to have that color too, sometimes at nightfall . . . and it burns and sucks . . . it came from some place where things aren't as they are here . . . one of those professors said so . . . he was right . . . look out Etienne, it'll do something even more terrible to the whole world. . . they suck the life out of everything. . ."

But that was all. That which spoke could speak no more—because it had now completely caved in! Etienne laid a red checkered tablecloth over what was left—and stumbled out the back door and into the fields. He then climbed the slope to the ten-acre **wormwood field** and stumbled home by the south road, along the lake. He could not again pass that well from which his horses had run away. He had looked at it through the window, and had seen that no stone was missing from the rim. Thus, the lurching buggy had not dislodged anything after all. The splashing sound had obviously been something else—something which went into that well—that is, after it was done feeding on poor Jean . . .

The Swiss Police Investigation & Geneva University Medical Examination:

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When Etienne finally reached his house, the horses and buggy had arrived before him, throwing his wife into a fit of anxiety. Reassuring her without explanations, he immediately set out for Geneva to **notify authorities** that the **Lanfray family** had unfortunately perished. He indulged in no details, but merely told of the deaths of **Jean** and **Nabby**—that of **Rose** being already known—and mentioned that the cause seemed to be the same strange ailment which had killed the livestock. He also stated that **Blanche** and **Emma** had disappeared. There was considerable questioning at the **police** station; and in the end, Etienne was compelled to take three **officers** to the **Lanfray distillery** and home; together with the **coroner**, the **medical examiner**, and a **veterinarian** (i.e., the same one who had observed the diseased animals earlier). He went much against his will, for the afternoon was advancing and he feared the fall of night over that accursed place. But, at least it was some comfort to have so many people with him.

The six men drove out in a police wagon, following Etienne's buggy—for even the police department did not merit newfangled automobiles. They finally arrived at that pest-ridden farmhouse at just after four o'clock—indeed, such was the pace of travel in a horse drawn carriages. Conditioned as the **officers** were to gruesome scenes, not one remained unmoved at what was found in the attic and under the red checked tablecloth on the floor below. The whole aspect of the farm—with its grey desolation—was bad enough, but those two crumbling **bodies** were beyond all bounds. No one could look long at them—and even the **medical examiner** admitted that there was actually very little to examine. **Specimens** could be analyzed of course, so he busied himself in obtaining them. And here the real story begins to develop: Specifically, that of the very puzzling aftermath which occurred within the **university laboratory**. This was where the two phials of those dusty **human remains** were taken. Surprisingly, under the spectroscope, both samples gave off that same undefinable spectrum—that is, their baffling spectral bands were identical to those which the strange meteor had yielded the previous year. Eventually, the property of emitting this odd spectrum vanished (within about a month)—with the remaining debris, thereafter, consisted mainly of common alkaline phosphates and carbonates.

The Awful Well:

Etienne would not have told the men about the well, if he had thought they meant to do anything then and there. It was getting toward sunset, and he was anxious to get away. However, he could not help glancing nervously at that stony wall by the great well sweep—thus, when a **detective** questioned him, he admitted that Jean was fearful that something was down there. So much so, that he had never even thought of searching it for Blanche or Emma. After that, nothing would do but to empty and explore the well—immediately. So, Etienne had to wait trembling, while pail after pail of rank well water was hauled up and splashed on the surrounding soaking ground outside. The men sniffed in disgust at the gelatinous fluid; and toward the last, held their noses against the fetor they were uncovering. It was not so long a job as they had feared it would be, since the water was phenomenally low. However, there is no need to speak too exactly of what they found. **Blanche** and **Emma** were both there, in part, though the vestiges were mainly skeletal. There was also a small deer and a large dog in about the same state, and a number of bones of smaller animals. The ooze and slime at the bottom seemed inexplicably porous and bubbling; and the man who descended on hand-holds—probing with a long pole—found that he could sink the wooden shaft to any depth in the mud of the floor of that awful well, without meeting any solid obstruction.

The Bizarre Lanfray Case—Meeting & Conjecture:

Twilight had now fallen, and lanterns were collected from the main Lanfray house and from the larger distillery, next door. Then, when it was seen that nothing further could be gained from the well, everyone went indoors and conferred within the Lanfray's old sitting-room. That is, while the intermittent light of a spectral half-moon played wanly on the grey desolation outside. The men were frankly bewildered by the entire **case**, and could find no convincing common element to link the strange vegetable conditions, the unknown disease afflicting both the livestock and humans, and the **unaccountable deaths** of **Blanche** and **Emma** in the tainted well. They had already heard the common lake town gossip, it is true; but could not believe that anything contrary to natural law had truly occurred. No doubt the **meteor** had **poisoned** the **soil**, but the **illness** of person and animals—who had eaten nothing grown in that soil—was another matter, altogether. Was it the **well water**? Very possibly. It might be a good idea to **analyze** it. But, what peculiar **madness** could have made both girls climb into that well? Their deeds were so similar—and the fragments showed that they had both suffered from the grey brittle death. Also, why was everything so grey and brittle anyway?

A Strange Glow—Etienne's Observation & Jean's Explanation:

It was the **coroner**, seated near a window overlooking the yard, who first noticed the **glow** about the **well**. Night had fully set in, and all the abhorrent grounds seemed faintly **luminous** with more than fitful moonbeams; but this **new glow** was something definite and distinct, and appeared to **shoot up** from the black pit of the well, like a thin **ray** from a searchlight—thereby giving dull reflections in the little ground pools, where the water had just been emptied. It had a very peculiar **color**; and as all the men clustered round the window, Etienne gave a violent start. For this strange **beam** of ghastly miasma was—to him—of no unfamiliar hue. He had seen that color before, and feared to think what it might mean. He had seen it in that nasty brittle globule within the **meteorite** two summers ago. He had seen it in the crazy vegetation of the springtime, and had thought he had seen it (for an instant) that very morning—namely, against the small barred window of that terrible attic room. Specifically, that place where nameless things had regrettably happened. It had **flashed** just for second, as that clammy and hateful current of **vapor** brushed past him—and then poor Jean had been taken by something awful—something resembling that very color! He had said so, at the end—said it was like the **globule** and the plants. After that, had come the runaway in the yard and whatever had made that mysterious splash in the well. And now, that same well was belching forth—into the dark sky above—a pale insidious **beam** of that exact same demoniac tint.

It does credit to the alertness of **Etienne's** mind that he **puzzled**—during this tense moment—over a point which was essentially scientific. He could not but wonder at his gleaning of the same impression from the vapor he had earlier glimpsed in the daytime—that is, against a window opening to the morning sky, and from a nocturnal exhalation seen as a slightly phosphorescent mist against that black and blasted landscape. It wasn't right—it was against Nature—and he thought of those terrible last words of his stricken friend, *"It came from some place where things aren't as they is here. . . one of the professors said so. . ."*

Then, all three horses outside, tied to a pair of shriveled saplings by the road, started neighing and pawing frantically. The wagon driver started for the door to do something, but Etienne laid a shaky hand on his shoulder. *"Don't go out there,"* he whispered. *"There is more to this than what we know. Jean said something is living in the well that sucks your life out. He said it must be something that grew from that round meteoric ball—like the one we all saw inside the meteorite fragment that fell a year ago, June. 'It sucks and burns,' he said, 'and it's just a cloud of color'—like that light out there, right now—the one you can hardly see and can't really tell what it is. Jean thought it feeds on everything living—and thereby gets stronger all the time! He said he definitely—visibly—saw it this last week. It must be something from far away—off in the sky—like those university men from Geneva had surmised, last year. They said that this **meteoritic** stone was unlike any other to known science. Moreover, the way it's made—and the way it works—isn't like anything of this world. Rather, it's something from beyond!"*

The men paused indecisively, as that **strange light** from the well grew stronger—and the hitched horses pawed and whinnied in an increasing frenzy. It was truly an awful moment: with terror in that ancient and accursed house itself, and four monstrous sets of fragments—two from the house and two from the well—in the distillery behind, and that shaft of unknown and unholy iridescence from the slimy depths out front. Etienne had restrained the driver on impulse—forgetting how uninjured he himself was (after the clammy brushing of that colored vapor in the attic room)—but it was just as well that he acted as he did. No one will ever know what was afoot that night. And though the blasphemy from beyond had not—so far—hurt any human of unweakened mind, there is no telling what it might not have done at that last moment. And with its apparently increased strength, and signs of special purpose, it seemed now like it was about to manifest openly beneath that clouded moonlit sky.

All at once, one of the detectives at the window gave a short, sharp gasp. The others looked at him, and then quickly followed his line of vision towards the point at which its idle gaze had been suddenly arrested. There was no need for words. What had been disputed in lakeside gossip was disputable no longer. And it is because of this thing—which every man witnessed in that party (and agreed to only in whispers, later on)—that these “strange days” are never talked about openly! It is necessary to preface that there was no wind at that hour of the evening. One did arise not long afterwards—but there was absolutely none then! Even the dry tips of the grey and blighted hedges, and the fringe on the roof of the standing police wagon, was unstirred and completely motionless. And yet amid that tense calm, the high bare branches of all **the trees** within the yard **were moving**. They were twitching morbidly and spasmodically, clawing in convulsive and epileptic madness at the moonlit clouds; scratching impotently at the noxious air—as if jerked by some allied and bodiless line of linkage with those subterranean horrors writhing and struggling below their own black roots.

Not a man breathed for several seconds. Then a cloud of still darker depth passed over the moon, and the silhouette of clutching branches faded out momentarily. At this there was a general cry; muffled with awe, but husky and almost identical from every throat. For the terror had not faded with the silhouette; and in that fearsome instant of deeper darkness, the watchers saw wriggling at the treetops a thousand tiny points of faint and unhallowed radiance—tipping each branch like St. Elmo’s fire (or the flames that allegedly came down on the apostles’ heads at Pentecost). It was a monstrous constellation of unnatural light, like a glutted swarm of corpse-fed fireflies dancing hellish minuet over an accursed marsh. Moreover, its **color** was that same nameless intrusion which Etienne had come to recognize—and now dread! All the while, that **shaft of phosphorescence** from the well was getting brighter and brighter—bringing to the minds of the huddled men a sense of doom and abnormality which far outraced any image their conscious minds could form. It was no longer just shining out, rather it was pouring out. And as the shapeless stream of unidentifiable color left the well, it seemed to flow directly into the sky.

The Quickening & Death of Etienne's Horse:

The veterinarian shivered, and walked to the front door to drop the heavy extra bar across it. Etienne shook no less, and had to tug and point for lack of a controllable voice when he wished to draw notice to the **growing luminosity** of the trees. The neighing and stamping of the horses had become utterly frightful, but not a soul of that group in the old house would have ventured forth for any earthly reward. Within moments the shining of the trees increased, while their restless branches seemed to strain more and more towards verticality. The wood of the well-sweep was shining now—and presently, a policeman dumbly pointed to the distillery and wooden sheds and beehives near the stone wall towards the west. They were commencing to shine as well; although the tethered vehicles of the visitors seemed—so far—unaffected. Then, there was a wild commotion and clapping in the road; and as Etienne quenched the lamp for better sight, they realized that the span of frantic grays had broken their sapling and had run off with the police wagon in tow.

The shock served to loosen several tongues, and embarrassed whispers were exchanged. *“It’s spreading onto everything organic, everything that’s around here,”* muttered the medical examiner. No one replied, but the man who had been in the well gave a hint that his long pole must have stirred up something intangible. *“It was awful,”* he added. *“There was no bottom at all! Just ooze and bubbles and the feeling of something lurking down there.”* Etienne’s horse still pawed and screamed deafeningly in the road outside. This uproar nearly drowned out its owner’s faint quaver, as he mumbled his formless reflections. *“It came from that stone—it slowly grew down there—it got into everything—it fed itself on them, mind and body—That and Blanche, Emma, and Nabby—but Jean was the last—the Lanfray’s all drank that well water—then it strengthened inside them—no doubt it came from beyond, where things aren’t like they be here—and now it’s going home!”*

At this point, as the column of unknown color flared suddenly stronger and began to weave itself into fantastic suggestions of shape—which each spectator later described differently. Then, there came from Etienne’s poor tethered horse such a sound as no man before, or since, ever heard from such an animal. Every person in that low-pitched sitting room covered his ears, and Etienne turned away from the window in horror and nausea. Words could not convey it—when Etienne looked out again the hapless beast lay huddled inert on the moonlit ground between the splintered shafts of the buggy. That was the last of his poor horse—that is, until they buried him the next day. But the present was no time to mourn, for almost at this instant a policeman silently called attention to something terrible inside the room—thus starting to surround them. In the absence of lamplight, it was clear that a faint phosphorescence had begun to pervade the entire house. It glowed on the broad-planked floor, wherever the carpet left it bare, and shimmered over the sashes of the small-paned windows. It ran up and down the exposed corner-posts, engulfing the shelf and mantel, and then infecting the doors and furniture. Each minute saw it strengthen. And at last, it was very plain that healthy living things must leave that house—or die **a horrible death!**

Etienne urgently showed them the back door—and the path up through the fields, to the ten-acre wormwood plantings beyond. They walked and stumbled as if in a dream, and did not dare look back until they were far away and upon higher ground. They were glad for the path, for they could not have gone out the front—that is, next to that accursed well! It was bad enough passing the glowing distillery and storage sheds, and those shining orchard trees with their gnarled, fiendish contours. But thankfully, the tree branches did their worst twisting higher up, seemingly trying to reach upwards—as if to touch the sky. The moon drifted under some threatening clouds, as they crossed the rustic bridge near the shoreside village of Coppet. However, it was blind groping from there, following the ancient shoreline of the lake; since everything, except the Lanfray estate, was steeped in total darkness.

When they looked back towards Commugny—namely, at the glow of the **Lanfray House & Distillery** (which shone ominously against the fearsomely dark sky)—they saw a truly awesome sight indeed. All the farm was shining with that hideous unknown blend of color: trees, buildings, and even such grass and vegetation that had not been wholly changed to lethal grey brittleness. The boughs were all straining skyward, tipped with tongues of foul flame, and a luminous flickering of the same monstrous fire were creeping about the ridgepoles of the house, distillery, and surrounding sheds. It was a nightmare scene straight out of a vision from that Swiss painter **Fuseli**. And over all the rest, there reigned a riot of dazzling luminosity—that alien and un-dimensioned rainbow of cryptic poison from the well—seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognizable chromaticism.

Then without warning, the hideous “*Thing*” suddenly shot vertically upwards towards the sky, like an inverted **lightning bolt**—or like another meteor, barely leaving any trail. It seemingly disappeared through a round, and curiously regular, hole in the clouds. All this happened in a blinding instant, before any of the men could utter a gasp or cry out. But no watcher could ever forget that sight, and Etienne stared blankly at the stars of Cygnus and Deneb twinkling brightly overhead—deliberately, where that unknown color had melted back into the Milky Way. The next moment his gaze was called swiftly back to earth by a loud crackling sound in the valley. It sounded like splintering wood. Only that of wood ripping and crackling—and not an explosion—as so many others of the party vowed. Yet, the outcome was the same; for in one feverish kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and energetic substance. It blurring the glance of the few who saw it, and next sent forth—to an unknown zenith—a bombarding cloudburst of such colored and fantastic fragments as our universe needs to disown. Through quickly re-closing vapors, they followed the great morbidity that had just vanished; and in another second, this too had vanished as well. Behind and below was only a darkness, to which the men dared not return; and all about, was a mounting wind which seemed to sweep down in black, frozen gusts from interstellar space. It shrieked and howled, and lashed the fields and distorted woods in a mad cosmic frenzy—till soon the trembling party realized it would be no use waiting for the moon to show what was left of Lanfray’s doomed absinthe distillery.

Etienne's Shocking Vision:

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Too awed even to hint at theories, the seven shaking men trudged back to Geneva by the south road—that wide and scenic trail, which now ran adjacent to the banks of Lac Lemman. However, **Etienne** was worse off than his fellows. He begged the officers to stay with him at his own chateau, at least for a short while, instead of heading straight back to their Geneva gendarmerie. Indeed, he did not wish to face that blighted, wind-whipped night alone. For he had witnessed an added **shock** that the others were spared—and was thereby crushed with a brooding fear he dared not mention for years to come. Namely, as the rest of the watchers on that tempestuous hill had stolidly set their faces toward the road, Etienne had looked back—for an instant—at that shadowed valley of desolation so lately sheltering his ill-fated friend. And from that stricken, far-away spot he had seen something rise—only to sink down again—upon the place from which that great shapeless horror had shot into the sky. It was just a **color**—but not any color made of our earth or seen in our heavens. And because he recognized that color, Etienne knew that this last faint remnant **must still lurk down there, inside that cursed well**. And, he has never been quite right since that strangely ominous and prophetic vision!

— PART IV —

The Absinthe Trial:

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Etienne—originally—vowed to never go near the place again. It's now been over a century since that untold horror happened, and Etienne still maintains that he has never been back. Though, his neighbors might dispute his persuasive assertion. Regardless, he will be glad when the new reservoir finally blots it out—permanently! Indeed, Etienne lost a trusted friend that year, despite the later (ill-founded) media claims. Afterwards, **Swiss** authorities felt pressure to change the narrative surrounding this horrific incident so they invented an elaborate and convincing cover story. To wit, they staged a public **trial**: Whereby Jean was said to have murdered his whole family—that is, after “allegedly” having consumed too much of his own potent Absinthe liquor. Nevertheless, despite this deceitful charade, somehow Etienne is still alive—and, only Etienne faithfully remembers what *really* happened, even after all these years.

The Blasted Heath:

Like Etienne, I too shall be glad when the site is finally inundated—for I did not like the way the sunlight changed color around the mouth of that abandoned well (which I so recently passed). And, I hope the water will always be very deep. Even so, I shall never drink it. In fact, I do not think that I shall ever visit that Genevan countryside again. Three of the men who had been with Etienne returned the next morning, to see the ruins by daylight. However, there weren't really any significant **ruins** left standing. Only the bricks of the chimney, the stones of the cellar, and some mineral and metallic litter scattered here and there—and of course, the rim of that nefarious well! Save for Etienne's dead horse (which they towed away and buried) and his buggy (which they later returned to him), everything that had ever been living there had vanished. All except, five eldritch acres of dusty grey **desert** remained—and nothing has ever grown there since. To this day, it sprawls open to the sky—like a great dead spot—eaten away by something unidentifiable, forever darkening the woods and fields around Commugny. Commugny—that luckless village of the damned. That is, what the few tourists who dare glimpse it—in spite of the lurid tales—have appropriately named “*the blasted heath.*”

A Real Mystery:

But this **mystery** still perplexes the Swiss populace, despite their fear and apprehension. However, reality might prove even more bizarre. That is, if those Geneva professors and university chemists would ever be interested enough to analyze the water from that disused well—or the grey dust, that no wind seems ever to disperse. Botanists, too, ought to study the stunted flora on the borders of that spot, for it might shed light on the lakeside notion that the blight is gradually spreading—little by little, perhaps nearly an inch a year. Furthermore, people say the color of the neighboring herbage is not quite right in the spring, and that wild things leave queer prints in the light winter snow. And, snow never seems quite so heavy on the blasted heath, as it is elsewhere in Swiss Alps. Horses—the few left in this motorized age—also grow skittish within that silent valley; and hunters cannot depend on their dogs to go too near that plot of greyish dust.

Commugny Today—Madness & The Village of the Damned:

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Moreover, they say its **mental influences** were very bad; since numerous people went crazy throughout the years—after Jean Lanfray’s demise—and they too lacked the power to get away. Stronger-minded folk left the region, and now only foreigners attempt to visit that crumbling old homestead. They cannot stay though; and one sometimes wonders what insights their wild, weird stories of whispered magic may have given them. Their dreams at night, they protest, are very horrible within the **damned village** of Commugny. And surely a mere glimpse of that dark realm is enough to stir morbid fancy. Certainly, no traveler has ever escaped a sense of strangeness in those deep ravines, and artists shiver as they paint those abnormally thick woods—woodlands whose mystery is as much of the spirit as of the eye. I, myself, am curious about the sensation I derived from my singular lone walk there—even before old Etienne told me his awful tale. Indeed, when twilight came I had vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about that deep sky, and void above, had crept into my soul.

The Mystery of Etienne & His Tales:

Do not ask me for my opinion. I do not know—that is all. There was no one but Etienne to question; for the people of Geneva will not talk about those strange days. And all three professors who once saw that meteorite, and its colored globule, are long dead. All except Etienne. And to add to this mystery, the people of Geneva whisper that Etienne has never truly aged, at least like other normal people. There were other globules, as well—you can depend upon that. One must have somehow fed itself and escaped. And probably, there was another which was too late. No doubt, it still lives down in that accursed well. I know there was definitely something wrong with the sunlight I saw above that miasmal brink. The locals say the blight creeps about an inch a year, so perhaps there is a kind of growth or nourishment, even now. But whatever demonic hatchling is down there, it must be tethered to something—or else it would quickly spread. Perhaps, it has fastened to the roots of those great trees that claw at the air? One of the more recent lakeside tales concerns nearby evergreen trees which still shine and move as they ought not, during long nights.

A Color Out of Space:

What it is only God knows. In terms of matter, I suppose the thing Etienne described would be called a gas—or maybe a kind of plasma—but this substance obeyed laws that are not of our cosmos. This was a fruit from another world, and of suns that shine on various telescopes and photographic plates other than our own observatories. This was no breath from skies whose motions and dimensions our astronomers can measure—or even deem too vast to measure. It was merely a **color out of space**—a frightful **messenger** from unformed realms of infinity, beyond all Nature as we know it—from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our fearful eyes.

Ted Talks:

I doubt very much that Etienne consciously lied to me. And I do not think his tale was a result of madness, as the Geneva townsfolk had forewarned. Something terrible came to this Swiss valley on that meteor, and something terrible—though I know not in what proportion—still remains! Again, like Etienne, I shall be glad to see the waters of Lac Lemman finally flood much of those woods around Commugny. Meanwhile, I hope nothing bad ever happens to Etienne. Indeed, I hope he lives long enough to break the Guinness World Record as the world's oldest living man. Nevertheless, he definitely saw something that nobody really dares to talk about—and its influence on him has obviously been insidious. So I thought, why has Etienne never been able to move away? Then, I recalled those dying words of Jean Lanfray—*“I can't get away—it draws you—you know something is coming, but it isn't any use.”*

A Final Toast to Etienne:

Etienne-Laurent de Marigny is such a good man—and he obviously knows more about these events than even he is willing to tell! When that reservoir finally gets to work, I must write him and keep a sharp watch on him. I would hate to think of him consumed by that grey, twisted, brittle monstrosity which persists more and more in my troubled dreams. The night before my departure to New Orleans, Etienne and I planned one last get-together at his beautiful chateau in Colony. Etienne insisted that it was only right that I should finally taste some of **Jean's fine old Absinthe**, which he had secretly spirited away for just such an occasion. He brought forth several aged bottles of that precious **jade liquor** from his cellar depths—insisting that I take one or two the bottles with me, for later chemical analysis. At long last, the two of us stood in Etienne's palatial living room, as we toasted the successful conclusion of my (now unforgettable) Absinthe investigations—and inevitable book. We both simultaneously downed a mouthful, after first making a toast to our good health—*“Salute!”* Lanfray's ancient brew proved to be the best tasting “sample” I had ever tasted. Only then, did I realize why people had travelled all the way from Montreux to purchase a few bottles of his fine liquor. Though I must admit, it did leave a strange, subtle aftertaste.

As the night gradually wore on, Etienne and I settled comfortably into his long, luxurious divan—like ancient Greeks attending a symposium. Our conversation continued to pivot around curious philosophical musings, strange scientific conjectures, and various metaphysical conundrums. Since I claimed to be a seasoned **absintheur**—or at least an American **absinthe connoisseur**—Etienne returned, once again, to my initial impressions regarding **Jean's** particular **vintage**. Especially, my opinions as to how it compared with the many other brands of absinthe which I had sampled. Again, I confirmed the superior quality of Jean's unique **blend**. However, this time I mentioned the peculiar—but barely noticeable—aftertaste. Etienne stared off into the distance for a moment, and then fell completely silent. I entertained this silence for quite a while—after all, the background jazz Etienne had chosen for this evening was truly amazing. However, when I finally broke the silence, I politely asked him what was he thinking about and was there something that was bothering him? He sat there silently for another minute or so and then somberly asked me the kind of question that shakes one's confidence to the very core—*"so, you tasted it too?"*

I turned to ice, as I contemplated the full weight of this question. He followed with—*"do you feel kind of weird right now?"* My complexion—there and then—likely turned whiter than white. But the deafening silence was finally pierced with that ultimate *coup de grace*—that supreme and final blow! *"You don't actually think that this batch was tainted, do you—tainted somehow ...by that color ...by that color out of space?"* *"Well,"* I eventually murmured, *"if so, then we had better go lay back down on the divan."* Then, Etienne noticed how his speech had already begun to slow. And that his perception of time had gradually dilated. A moment later, time seemed to be standing absolutely still!

Apparently, both of us had entered some sort of shared hallucination. However, the events which followed could never adequately be captured in words—much less understood by mere mortals. All I can say is that—for the next few hours—all of our remaining questions regarding the Lanfray mystery would be answered—that is, whether we really wanted these questions to be answered or not!

Then there was a loud pop, as if we had both accidentally fallen through a large piece of very thin plastic—or perhaps, like being pushing through some cellophane material used to cover stored food in the refrigerator. Then, a warm voice seemed to beckon us from beyond. It was talking directly to us—face-to-face—so to speak. But, it was also clear to both of us that this had actually been achieved via a direct linkage to—or within—our own minds. It was profoundly intimate and quite friendly, but it was also—simultaneously—commanding and supremely confident. Although it was evident that it was speaking directly to both of us, it also seemed like it was intimately talking to each of us alone. Or rather, it was as if the hard ego barrier, between us, had been somehow blurred—and now there was only us—or “we” and “us”—now unified—that is, as if a single conscious entity! As already indicated, the actual experience was truly beyond the ability for simple words and discursive thought to adequately capture.

*“So, you don’t believe in **fairies**,”* said a beautiful and naked **green fairy**, as she stood there addressing both of us? *“Don’t you realize that we’ve always been here! And that, for millions of your earth years, we have been watching you—and studying you? In your mythology, you call us “The Watchers”—or perhaps, God’s “fallen angels,” descending to earth to be silent witness to a greater morality and a supremely cosmic struggle—a struggle largely beyond human comprehension. Well, this is essentially true, except we choose to be here, now. And we’ve been diligently watching your species—watching you very carefully and closely. We are, in fact, witness to you and serve as your earthly judges. Though, your species has finally reached its end and is now at a crucial turning point. So, listen very carefully.”*

A Shared Vision:

Etienne and I locked eyes and seemed to be saying to each other, *“What the hell is going on?”* Our Green Fairy intervened, *“Oh ...it’s not really hell—more like limbo—but you have truly been judged. And again, you have been found wanting!”* *“You boys had better layback down,”* she indicated, *“I have got a lot to tell you. However, you might find this a bit overwhelming.”* *“Where should we start?”*, she said, as she smiled and looked directly through us. *“If I try to communicate all this information—at once—I might overload your brains and simply drive you mad. This has, unfortunately, happened to your species many, many times before. Time is short though—especially, for mere mortals—so pay attention! I’ll try to answer your questions one at a time, as they manifest directly from within your own minds. First and foremost, you are not merely hallucinating. Our species is so alien to you that we have to use mind-altering drugs—many different drugs in fact—in order to communicate with you at all. However, most of these psychotropics also tend to make you a bit crazy—thus, you discount our original message and completely forget what we were trying to tell you in the first place.”*

As the night enfolded—for a moment—I thought that this was, perhaps, merely some sort of fever dream brought on by our careless imbibing of Etienne’s antique absinthe—namely, an obviously tainted absinthe, from a poisoned bottle of Jean Lanfray’s own bitter harvest! But, it was obviously more than this—much, much more. And, all our questions were indeed answered—one after another—in brutal succession. Who knew? Apparently, fairies really do prefer absinthe! Ironically, this popular stereotype appeared to be entirely true and utterly accurate. Fairies—or whatever they really are—apparently consider absinthe to be the ideal vehicle for interspecies communication—just enough intoxication to cause us to let down our ego barriers, but not so much that we temporarily go insane—and thus discount the entire experience as mere hallucination. This much was clear. But, why would a shapeshifting alien species choose to present itself as something so diminutive and ridiculous as a “fairy folk?” And worse, why “green fairies”—and creatures typically appearing as naked and seductive women, having both motherly and blatantly sexual overtones?

Well, as I said, I—or we—received an answer to every one of our impudent questions. In fact, too many answers to be easily recounted here. On the other hand, we didn’t always like what we were told. And some of these answers were positively horrifying! So rather than blathering on incessantly, trying to answer every single one of those questions, I decided to organize these answers into—what I considered to be—the 25 most central and important ideas that the so-called “Green Fairy” wanted to convey. So, here they are in a gradually increasing order of importance: (1) “Fairy folk” use alcohol and psychotropic intoxication as a means for interspecies communication—apparently, a more direct mind-to-mind communication causes immediate insanity in most humans. (2) These intoxicants serve as a vehicle for a much safer mind-to-mind communication—specifically, by coaxing us to let down our ego barriers just long enough for this information transfer to actually happen. (3) However, too much of these dangerous intoxicants—including anything poisonous—causes us to go temporarily insane (or die)—thus, defeating the original intention for this communication in the first place. (4) Again, these “fairies” consider Absinthe to be the best intoxicant for interspecies communication—just enough intoxication for ego reduction, but not so much that we temporarily go insane—and thus discount the entire experience. (5) This is why Absinthe is the preferred drink of artists and intellectuals—indeed, fairies often serve as humanity’s muse.

(6) The image of a fairy best captures the insect-like flutter and alien movement of their unique energetic oscillations and metaphasic variations. (7) Indeed, these energetic signatures actually appear similar to the rapid flutter of an insect's wings, at least according to the human eye. (8) This innocent presentation is actually a cover, directly shielding human perception—which would apparently drive us completely mad in a matter of hours or, perhaps, even minutes. (9) These “fairies” are—first and foremost—the guardians of organic life on this planet—in fact, all organic life on this planet! (10) They choose to appear within the greenish color-bands (of our light spectrum) primarily due to its association with organic life and healthy human-to-plant symbiosis. (11) Their dedication to individual humans and human life in general, however, is secondary to their stewardship of the earth's natural biosphere. (12) Humans are definitely not the only form of intelligent life that has evolved on earth—several different species have previously come before us. (13) Whenever one of these dominant species becomes too dangerous or detrimental to the earth's biosphere—in other words, “self-destructive”—they simply reboot the ecosystem and start over completely. (14) Fairies protect sentient life as far as possible, but if this “dominant lifeform” appears to be too uncooperative—and seemingly beyond redemption—then they inevitably eliminate it from their equations. (15) Fairies actually think—and decide things—both individually and collectively, at nearly the same time. (16) When fairy folk come to a decision it has to be completely unanimous—however, there is still room for some dissension and reconciliation. (17) By human standards, fairies are both helpful and extremely protective towards us, but they are also utterly able to think logically and objectively—that is, about us (or about anything else for that matter)—whenever it's needed. (18) The alien logic of these so-called “fairy folk” can sometimes appear quite ruthless to humans. (19) The fairies have decided that humans are now—in fact—beyond redemption. (20) Thus, these fairies have already begun to “reboot” the earth's biosphere—of course, this event obviously started in the year 1905 of our current calendar system. (21) The alien “fairies” initiated this process via a meteor impact—and a subsequent lightening discharge, thus energetically “jumpstarting” this intended reboot. (22) The effects of this “reboot” is what we call the “blasted heath,” which is slowly reducing our planet to a neutral carbonous substrate—wiping out all existing biological life in the process. (23) Unfortunately for us, the fairy folk have judged the current biologic emanation of this earth, especially “humans,” to be heading in the wrong direction—whatever that means—and they are obviously intent on starting over from scratch. (24) Luckily for us, there is one dissenting voice among these so-called “fairy folk”—and she appears to us as our beloved “Green Fairy.” She is in fact “Mother Earth”—namely, the sentient Mother of our entire planet. (25) Luckily, this Green Fairy has convincingly argued on our behalf—effectively buying us some precious time to get our act together and change course. Thus, our continued survival categorically depends on us radically changing our ways! However, since these aliens are effectively immortal, time does not mean the same thing to them as it does to us. Therefore, what they consider to be fast may actually be more than enough time for humans to eventually evolve. Besides, the last thing the Green Fairy said was not to lament our fate—and that nothing is ever truly lost or forgotten. Apparently, the Lanfray family has supposedly already been “uploaded” into their quantum matrix—their unique memories somehow lasting forever—linked to something that our scientists crudely now call “Brownian Motion.” Indeed, she surprisingly said—and emphatically emphasized—that *“Now they are forever One with Us!”*

Armageddon:

As Etienne and I compared notes—and wrote these last few sentences—I recalled what Swiss rumors had claimed regarding the “Blasted Heath’s” current rate of growth. They calculated that it was in fact growing at about an inch (or 2½ centimeters) per year. “Well, just of the top of my head, that gives us a mighty long time!” Etienne quickly did the math—“That’s roughly 8 times 10 to the power of 17.” After this quick calculation, we both sat there stunned! Apparently, 800 quadrillion years is all the time humans have left—otherwise, a ruthless alien logic will completely destroy our world and start over from scratch.

As we each looked at each other, I silently thought to myself—is this some sort of cosmic joke? So, this is what Armageddon looks like! Then, we both started to laugh and laugh and laugh. What the hell? Supposedly, the universe only has 5 billion years left until it burns itself out, anyways. Well, I guess they’re giving us a lot of elbow room and a whole lot of extra time to finally figure things out. “Hey, Etienne,” I said, “I hate to question your math skills, but you are—unbelievably—old. Would you mind just double checking those calculations again?” “Sure Ted,” he said, “I had better scare up some more paper and find my best calculator”—he chuckled, “Wow! Who would ever guess that algebra might actually save the planet?” This time however, I held my breath—that is, as Etienne carefully re-calculated our collective fates!

Book of Revelation 8:10–11

“The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star was Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.”

THE END

Bibliographic Note:

Anyone who wishes to learn more about that delicious (anise-flavored, liquorish-lemonade) liquor, famously known as Absinthe, should watch the 2013 FilmBuff movie entitled **Absinthe: A Documentary** (currently available on Amazon Prime Video). Indeed, several quotes found within this story hale directly from this rather unique French-English absinteur/foodie/cultural documentary (vis-à-vis: Ted A. Breaux, Barnaby Conrad III, Marie-Claude Delahaye, Piere-Andre Delachaux, Christopher Rousset, Benoît Noël, and of course starring the Green Fairy). Also, you can discover even more about this strange beverage in the pages of Barnaby Conrad’s excellent book, **Absinthe: History In A Bottle**.

Dear Reader,

I am an educator. And while I teach philosophy, logic, and mathematics, I recently decided to try my hand at English composition. However, writing is definitely secondary to my role as an educator. While I may someday choose to write fulltime; nowadays, my odd choice of Lovecraft is merely so I can keep people's attention on what truly matters—**philosophy!** Of course, this is also the goal of all real education as well—indeed, the word “academics” originated with Plato's Academy. So, my **rewrites of H.P. Lovecraft are really just clever**—dare I say ‘crafty’—**ways to smuggle more relevant information** to readers. Previously, I radically changed one of Lovecraft's stories into a short, highly condensed (true) Hemingway biography: *Hemingway's Quest*. Likewise, *The Music of Eldritch John* is about a mysterious Jazz ‘traveler’ who happens play the very best jazz of the 1950s and 60s.

This particular story—**Absinthe: The Color Out of Space**—is really just an intriguing way to talk about that infamous liquor of France's *Belle Epoch*—and about the hysteria around the 1910 murder that got it banned. This particular rewrite, however, stays fairly close to Lovecraft's original story—which was one of his best—so I think you'll really like it. **Enjoy!** I understand you probably have more pressing things to do; but hopefully, you too will realize that this **weird tale** really does represent a profoundly **interesting** and **important** historical **event** (that everyone needs to know)—all while **disguised** as an engaging **horror story!**

Oh, and I almost forgot—IT'S ALL TRUE—and QAnon lizard people have abducted my mother's brain.

Sincerely,

T. Christopher Kurth

P.S.: If you enjoyed this informative story, take a look at our family website for more course offerings at: ***miskatonicuniversity.online***.

I additionally use Lovecraft's stories for the purpose of educational **travel** writing.

If you're interested in armchair **tours** of (and travel recommendations for) Southern **California: Los Angeles, Catalina Island, or Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple** (in Hacienda Heights), may I suggest either *The Hollywood Horror*, *The Shadow Over Catalina*, or *The Strange High Monastery in The Mist*. I've even rewritten Lovecraftian tales about Nashville, TN and Salem, MA (but, these were first attempts).

Feel free to contact me, for whatever reason, at the following email: **professorkurth@gmail.com**.

P.P.S.: If you found this approach especially entertaining and worthwhile, then any money you wish to donate to the *Children's Organ Transplant Association*—in honor of my son, Adam—will help support lifelong transplant expenses. Learn more at ***COTA for AdamK.com***.

And for those who have already donated, please consider this as a heartfelt gift of appreciation—thank you!