

HIDEOUS CREATURES

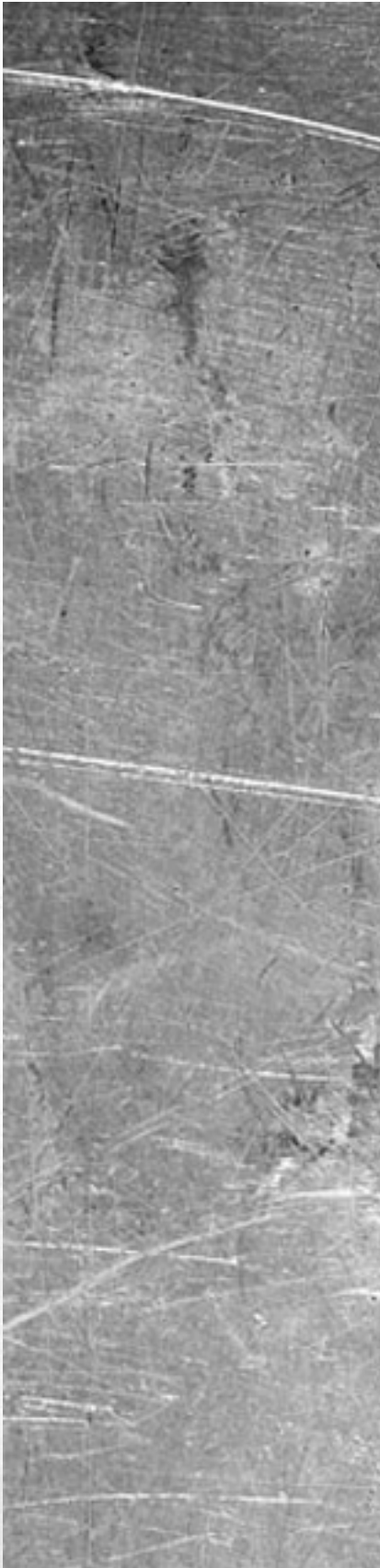
# WENDIGO



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Pelgrane Press



## WENDIGO

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# KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

Hideous Creatures: Wendigo is part of the Ken Writes about Stuff subscription series, featuring new and original Hite goodness every month for twelve months. A subscription costs \$24.95 and as well as giving you a generous 30% discount on the individual article price of \$2.95, we'll be offering an exclusive extra later in the year to all subscribers.

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# Hideous Creatures: Introduction

Lovecraft created his various “shadowy congeners” because the stories of vampires, werewolves, and even ghosts had become too familiar and too formulaic to evoke true horror. Almost a century after he wrote, his own monstrous races have likewise begun to seem like comfortable story furniture rather than unnerving signals that the world is horrible and wrong.

Our goal with this series is to present a comprehensive look at Lovecraft’s hideous creatures, from as many angles as we can. Our goal is contradiction, surprise, and most especially the uncanny: the recognition of something familiar as something weird. As in the “Gods and Titans” section of the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, this series deliberately contradicts itself, blurring boundaries and erasing certainties in the name of the uncanny. In your campaign, these variant truths might be misunderstandings, legends, heresies, or deliberate lies spread by the creatures to lull their foes into a false sense of familiarity.

Change anything and everything in these pages, most especially the ability scores. If you need a terrifying assassin, a brief but survivable fright, or a sanity-shattering horror, just add or subtract points at will.

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# Wendigo

**"IT CAME WITHOUT WARNING, OR AUDIBLE APPROACH; AND IT WAS UNSPEAKABLY DREADFUL. IT WAS A VOICE ... POSSIBLY A HUMAN VOICE; HOARSE YET PLAINTIVE—A SOFT, ROARING VOICE CLOSE OUTSIDE THE TENT, OVERHEAD RATHER THAN UPON THE GROUND, OF IMMENSE VOLUME, WHILE IN SOME STRANGE WAY MOST PENETRATINGLY AND SEDUCTIVELY SWEET."**

-- ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, "THE WENDIGO"

The word "wendigo" likely derives, in fine Lovecraftian fashion, from the Cree *wi'tgo'ku*, meaning "insane." But the Lovecraftian wendigo can represent two types of madness: a cannibalistic hunger that reduces a man to bestial monstrosity, or the seduction of the northern wastes that leads a man to lose his identity entirely and vanish.

The original Indian legends of the wendigo tend toward the anthropophagous fiend, but there are more than enough Ojibwa and Cree descriptions of the vast spirit of the snows to allow Algernon Blackwood and even August Derleth some claim to authenticity. The Keeper can choose the form of the wendigo in her game: demonic cannibal-ogre or cosmic wind-walker.

The cannibal-ogre is traditionally stinking and hairy, with a long tongue, blazing eyes of red or purple, protruding fanged teeth, and deformed or animalistic feet. Think of a rabid Sasquatch or a very manlike werewolf, and build from there. Other versions and variations can prove interesting, from historic lore and weird fiction alike:

- Skeletal and starving, jaundiced flesh pulled parchment-thin over skull and bones
- Indian depictions of the wendigo often sport horns; a cadaverous ogre with hooves and antlers like a caribou or elk, a feral woodland spirit
- Coated in frost or rime, or actually made of ice
- Pale and tall, with icy metal talons and teeth, the demon-embodiment

of the European invaders who brought starvation, plague, and tribal collapse in their wake

Those who see the fiend or hear its howl can contract wendigoism, the craving for human flesh. A spirit wendigo can even possess a hungry man and drive him to such foulness. The wendigo is thus a kind of tulpa, embodying and constructed from the basic cultural fears of the Algonquin: losing control emotionally or personally, starvation, madness, and isolation.

These last fears shape the wind-walker depicted by Algernon Blackwood: vast, indefinable, watching from the endless skies and forests, cold, implacable, pre- or ab-human. The wind-walker also has burning eyes, a seductive and terrible howl, and (if it takes a shape) strangely misshapen or attenuated feet. Consider a mirage of a mountain, or a hostile aurora, or an onrushing winter storm front given body and malice. Some possible changes to ring:

- Tall and thin, limbs trailing like wisps of fog and ending in talons and those horrid burnt feet
- An enormous predatory owl or death's-head moth — the wendigo and the West Virginia Mothman have a prophetic death-power in common, along with burning eyes and wings
- Formed out of blizzard winds and the negative space between wildly whipping trees, centered on a blazing indigo star
- A titanic apparition of any of the

cannibal-ogre forms: icy skeleton, antlered demon, winged corpse

Those who see this evil manitou or hear its howl are carried up to the arctic sky in a series of giant leaps. Their eyes bleed and their feet burn as they are consecrated to the thing that walks on the wind. If they return, it is as cannibal-ogres, or aged wreckage, or as frozen corpses dropped from a great height.

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Although Blackwood manages to ineffably combine the cosmic and the brutal in his story, Keepers may want to focus on one or the other form of wendigo for a given adventure or encounter.

### Wind-Walker

**"OUT THERE, IN THE HEART OF UNRECLAIMED WILDERNESS, THEY HAD SURELY WITNESSED SOMETHING CRUELY AND ESSENTIALLY PRIMITIVE. SOMETHING THAT HAD SURVIVED SOMEHOW THE ADVANCE OF HUMANITY HAD EMERGED TERRIFICALLY, BETRAYING A SCALE OF LIFE STILL MONSTROUS AND IMMATURE."**

-- ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, "THE WENDIGO"

This writeup presents the wind-walking "demonic" (perhaps winged) wendigo, of gigantic (if indefinable) size. It can

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Wendigo Psychosis

Anthropologists, and to a lesser extent psychologists, studying the Cree and Ojibway in the 1930s began to mention "windigo psychosis" -- an apparently culturally-driven syndrome among Northern Algonquin leading to autism, religious delusions, and cannibalistic mania. Many Algonquin had seemingly projected their cultural fears of famine not onto some misty demon in the wilderness, but onto themselves or each other. Victims of "windigo psychosis" believed themselves possessed as they wailed, clawed at friends and family members (whom they hallucinated as food animals), and refused food -- just as the myths had predicted.

However, when the cases came under closer scrutiny in the 1990s, the notion of a unified "windigo psychosis" disintegrated. There does not seem to be a single documented, first-hand case of incontrovertible Algonquin psychotic cannibalism on record. Modern cases of "windigo psychosis" turn out to be cases of ordinary anorexia, depression, or mental illness contaminated by sloppy white anthropologists and psychologists.

Whether "windigo psychosis" actually exists in your campaign is up to the Keeper. If it does, it takes a 2-point spend of Psychoanalysis (or perhaps a trained Ojibwa shaman) to differentiate it from genuine demonic possession.

leap 100 yards in a round, fly with its wings (if it has them), or actually walk on the wind.

Wendigo ratings change by environment (on land/in air).

**Abilities:** Athletics 10/30, Health 21, Scuffling 19/39

**Magic:** 15; possibly Create Hyperspace Gate, definitely Call Ithaqua.

**Hit Threshold:** 4/5

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** +0

**Weapon:** +2 (claw), +1 (bite), +2 or -2 (wing buffet)

**Howl:** The wendigo's howl costs it 2 Health (or Magic); hearers make a 5-point Stability test. Those who fail become Blasted for the duration of the scene; those who succeed lose only 2 Stability.

**Wing Buffet:** The wendigo slams its wings on the target, doing +2 damage (to one Point-Blank target) plus -2 damage (to all targets in Close range from the wind shock).

Wind-walking wendigo can either howl, wing buffet, or claw twice. If two claw attacks hit the same target in succession, its bite attack succeeds automatically

until forcibly separated from its prey.

**Grasp:** A wind-walker can seize a foe in its claws with a successful Scuffling test (-1 damage); that foe must spend 3 Athletics to do anything but writhe uncomfortably. A seized foe has her Hit Threshold lowered by 2. To free herself, she must defeat the wendigo in a contest of Athletics. If the wendigo wishes to carry off its target, use a die to keep track of the rounds elapsed since the grab: on odd-numbered rounds, the wendigo leaps hundreds of feet into the air, only touching down (perhaps miles away) on even-numbered rounds. On round seven, the wendigo begins actual flight, and freeing oneself is either impossible or suicidal.

**Armor:** -4 (thick and frozen hide, or ablative blowing snow); only extreme heat (burning, melting) damage to the heart (+3 to Hit Threshold) can kill it.

**Stability Loss:** +1

Cannibal-Ogre  
 "NOTHING REALLY CAN DESCRIBE THAT GHASTLY CARICATURE, THAT PARODY, MASQUERADING THERE IN THE FIRELIGHT ... THE FACE WAS MORE ANIMAL THAN HUMAN, THE FEATURES

DRAWN ABOUT INTO WRONG PROPORTIONS, THE SKIN LOOSE AND HANGING, AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO EXTRAORDINARY PRESSURES AND TENSIONS."

-- ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, "THE WENDIGO"

This writeup presents the more human-scale "ogre" wendigo, a ferocious man-eater.

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Health 9, Scuffling 10

**Magic:** If wendigo are tribal, only wendigo shamans have Magic 8 and Call Ithaqua; if they are solitary monsters, each wendigo has Magic 8 and Call Ithaqua.

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Alertness Modifier:** +2 (+4 to track wounded prey)

**Stealth Modifier:** +2 (+3 while snowing)

**Weapon:** +1 (claw), +0 (bite, plus possible wendigoism)

**Howl:** The wendigo's howl costs it 2 Health (or Magic); hearers make a 5-point Stability test (Difficulty 5). Those who fail become Blasted for the duration of the scene; those who succeed lose only 2 Stability.

The wendigo begins attacks with a howl from Long range (or farther). If surprised at Close range or nearer, it defaults to claws and teeth; it can attack twice in a round, either claw-bite or claw-claw. If two claw attacks hit the same target in succession, its bite attack succeeds automatically until forcibly separated from its prey.

**Armor:** -3 (thick and frozen hide); piercing the heart (+3 to Hit Threshold) with a red-hot poker, burning brand, etc. kills it instantly; if its heart is not burned or melted, the wendigo resurrects the next sunset, fully regenerated.

**Stability Loss:** +0; +1 if the wendigo was known to the witness when human.

The Wendigo Within

In the traditional lore of the wendigo, the great fear is not of being eaten or

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even abducted, but of being infected with wendigoism. Some wendigo are simply possessing spirits, while the more material wendigo transmit their condition in their bite.

As is traditional in GUMSHOE, NPCs become wendigo-sick as rapidly or completely as the story requires: after one bite, or after years of living in a remote town or hunting camp; ravaging demons or guilt-haunted hungerers.

After being bitten (or possessed) an Investigator succumbs to wendigoism on a failed Stability test (Difficulty 5, +1 for each additional wendigo bite, +5 if he has ever eaten human flesh). Some wendigo spirits, or cursed artifacts, may increase this Difficulty.

Investigators who become wendigo add +3 Athletics and Health, double their Scuffling, and do -1 damage with their bite. They must make a Difficulty 6 Stability test to avoid eating human flesh if available. Their feet begin to deform and their eyes change color (Difficulty 5 Sense Trouble to spot).

At the end of the scenario, if not cured, they permanently transform to wendigo. A human wendigo can only be cured by pouring boiling fat down its throat, to melt the ice in its heart. This does two instances of +1 damage; the sufferer must then succeed at a Health test with the Difficulty equal to the damage done.

### Possible Wendigo

#### Abilities

Wendigo are traditionally solitary, or even singular: it's therefore impossible to say what "standard" wendigo abilities might be. Special powers available for the wind-walker [W] and cannibal-ogre [O] form are indicated by those letters.

**Alpha Wendigo:** This is a larger (10' or so) cannibal-ogre: Athletics 12, Health 13, Scuffling 16, claw +2, -4 Armor. [O]

**Arctic Cold:** The wendigo carries with it an aura of freezing cold. In addition

to eerie effects on its surroundings, touching the beast with unprotected flesh costs 1 Health. [O, W]

**Blizzard:** By spending 1 Health (or Magic) per hour and howling at least once, the wendigo can howl up a blizzard, restricting human visibility to Point-Blank (the wendigo can still see fine) within a 100-yard radius. Each additional 1 Health or Magic point increases the radius by another 100 yards. [W], although a cannibal-ogre shaman might be able to cast this as a spell for 2 Magic per hour.

**Freezing Grasp:** After scoring a Scuffling hit, a wendigo can spend (minimum 1) Magic points to force the target to make a Health test against a Difficulty total equal to the roll plus the Scuffling and Magic points spent. On a failure, the target is frozen; his Hit Threshold drops by 2 and he cannot move for the rest of the scene. (Kindly Keepers may allow an Athletics test

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against that Difficulty every round after the first to break the paralysis.) [O, W]

**Frostbite:** Encountering the wendigo causes accelerated, dangerous frostbite. Everyone within Point-Blank range of the wendigo loses 2 Athletics, and 1 more for each time the wendigo touches them. These points (as well as fingers, toes, chunks of flesh) are lost *permanently* unless the victim receives medical treatment (First Aid, treat lost Athletics as Health) in a warm room within 12 hours. [W]

**Giant Steps:** For 2 Athletics points, a wendigo can bound or “step” up to 20 yards vertically or 40 yards horizontally (from Near to Point-Blank, for instance) in one round. [O] A wind-walker can walk on the wind for free.

**Greater Wendigo:** A truly titanic wind-walking wendigo, possibly an avatar of Ithaqua: Athletics 90, Health 64, Scuffling 27, claw +5 (ignores armor), -5 Armor, Stability Loss +2; all damage below 0 Health must be dealt to heart. [W]

**Human Form:** A once-human wendigo can spend 3 Health (or Magic) to assume its previous human form to lull potential targets. It can only change back at night; this change does not refresh the 3 points of Health spent on the transformation, but it heals all other injuries. It must eat 3 Health worth of human flesh before it can transform again. [O]

**Hunger:** A wendigo must make a Difficulty 6 Health test to avoid biting a vulnerable human. [O]

**Infrared Vision:** A wendigo can easily see their warm, delicious prey at night, through blizzards or cabin walls, etc. [O]

**Inhuman Strength:** Fueled by its horrific hunger, a wendigo can rip wooden doors off hinges, topple trees, smash through car windshields, etc. It must freeze metal before it can snap

or damage it. A feat of strength costs 3 Athletics points. [O] The cost for a feat of strength is 2 Athletics for a wind-walker. [W]

**Raise Zombies:** The wendigo can raise the dead buried in land under the wendigo’s curse. This costs 2 Health or Magic per corpse; they become “Herbert West style” zombies (TOC, p. 159) with no infectious bite or vulnerability to rock salt. In addition to Scuffling 10, the wendigo’s zombies bite and chew for +0 instead of -1. [W], although cannibal-ogre shamans might be able to cast this as a spell for 3 Magic.

**Temperature Drop:** The wendigo can spend 1 Health (or Magic) point to drop the air temperature by 20°F for an hour. Each additional 1 Health or Magic point drops the temperature another 20°F. Below 20°F, Investigators without protective gear suffer from extreme cold (*ToC*, p. 68). Below -20°F, regardless of gear, Investigators must make Athletics tests (Difficulty 4) to keep moving, and each additional temperature drop raises that Difficulty by 1. Investigators who stop moving begin losing 1 Health every 15 minutes, or every 5 minutes in a blizzard. [W], although a cannibal-ogre shaman might be able to cast this as a spell for 2 Magic per hour.

**Terror Bite:** Anyone who loses any Health to a wendigo bite must make an immediate 5-point Stability test (Difficulty 5). If he fails, he succumbs to overmastering panic fear; he must immediately flee the scene as fast as possible. He comes to his senses in an hour, half his Athletics rating in miles away. [O]

**Wind Gust:** The wendigo can summon or create a mighty gust of icy wind that lifts a human target, hurls her through the air, and drops her. The target flies 20-120 feet, suffering +0 to +5 damage: +0 at 20’-30’, +1 at 40’-50’, etc. [W], although a cannibal-ogre

shaman might be able to cast this as a spell for 3 Magic.

## VARIATIONS

As with the “Gods and Titans” section in the corebook, this compendium is intentionally self-contradictory. Its facts and theories come from Blackwood, from later writers, from sloppy anthropology, and from the universe of possibilities opened up between them.

- The wind-walker is a servitor of Ithaqua, similar to the night-gaunts of Nodens. It carries selected people to Leng, or Borea, or wherever the true Wind-Walker dwells.
- The wendigo is the favored servitor of Rhan-Tegoth, given immortality by Its divine matter a million years ago or more. However, the enchantment has drifted, leaving it starving and insane but unable to die.
- The wendigo ogres are simply Canadian ghouls, driven to Ithaqua worship by the paucity of corpses in the wilderness.
- The wendigo is intensely solitary. Two wendigowak who meet immediately fight to the death, the winner burning the loser’s heart.
- The antlered, hooved wendigo are Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, optimized for the endless Canadian forests. They feed on moss, frogs, fungi, and human flesh, and howl their Pan-ic worship to the Black Ram of the Woods.
- The wendigo are the earthly forms of the winged, horse-headed shantaks of Kadath and Leng in the Dreamlands.
- The wendigo are mi-go: the “howl” is their buzzing unclassifiable drone, the violet eyes their glowing heads, their flight and claws leave the enigmatic radiant footprints, they carry their chosen frozen to Yuggoth and return the husks.
- The wendigo are the yeti, a mi-go servitor and guardian construct.

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Canada's wilderness holds the oldest rocks on the planet, replete with the ores the fungi crave; to keep humans at a distance, the mi-go simply engineered their yeti guards for infectious ferocity and appetite for human flesh.

- Gnoph-keh are wendigo colony creatures; they split into individual wendigo ogres and then combine into one beast.
- "For round about the deep, plunging holes of the animal there now appeared a mysterious, reddish tinge that was more like an effect of light than of anything that dyed the substance of the snow itself. Every mark had it, and had it increasingly—this indistinct fiery tinge that painted a new touch of ghastliness into the picture."
- Those who die insane in the North become wendigo.
- Every time a wendigo eats human flesh, it grows larger and therefore hungrier.
- The wendigo are the remnant courtiers of frozen Lomar, driven mad by Hastur and destroyed by the Inutos 24,000 years ago. Their icy hibernations — and occasional meals of man -- keep them blasphemously alive until the stars come around again and Lomar is reborn in 2100.
- The wendigo are actually the ylidheem, the hideous Cold Ones (*Bookhounds of London*, p. 69) spoken of in the *Book of Eibon*.

### Mythic Echoes

"HE ENVISAGED IT RATHER AS A GLIMPSE INTO PREHISTORIC AGES, WHEN SUPERSTITIONS, GIGANTIC AND UNCOUTH, STILL OPPRESSED THE HEARTS OF MEN; WHEN THE FORCES OF NATURE WERE STILL UNTAMED, THE POWERS THAT MAY HAVE HAUNTED A PRIMEVAL UNIVERSE NOT YET WITHDRAWN."

- ALGERNON BLACKWOOD, "THE WENDIGO"

As with the variations and possible powers above, the wendigo might more closely match its various mythic depictions than Mythos fiction. And there are plenty of mythic variations on the wendigo to match. Its name varies: windigo, witiko, wheetigo, weeteeko, whitego, windigou, wihtikow, windego, kokodjo, atoosh, hamatsa, toonijuk, and so forth. It closely parallels the wechuge of the Beaver Indians, the Kwakiutl "Man-Eater," the atcen of the Montagnais, the Micmac cheenoo, and various "Cannibal Spirits" of the Assiniboin and other Sioux, whose cult leaders often use variants of the wendigo name. The Lakota leader Crazy Horse, for example, was *Tashunka Witko* — "Wendigo Horse."

### Gashadokuro (Japan)

When angry men die in the wilderness, of battle or famine, their spirits haunt their bones. Eventually, those bones join together in a giant (15'-90' tall) "starving skeleton" that stalks the night invisibly and only appears to devour travelers. Its teeth clash in a *gachi-gachi* sound that resembles ringing bells, the only warning you get of its presence.

### Grendel (Dark Ages Denmark and Britain)

His name possibly derives from the Old Norse *grindill* "storm," and he is a stinking, demonic, gigantic, cannibal stalker of the Wastes. The word grindel or grindle is usually applied to lakes, meres, and fens in England: there are a dozen lakes, rivers, or bays named "Windigo" or "Wendigo" in North America. Grendel's armor is scars and horn rather than ice. Grendel is also the name of one of the jotunn, the ice-giants that make a Scandinavian parallel to the wind-walker.

### Herne the Hunter (England)

Many of the more cosmic aspects of wendigo lore appear in the figure of Herne, the Wild Huntsman of English legend. He is antlered, walks or rides

across the sky on the wind and in winter, his burning-eyed hounds' howl strikes terror and madness into listeners, and he snatches up sinners to race with him across the skies forever.

### Jokao (New York, Quebec)

These cannibal giants of the Seneca and other Iroquois peoples were born of winter and famine, the survivors of an isolated town that ate each other. The survivors grew armor coats of stone; drinking hot deer fat can melt the Stone-Coats' armor and leave them vulnerable.

### Loup-Garou (France, French-Canada)

The traditional werewolf of French medieval legend appears during famines (especially the 1590s, 1630s, and 1790s) and devours the flesh of helpless humans. Both wendigo and loup-garou howl, both have thick hair and animalistic feet, both transmit their mania by biting. In some versions, the loup-garou is a demon that casts an illusion of wolfishness on a possessed, but all-too-human killer. The French-Canadian voyageurs noticed the similarities: their Métis descendants still call the wendigo "loup-garou."

### Sadhuzag (Medieval Europe)

Described as an antlered beast with the body of a deer and the head of a goat or dog, the sadhuzag terrifies with its scream. For some reason, it is often conflated with the crocotta or leucrocotta, a wolfish beast (with cloven hooves, however) that mocks human speech from a mouth containing only two bony blades instead of teeth. Flaubert associates the sadhuzag with the solstices and equinoxes. It may also be connected with the Scots legend of the *sianach* ("screamer"), a carnivorous deer with bony, serrated teeth.

## INVESTIGATIONS

Keepers should treat this section, and use these elements, even more idiosyncratically.



## Wendigo



### Clues

The clues in this section point variously to the cannibal-demon wendigo and to the windwalking monster. If your wendigo doesn't meet both criteria, feel free to adjust them at will.

**Accounting:** According to these old ledgers, the Bureau of Indian Affairs officials basically embezzled all the food allotments for the reservation. For years. They left that whole tribe up there to starve for eight winters.

**Anthropology:** Father John M. Cooper, a professor of anthropology at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., theorizes that the Algonquin turn wendigo as a psychotic response to starvation, or even to fear of starvation. What about the fear of wendigo? Could that, also, turn someone into a wendigo?

**Archaeology:** Digging in this frozen ground would be literally impossible – look around for cairns of stones, blazes on trees, some other place the body or the book might be left. (Evidence Collection)

**Architecture:** This platform resembles the *dakhma*, or “tower of silence” erected for “sky burials” by ancient Aryan tribes and still seen in Parsee districts in India. Corpses placed on top of the *dakhma* become food for vultures and other aerial carrion-eaters. But what it's doing here in the Canadian tundra I couldn't say. (Anthropology)

**Art History:** I don't think the blood spattered these pictures at random. I think someone smeared blood on two faces specifically – look how each picture of Anna or Stewart has been defaced. The Eastern Algonquin painted the faces of wendigo carvings red; do you suppose there's a connection here? (Anthropology, Evidence Collection)

**Assess Honesty:** “Clearly the man was still fighting with some profoundly moving emotion. He wished to excuse himself in the eyes of the other. But the explanation, in that it was only a part of the truth, was a lie, and he knew perfectly well that Simpson was not deceived by it. For nothing could explain away the livid terror that had dropped over his face while he stood there sniffing the air.”

**Astronomy:** This spate of disappearances centers on the late winter of 1928, which was the height of the last sunspot cycle – and hence, of the aurora borealis. Auroras lag sunspots, which is why 1930 and 1931 were so bad, too. If we don't stop this thing now, it comes roaring back in 1939, when the 11-year sunspot cycle comes around again. (Note: The actual sunspot maximum for the 1930s is April, 1937. The sunspot minimum, if you prefer your auroras to be wendigo cages, occurs in September, 1933.)

**Biology:** The Métis call these things “moss-eaters” – well, sphagnum moss in peat bogs acts as a preservative, and during the War the Native medics with the Canadian forces made bandages out of it for its anti-bacterial properties. Could these things be functionally immortal, between the cold and the phenolic compounds in moss?

**Bureaucracy:** On December 1, 1936, Canada abolishes the office of the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs and transfers responsibility for its Indian population to the Ministry of Mines and Resources; by playing the new bureaucrats off against the old bureaucracy, the Investigators get brief, untrammelled access to the records of that Cree tribe.

**Chemistry:** This cabin ... ammonium-nitrate fertilizer and salt make sense, but powdered zinc ... mortar and pestle ... okay, nobody open those pipe sections. The contents combust explosively when they get wet. I think we've found out how Taliaferro intended to burn its heart, though. (A 1- or 2-point spend allows an Investigator to come up with this incendiary mixture herself.)

**Cop Talk:** If you're looking into those disappearances, the man to talk to is John Dalhousie, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He collects them, after two of his own men vanished in

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1931 and 1933. But you'd better be quick – he's accompanying another search party into the Territories this month.

**Credit Rating (5+):** Benning and Courtright are both Harvard men, and professionals – an alienist and a banker. They're not going to talk about their fearful experience, much less risk showing weakness or gullibility, in front of their "inferiors."

**Cryptography:** The hand holding the little boat, the two eyes that look like caves -- that's not a petroglyph on the rock, it's a map. The torso and legs are the river, and that means we'll find the old stone site right there, where the "heart" is. (Archaeology)

**Evidence Collection:** Look at the blood spatter, the broken furniture – the absence of footprints except for that smear by the door. No bullet holes in the back walls. It wasn't a rival gang that wiped out Banks' boys, it was one man ... who didn't bring a gun.

**Forensics:** The body is frozen solid, as though it spent days in a deep freeze or in the Arctic winter wilderness. Or on a mountaintop, or in the upper atmosphere: the bleeding visible around the eyes may have been caused by depressurization. Even though the depth of the crater the body left in the permafrost indicates it was dropped from a terrific height, none of the extremities snapped off or were damaged by the fall. The feet had been charred and pulped, apparently, before being frozen.

**Geology:** Lake Windigo in Minnesota is the only spring-fed lake in the Northern Hemisphere entirely contained within a river-fed lake – Lake Windigo is on Star Island, itself surrounded by Cass Lake. Could that geological unicum be some kind of primordial prison – and can we lock this thing back up in it?

**History:** The November 27, 1930 *Danville Bee* reports the disappearance of all the inhabitants of an Esquimau village near Angikuni Lake in the Keewatin District of Canada's Northwest Territory. The trapper Joe Labelle found shirts with needles in them, food over fires ... and an excavated grave. A similar story from the February 27, 1930 *Navissa Daily* reports the vanishing of every inhabitant of Stillwater, Manitoba. (Library Use)

**Interrogation:** "Simpson found it possible to tell his uncle a good deal more of the story's true inwardness, without divining that it was drawn out of him as a matter of fact by a very subtle form of cross examination."

**Languages:** Those words Carstairs kept repeating: *inuttupuk* and *akkunak* – they're Inuktitut words meaning "cannibal" and "storm."

**Law:** Mistainnew, a chief of the Ojibwa tribe, is currently serving a life sentence in Stony Mountain Penitentiary in Manitoba for aiding and abetting over 20 murders of so-called wendigos by the medicine man Pe-Se-Quan in 1907. If anyone knows how to kill these things, it's him – and I think we can get an interview.

**Library Use:** The best compendium of wendigo beliefs and wendigo encounters, as well as other spirit lore of the Cree and Ojibwa, appears in the 1823 journal of the Hudson's Bay Company trapper George Nelson, kept during his sojourn at Lac la Ronge, Saskatchewan.

**Medicine:** Look at his wound – the blood isn't flowing, it's barely oozing. And the sheen of fat in it – he's deep into catabolysis; he's apparently been starving so long his body is breaking down his own muscle and fat.

**Occult:** The "magic square" on the wall of the cabin is Enochian, designed

to invoke or perhaps harness the "Watchtower of the Air." The letters with bloody fingerprints over them together make up an Enochian Secret Holy Name of God, in this case the Aerial Name ORO-IBAH-AOZPI, "He Who Cries Aloud in the Place of Desolation."

**Oral History:** These Montagnais are clearly keeping something back – whether it's because they're ashamed, or because we're white, they're not going to talk about the events of forty years ago. We need to find a Métis or other quasi-outsider to brace.

**Outdoorsman:** "He found no difficulty in following the tracks for the first few miles. They went straight as a ruled line wherever the trees permitted. The stride soon began to increase in length, till it finally assumed proportions that seemed absolutely impossible for any ordinary animal to have made. ... But what perplexed him even more ... was that Défago's stride increased in the same manner, and finally covered the same incredible distances."

**Pharmacy:** This ogre eats the livers of its prey: perhaps spraying fractionated-concentrated liver juice (experimentally developed in 1928 by Howard Cohn at Harvard as a treatment for pernicious anemia) might irresistibly attract it into our trap.

**Photography:** When I developed the photos of those animal prints, that weird reddish effect showed up in the image. It's not the camera, because it only shows up on those bigger prints, and not any other prints, or on the rocks or wood or other dark features nearby.

**Psychoanalysis:** "It was not the first time, even in the experience of Dr. Cathcart, that a man had yielded to the singular seduction of the Solitudes and gone out of his mind;

Wendigo

Défago, moreover, was predisposed to something of the sort, for he already had a touch of melancholia in his blood, and his fiber was weakened by bouts of drinking that often lasted for weeks at a time. Something on this trip—one might never know precisely what—had sufficed to push him over the line, that was all.”

**Sense Trouble:** “He had become aware that a strange perfume, faint yet pungent, pervaded the interior of the tent. ... Acrid rather, not unlike the odor of a lion, he thinks, yet softer and not wholly unpleasing, with something almost sweet in it that reminded him of the scent of decaying garden leaves, earth, and the myriad, nameless perfumes that make up the odor of a big forest. Yet the ‘odor of lions’ is the phrase with which he usually sums it all up.”

**Streetwise:** You heard Kid Cann say he was gonna call “old Peg down from Duluth?” That means he wants someone disappeared, like, for good. Peg Perry comes to get ‘em, and they’re never found, not so much as a fingerprint afterward.

**Theology:** Could it be relevant that the old Orthodox church here was dedicated to Saints Enoch and Elias, two figures carried bodily up to heaven by the storm god Yahweh?

Scenario Seeds

Here’s one scenario seed for each type of wendigo, both slightly more complex than “track and kill it.”

Out of the Ice

Frozen bodies fall in northern Wisconsin. Strange, starving, ragged madmen appear in the Upper Peninsula babbling in Russian; they expire or attack suddenly. Belt buckles, kopek coins, even the occasional Orthodox cross and Lenin medal, plummet out of the winter sky across Minnesota. In the Kolyma basin in far eastern

Siberia, Stalin keeps a quarter-million prisoners working, starving, and freezing to death in Gulag camps. Among them are mathematicians, rocket scientists, and eccentric experimenters: Mikhail Kravchuk, Sergei Korolev, and Léon Theremin all slaved in the Kolyma gulags in 1938, for instance. One of those savants discovered and built a Design, a Seal, a Sigil to call the Wendigo. Whether he meant it to destroy the guards or simply carry him away is irrelevant: what it has done is return and return to this banquet of starvation laid out for it – to the Seal that summoned it, in a place the Investigators can’t possibly get to. And now the wind-walker looks across the ice, to where it has been leaving its castoffs, and wonders: is the eating good there, too?

Hungry For Power

Even in the Depression, you can get ahead. You can rise to power in politics, or influence in culture, or leverage in finance – all you really need is a real, insistent *appetite* for it. Caldwell Cavanaugh knows this. He came back from that Arctic expedition or Canadian hunting trip a changed man, and he shared the secret with a few friends in the New England Discoverers’ Guild ... over dinner.

The Investigators’ home city – Arkham, Boston, or somewhere else – has grown a wendigo cult. The cultists have a ritual method (tattoos, netsuke pendants, tongues torn out of female relatives) of hiding their condition, and a supernatural aptitude for competition and success. They have all become high-performing psychopaths, a coven of Hannibal Lecters. In any contest with a normal human, they get a free +1 bonus to the die roll; more generally, nothing they do fails. To keep their edge, they just have to eat their enemies, or magical proxies for their enemies (long-lost blood relations, physical doubles, down-and-outs blasphemously rebaptized) or interfering Investigators. Wherever the Investigators look, a

member of the NEDG is there: the courts, the press, the arts, business, government. It’s a cannibal freemasonry, if you will, an old ghouls’ network. And now Cavanaugh is talking about running one of his sons for Senator, or maybe getting an ambassadorial appointment ...

BIBLIOGRAPHY

One of Lovecraft’s favorite weird tales, “The Wendigo” (1910) by Algernon Blackwood brought the wendigo into the pantheon of elite horror monsters. “A Tale of the Grand Jardin” (1915) by W.H. Blake is a similar but lesser story; Blake’s raw narrative somewhat makes up in immediacy what it loses in evocation. Blackwood’s tale, along with a number of other surprisingly excellent Mythos and non-Mythos wendigo stories, appears in *The Ithaqua Cycle* from Chaosium, edited by the unsurprisingly excellent Robert M. Price. Derleth associated the wendigo with his new Great Old One, Ithaqua, in some of his best work (“The Thing That Walked on the Wind” and “Ithaqua”); even Brian Lumley’s Ithaqua began as a genuine terror (“Born of the Winds”) before diverting into fantastic quod-Burroughsianity with *Spawn of the Winds*.

Since the wendigo partakes of a larger culture than the Mythos, it appears in many more “straight” novels and tales, including a “goblin story” by none other than Theodore Roosevelt (published in his 1893 book *The Wilderness Hunter*). Standout examples include *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King, the YA novel *Call of the Wendigo* by Robin Hardy (the Canadian gay icon, not the British film icon), the poem “The Wendigo” by Ogden Nash, the horripilating story “The Wendigo’s Child” by Thomas Monteleone, and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Finally, *Ravenous* (1999), directed by Antonia Bird, will both incite and slake your appetite for wendigo movies. Try to see it before running with a cannibal-ogre-possession wendigo.