

Snowmageddon!

by Matt Ryan & Noah Lloyd

The Story Without the Investigators

Royce Henderson is a professor of geology tenured at Harmington University, in upstate Maine. Two years ago, while on sabbatical in Inuvik on the Mackenzie River, he discovered a book titled *The Icy Gnaw of Winter's Breath*, a religious volume that describes the worship of the Elder God Ithaqua. Returning to Harmington he translated the text, which corrupted his mind, and decided to summon Ithaqua. He needs a large sacrifice to draw the god's attention and plans to kill the assembled students attending the university's mid-winter pageant, when they assemble on Brickmore Lake, the university's artificial reservoir, for a skating party.

To increase participation, Henderson joined the pageant committee and suggested inviting the students' parents, an idea that quickly took root. The dean approved and H. U. anticipates over 300 attendees. Henderson plants explosive charges around the perimeter of Brickmore Lake, which he will detonate during the height of the pageant. During the ensuing carnage and confusion, he will intone the summoning prayer to Ithaqua. **Cory McAlister**, Henderson's graduate student assistant, discovered the professor's plan and threatened to tell the authorities. Using *The Icy Gnaw of Winter's Breath*, Henderson summoned a gnoph-keh, a humanoid cannibal covered in coarse hair, that killed McAlister.

As the guests arrive on Friday for Saturday's pageant, the body is found. Too late to halt the ceremonies, the dean calls the local police. Again using his arcane tome, the professor creates a snowstorm, trapping the guests at the university. The pageant proceeds as planned. If Henderson is not stopped, he blows up the ice covering the reservoir, then summons Ithaqua as the skaters drown. The Elder God arrives and destroys everything within a 100-mile radius.

The Story with the Investigators

Decide first if "Snowmageddon!" is a one-shot adventure or part of a longer campaign. Both offer several avenues to include the investigators, depending upon their occupation. This story works in the historical setting of the 1920s or '30s, and in the modern era. The snowstorm prevents assistance and retreat even with today's heightened technological advances. If the investigators are students, they may be enrolled at H. U. or are invited to the pageant by friends. If they are local townspeople, they work at the university and have responsibilities during the pageant. Are they journalists? Assign them to cover the story. Law-enforcement officials? They are called when McAlister's body turns up. A mixed assortment of the aforementioned occupations makes an ideal team.

"Is that a clue?"

Henderson isn't a calculating killer, and is sloppy in his handiwork. McAlister's body lies in a storage shed, rent to pieces (Sanity Check). Large tracks in the snow (Bear prints? Walking on hind legs?) lead followers to a spot in a clearing in the pine forest that surrounds the university and lake. There, another set of human-sized tracks leads back to the university, where they mix with hundreds of others. A page torn from *The Icy Gnaw of Winter's Breath*, a spell for summoning one of

Ithaqua's minions, lies lodged in the lower branches of a tree. After summoning the gnoph-keh, Henderson lost the page in the blowing winds that accompanied the spell.

McAlister lived alone in one of the student dormitories. Neighbors say the graduate student was affable and orderly, and has been under Henderson's academic provision for 2 years. Diary entries (paper or electronic, depending on period) state McAlister's interest in Henderson's studies, especially the extended sojourn in the Northwest Territories. Doubt crept in a year ago as Henderson shifted concentration to deciphering *The Icy Gnaw of Winter's Breath*, and asked linguistics Professor Kyrie Dawn for assistance in translating Inuit. A shocking note on the final page, dated two days ago: "I can no longer go with H.'s plan. Murder for tenure track? No, I say, and must inform the constabulary."

Asking about Henderson at the Department of Geology offices reveals that the professor hasn't been seen for days. The last transaction was a request to the grounds crew for several packets of dynamite and a handful of remote detonators. And yes, the request was fulfilled.

If anyone asks the dean or the pageant committee if there have been any strange individuals around, they say yes. Over a hundred. "Have you met today's parents? Unlike anything we had in our day." If asked if parents normally come, the answer is no. Whose idea was it to include the parents? "Why, that nice professor of geology, Royce Henderson."

Following up on the lead from McAlister's diary, Professor Dawn easily admits to translating parts of the book Henderson had. Though it was written in Inuvialuktun, the book does not describe any Inuit or other Indigenous tribe's religious practices or folkloric beliefs. Dawn's assumption is that the anonymous author wanted to purposely make reading the tome difficult. Dawn's best guess, based on linguistic evidence, places the book's origin in the 19th century.

Henderson cannot be found at either academic office or house. Both locations hold further clues. Known for being tidy and well-groomed, the professor's house is a disorderly jumble. Paper cartons of half-eaten food sit rotting among piles of loose paper and bent-open books. Entrance to the house's W. C. demands an iron constitution.

Locations Possibly Visited During the Session

The surrounds of Harmington University, including the various academic offices and dormitories. The town of Cutter's Gulch, which houses the campus. The lake and surrounding woods. The outbuildings, including the winter storage shed McAlister died in.

Events that Threaten Sanity Loss

McAlister's body. Seeing the gnoph-keh (it is still in the woods). Reading the translation of *The Icy Gnaw of Winter's Breath* (found among Henderson's, McAlister, or Dawn's things). Reading any of the spells (all torn from the book and left where Henderson cast the spell). Watching the dynamite detonate and destroy the ice covering the lake. Watching the skaters drown. Seeing Ithaqua arrive.

Things that Could Kill the Investigators

The gnoph-keh. Ithaqua. The elements (if caught off-guard in the woods during the snowstorm). Henderson (if found in the woods residing in an old cabin). McAlister's ghost (if you read a lot of M. R. James stories and want to throw a ghost in there).

