New Mythos Legends

New Mythos Legends

MARIETTA PUBLISHING
Marietta, Georgia USA

This book is dedicated to
the memory of Faith Lassiter Gehweiler,
my mother, who taught me to never lose my
imagination in a cynical world.

This book is also dedicated to my wife,
Andrea Evans Gehweiler and my two daughters,
Breanna Faith Gehweiler & Sierra Hope Gehweiler.

PUBLISHED BY
Marietta Publishing
Bruce R. Gehweiler, Publisher
1000 Arbor Forest Way
Marietta, Georgia 30064

Printed and bound in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Editor: Bruce R. Gehweiler
Design: John A. Gehweiler, Jr. & Alexander DeLarge
Cover Art: Allen Koszowski
Interior Art: Allen Koszowski, Ronald Moore, Jeffrey Thomas, M. Wayne Miller & Bob Fogletto

The Contents

Introduction & Acknowledgments

Few writers have influenced as many people as Howard Phillips Lovecraft. His impact on the fans and authors of science fiction, fantasy, and horror is clearly discernible and quite impressive. Having been inspired by fellow American, Edgar Allen Poe, Lovecraft sought to encourage young authors of his day. He succeeded far beyond his dreams and lifetime. Today, authors continue to draw inspiration from his body of work. This is such a collection.

When I contacted the authors who comprise this collection of short stories and novellas, I asked for fiction that attempts to equal the towering imagination of H. P. Lovecraft. I asked them not to try to imitate his writing style, or use any of his creations or characters. Well, some of them managed to slither into the book, after all; but that is due to the skill of the writers and the high caliber of their work. This book will introduce you to the new worlds created by the individual authors. Their writing contains hints of Lovecraft's influence, while breaking new ground.

I won't try to lecture you about the life or literature of Lovecraft. S. T. Joshi is, in my opinion, the best source of biography and literary criticism of H. P. Lovecraft. Also, I'm going to do something rare in the jealous world of publishing: I'm going to recommend you buy another publishing company's books. Chaosium, Inc., puts out a very

entertaining series of books that continue the mythos of Lovecraft. Series editor Robert M. Price is, in my opinion, one of the best editors of Lovecraftian fiction currently working in the genre. Stephen Mark Rainey and Jeffrey Thomas, both of whom have stories that appear in this collection, are also outstanding editors of Lovecraftian fiction. My humble hope is that you enjoy the stories in NEW MYTHOS LEGENDS for their originality and entertainment value.

Also in the tradition of H. P. Lovecraft, we introduce two new authors in this book: James Shimkus, and Richard Flanagan. Lovecraft spent much of his time working with new authors, as does Marietta Publishing. It is our wish and intent to bring fresh styles and viewpoints to the three genres we love most. I hope you enjoy their work enough to look for their names in future books from Marietta Publishing and others. I am thrilled to have been able to work with Tom Piccirilli, Norman Partridge, Hugh B. Cave, C. J. Henderson, Del Stone, Jr., Don D'Ammassa, Jeffrey Thomas, Stephen Mark Rainey, James S. Dorr, Gregory Nicoll, Stephen Antczak, and W. H. Pugmire. You are extremely gifted writers! You honor me with your confidence.

What makes a Marietta Publishing book different is the cutting edge and often cross-genre fiction. What also is unique about our books and chapbooks is that each story is beautifully illustrated by some of today's best artists. My thanks go out to: Allen Koszowski, Jeffrey Thomas, M. Wayne Miller, Bob Fogletto, and newcomer Ronald Moore for bringing these stories to life so vividly.

Without the advice of Tom Piccirilli, Richard Chizmar, and David G. Barnett, this book project would never have been completed. My heartfelt thanks go out to them for listening to me and helping me to overcome the many obstacles that have faced this project. I also wish to thank my father, Dr. John A. Gehweiler, Jr., for his many hours of hard work that went into the layout, design and copy editing of this book. Also, I wish to thank Alexander DeLarge for his invaluable layout work and dust jacket design. Special thanks go out to James Shimkus

for helping to copy edit the book. I'd like to thank my wife, Andrea E. Gehweiler for her support of this project.

Thank you for your support of the small press. Publishers in the small press have largely been responsible for the recent resurgence of horror fiction in North America. That is something Marietta Publishing hopes to continue in the future.

—Bruce Gehweiler

To communicate, or for a free updated catalogue, write us at: Marietta Publishing, P.O. Box 3485, Marietta, GA 30061-3485. If you wish to contact our authors or artists, I'll be happy to forward letters to them.


WAYNE
MILLER

The Calm

James S. Dorr

IT WAS ON a bright summer's day, in the Year of Our Lord 1755, that they came to the village. They had mustered out of Massachusetts, under the flag of Governor-General William Shirley to fight the French, and the wind had pursued them. It had followed them from the well-kept farms and ordered towns that they had grown up in, west and then north as their detachment, commanded by Captain Laurence Pindar, broke off from the main body, up through the Berkshires and into Vermont, a mixed troop of British regular army and raw colonials. It whistled after them through Brattleboro and Newfane and Windham, as they marched up, first, the West River valley, then, hoping to meet with the Battenkill and then the Mettawee and Otter Rivers, either of the latter of which could bring them to Lake Champlain, into the sow-backed ridges and valleys of the east slope of the Taconic Mountains.

Possibly of them all, Philip Latham, himself from the western part of Massachusetts and elected corporal of his town's militia, knew the wind best. Le vent de la mort, the French trappers called it, the few that, before, had come down to the lands of the English settlers.

The wind that presages death.

This was a Huron superstition, or so he had been told, brought east

from the Great Lakes but shared by the Iroquois tribes as well, that a wind that persisted could only bring ill fate. Especially a wind, as this, that even as they pressed into the mountains, still rustled the treetops. Still lay in wait for them to swirl their hats off whenever they broke to the infrequent clearings, the patches of grass where they fell out and rested while their officers grazed their horses.

He kept this lore to himself, of course—no sense spooking the others. Enough men were being lost to desertion. Enough there was to make men away from their homes for the first time, as most in his group were, to feel uneasy about their own shadows, much less the brooding, patch-shadowed peaks they caught glimpses of from time to time, as, hacking their way through tangles of honeysuckle and wild grape surrounded by forest, they pushed ever upward.

Until, at last, they came out on a ridge-top and saw the village.

The captain halted them. "Lieutenant Barnstone," he called, "bring the maps up." Still well outside the village proper, the men looked down on it, its empty town square with its well in the center, its rough-granite church standing squat on the far side with signs in its churchyard of recent activity, while the officers were conversing. They looked for signs of life, seeing no movement, the houses on its square's three other sides all barred and shuttered tight.

But shuttered against what, Corporal Latham wondered. Perhaps a coming storm? Beyond the small town stood a half-mile high mountain, its peak lost in darkened, fog-like clouds that hugged its cragged sides, not spreading out in the sky as most clouds did, but huddled close to its bare-rocked surface. But as for the wind that would bring a storm to them—he realized now that, for the first time, the wind appeared to be dying.

He looked toward the other men, then to the captain and his lieutenant as the officers called him over with the other noncoms. "This village should not be here," the lieutenant began. "At least it's not on any of our maps, which gives us a problem. Not knowing what this village is, we have no way of knowing which side its inhabitants support. Whether they'd welcome us with open arms, or—"

"Or whether they'd shoot us, if they had the chance to," the captain

said for him. "We may as well be blunt. I know we've lost men every mile of the way once we came in to these mountains. The hard march. The unfamiliar surroundings. The men need resting, a chance for cooked rations. And so I propose that we take a risk and make camp in the town here, but not all go in at first. I want some of you men to take the horses—we passed a small meadow not a mile back—and the wagons with them. See that they're hobbled there, then be ready to join back with us the instant there's any sign of trouble...."

And so the captain's orders continued, detailing some of the men as pickets to remain on the ridge-top, at least until given orders to come down, others, including Corporal Latham, to precede the main body into the village, but spreading out into its open places, guarding the dirt paths between its houses, its church and its churchyard. Latham, in point of fact, to take his group and scour the churchyard for any townspeople who might be hiding there, bringing any he found to the square where Captain Pindar would set the main camp up.

And the wind, meanwhile, slackened further, while other sounds now came, sounds of murmuring within the houses as the first troops passed slowly between them, the men with bayonets fixed on their muskets, alert for hostility. Then even these were then drowned out by the sounds of drums, as, the scouts passing through to the square without incident, the doors and the windows remaining shut tight, the main troop descended in battle order, carefully, warily, until they, too, reached the village's center.

"You of the village," the captain then shouted. "You see we are here and that we will not harm you. We ask you to come out—to send someone out to us. We wish to buy provisions from you. To use your well to fill our canteens with. To camp here peaceably only for one night and then be on our way."

And this time several of the doors opened. Latham watched from the churchyard where he and his small group had been inspecting what seemed the signs of a recent funeral, one interrupted before it was finished, as men from the houses came out to the square, but never straying too far from their own front doors. Some of them shouted, short, bent men, as if Aboriginals or else of mixed blood, but not in English.

Part French, a few of them. Others in some tongue that seemed like that of the Oneida tribes people, yet not entirely that, while Latham listened, hearing a snatch now and then that he recognized.

"Gardez!" a few shouted—that in a broken French Latham could understand. "Gardezvous de la fin du vent! Gardez son extrémité!"

And Latham, at least, realized what they were saying. The wind that presages death—beware its ending!

But Captain Pindar shouted over them: "Damme, is there no one here who speaks English!"

Then there was silence, a moment of silence as the villagers retreated softly back into their houses, closing the doors quietly behind them, and even the wind sank down to a sigh. And then to a whisper.

And then—next to Latham. Practically in his ear, a quiet voice murmured. "I speak English."

Latham jumped back, nearly tripping over a shovel—another sign of the ceremony that had, for some reason, been abandoned. Before him a man stood, robed as a village priest.

"I—I'm Corporal Latham," he stammered. Then, regaining his wits, he bowed hurriedly. "Begging your pardon, sir, but I was startled. The sudden silence, after our captain's shout. Then your voice, so near. I did not hear you come out."

"My pardon, then, Caporal," the priest answered, leading him with him to the square where the captain waited. "I am Charles Devinette, curé of the church where I came out a side door. Here in our village we have become used to moving with little sound, staying inside when our work does not call us out. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' as say you English, yes?"

"Uh, yes," Latham answered. "This is our commander, Captain Pindar, who, as you may have heard, wishes to let your villagers know that we only wish to camp here for the night. To rest and reprovision ourselves."

The priest nodded, then shook hands with the captain.

"My children," he said, "the flock of my village, wish you no harm either. With your permission, I will call them out again, but only for the briefest moment. I will explain to them that you must be sheltered,

even as they are sheltered themselves, that they must each take one or two of you with them into their houses. To let you wait with them...."

The captain shook his head.

"Damme!" he said. "You mean what you wish is to separate us—to get us in small groups where you can kill us. Your language is French, at least what I can make of it. Some of you Indians by the look of you, I would imagine. Likely most of you, even if you live in white men's houses." The captain smiled then, a bitter, tight-lipped smile. "Probably massacred, those that built 'em, eh?"

"Capitaine, non!" the priest protested. "We massacre no one. We are on neither side. As for our bodies, our language, our ways, we are, all of us, only what life makes us to be, yes? Here in these mountains there are êtres—things—much older than French or English. Or even the Iroquois. Things that are even more silent than we are. That strike when the wind dies!"

And the wind was silent as the priest suddenly turned and bolted back into the churchyard, Latham following on his heels at the captain's orders. He ran as quickly as he could, but the priest was faster, dodging gravestones, dodging the long, narrow, wicker basket used to carry the newly deceased—when even funerals were interrupted when the wind showed signs of stopping its constant hum—dodging the shovel that Latham had almost tripped over before, and then disappeared through a stout oaken door in the church's stone side, locking it with a firm click! behind him.

And Latham stood, transfixed, as the air became completely calm. As the leaves of the trees outside the town ceased their constant rustling, as every iota of motion was stilled. As even the murmurs inside were halted—until, a sudden scream!

A scream of horses, beyond, in the meadow where they had been taken. The shouts of the men who had been posted with them, followed by the captain's barked orders, to form up in ranks. A defensive square. Riflemen inside, bayonets outside.

Latham turned and ran to join them, seeing, as he did, over the church roof, the fog on the mountain beyond the village streaming downward, tendrils already having reached the plateaued grass where

the horses had been tied. He twisted, broken-field dashing through the cluttered churchyard when, with a sharp jolt, he felt the earth drop away beneath him.

He landed in darkness—the newly dug grave, the corpse already in it, but left unfilled when the gravediggers had hastily dropped their shovels to flee the impending calm. He tried to climb out of it, scrambling up its crumbling side, but his foot was caught in the winding cloth of the corpse's shroud, becoming all the more entangled the more he attempted to extricate it.

And overhead the air became heavy, hot with moisture, darkening as the fog rolled in behind him. As—

He tried to scream! To give some warning even if he could not join the others, faced outward in their defensive formation to stave off whatever it was that ignored those inside the houses—out of sight, out of mind, as the curé had said—but oozed on steadily up the pathways between the houses. Converging on the square. While, in the square itself, behind the men—he tried to scream, but the words would not come out.

He tried a second time to shout a warning that, in the square's center, out of the well where they had been planning just minutes before to refill their canteens another something was rising, haze-like, slowly forming in misted tendrils into some dim shape. Into some massing thing long-forgotten, hinting of scales and half-rotted tentacles, of bone and horn-like beak, as if of some race of ancient sea creatures long trapped beneath the ground. Fearing the wind only, the slightest breeze that would tear its damp form apart, scattering its substance into atoms, but, when even that which it feared had become still....

When all that moved were things filled with blood's wetness....

The scream would not come! He felt blood fill his own mouth as, struggling, he trapped himself yet more firmly within the shroud-cloth's vise-like windings, falling now on the corpse, rolling now under it as, in new darkness, he felt in his ears the echoes of other screams.

Then only silence.

And then, again, wind and the murmur of voices as villagers dug

him out. Wind that portended death for some, as the French trappers used to say, when it stopped blowing. For others, just graves.

But now, for Philip Latham, neither. Now the villagers took him in, an unwitting orphan, and saw to his hurts, and fed him and clothed him. They made him one of them, working side by side with him in the fields, finding a wife for him, helping him to establish a family. And always, now, he fled indoors with them when the wind began to slack in its blowing, until a time came, scarcely twenty years after, when another war spread to the mountains.

This war, however, was not with the British, regular army and raw colonials fighting side by side, but rather was a struggle against them. Except in the village, sides still did not matter.

The priest was long dead by then, unfortunately, when a detachment of New Hampshire volunteers, under Captain Nathaniel Flambard, arrived at a time when the wind once again was beginning to die down. As for the villagers, even their French had become unintelligible by then to anyone but themselves. And so, this time, they could give no warning, not even when this new captain screamed as he stood in the village square, the well behind him, his troops arrayed with him in loose formation, for someone, anyone, who could speak English.

"We wish not to harm you," he shouted. "We wish only for provisions. To fill our canteens here. To rest for the night and then be on our way."

Some who remembered brought Latham out to the square, to stand a moment remembering himself when he, too, was a soldier. He attempted, too, to give them some word or some sign, to make the captain understand that his men were in danger before, with the others, he scurried back inside.

And then, just before the wind stopped completely, one of the other officers turned to this new captain. "What do you make of it, Nate?" he asked.

The captain shrugged. "Whole village is mad, for all I can gather. And that man most of all. Harmless enough now, but something must have happened years back that gave him quite the fright. Did you see the inside of his mouth when he tried to talk?"

The other nodded. “That blackened stump? Aye, sir. I wonder if we’ll ever know what it was—what could have frightened a man so much—that he’d bite his own tongue off.”