

Padding Down the Moonlight Mile...



There are creatures that live in the St. Francois River, deep in the Missouri Ozarks, that have never been catalogued in the natural compendia of man. They are eldritch and hoary, and have existed for countless centuries isolated within these mountains, the erosion worn remnants of a once titanic mountain range on the super continent of Pangaia.

They are shy, retiring creatures by day, lurking in the dark green depths of pools and underwater caverns. Some are merely mischievous, content to gently nudge a bow out of line, or place a rock where none had existed before. Others are much more malevolent and only come out on nights when the moon is full. As your boat slides over blackened pools do not look into the depths, or you will see their eyes glowing with alien, icy anticipation. You may feel their tendrils and feelers delicately probing along the hull of your boat, palping for something delicious.

Do not lose your balance on a moonlit night, especially in the rapids, for being upside down in the water could be the most outre' adventure of your short life.

The river itself comes alive under the full moon. Even the self-shuttle is a venture not to be taken by the weak of heart. As you secret your

boat in the brush by the put-in, you have the feeling that you may never see it again. Misanthropic elves might spirit it away and hide it in their caverns.

And there are locals living in old houses that are rotten and appear to be abandoned. They spend their days hiding beneath rotten front porches and roadless hollows, avoiding the daylight. But they are always out and about in the cool glow of the moon. They may take a liking to the bright colors of your gear and steal away with it. Worse, they may wait to meet the owners.

Leaving your car at the take out near D bridge, you enter the deeply forested trail and the hair on the back of your neck prickles. Your breathing increases, even before you start your jog.

Is your flashlight good? How old are the batteries? Wait! Go back and get your knife. Not the wimpy Gerber -the big one, with serrated edges and the point you filed expressly for piercing.

Why were there silver bullets for sale in that gun store in Ironton? These thoughts swim within as you begin the steady plod up the trail to the dam.

As you jog the flashlight dances



Halloween Descent

by Chuck McHenry

about, projecting a macabre dance of shadows and trees.

Something move over there? You stop; shine your light furtively about; a stump-it's just your imagination. Stumps don't move; but as you jog past it you hear a shuffling of something heavy trying to be quiet. Don't look back, just run through woods so deep that not a shred of moonlight reaches the trail. Yet, in the canopy above, the moonlight flitters about as if afire with cognizance.

As you reach the part of the trail overlooking the dam you look down 100 feet and see the river churning ominously, black and oily in the moonlight. Now there are sheer bluffs to the left. If something should come rushing out at you from the right, you would fall into a darkness deeper than your flashlight can penetrate.

The river murmurs and groans as you begin your descent to the Turkey Creek Campgrounds. There is a pervasive feeling that this place has just been abandoned. What wild rite

Paddling Down the Moonlight Mile...

or sacrifice was taking place on the picnic table, and why did they **all** go into hiding as you approached?

Now you must enter deeper, darker woods, on a trail less traveled, weedy and overgrown. What waits in the nettle to ensnare your ankle? What manner of goblin rests in the branches above to drop down on you? And it **is** a full moon! What manner of beast runs with you, just yards away in the brush, stopping when you stop, running when you run? Things rise in the darkness ahead, then melt away as the domain of your light engulfs them.

Your sweat is cold, the night is warm. Your flashlight dims at certain places for no apparent reason, as if the blackness has the ability to overpower it. There are fogs in the dales that do not shift in the wind. As you pass the Indian mound, where in daylight you might ordinarily raise your paddle and salute; on this night you slink by and pray that you do not disturb him, that he does not block your path.

As you break into the moonlight and jog past the overlooks section of the trail you begin to think about the river. In the river something could happen and no one would ever know. But returning along the path is unthinkable. You don't want to meet what has been following you; the shy fiends may be more bold upon see-

ing you return.

Reaching the put-in you **find** your boat and drag it to river's edge. As you stand by the water, pondering your fate, the moon slips behind a cloud and **all** is black. Insane howls come from the hills, **heading** swiftly your way. They must have your scent. The river is your only escape and you must shove off now!

The moon hangs in the East, huge and smiling, and the water dances its silvery ballet. Your paddle makes swirls of twinkling stars and scatters moonlight in miniature galaxies of splash universes. The river begins soothing frayed nerves with its hypnotic murmuring, regressing you to past incarnations of otters playing on mud banks, or barracuda speeding silently through crystalline reefs, and of orca gliding among silent icebergs.

It whispers to you of motives and meanings, and caresses your thoughts with soft songs of **aeon**-aged creation. Its atoms hum, vibrate and **kineticize** as you approach the **first** rapid. It speaks of the power of patience, of yin and yang, and of the **Lotus**. In the river's time rocks have melted like ice, and like Mohammed, the mountains have come to it, to be washed away and dissolved in its currents.

The river sparkles, it laughs and playfully nudges your boat. Pay at-

ention! This is the way its supposed to be. The galaxy moves through space at **100** miles per second. Our star rotates about the galactic center at **150** miles per second. The earth orbits the sun 18.5 miles per second, and, at our latitude, rotates about its axis **13** miles per minute.

The river flows 1000 CFS and you get lost **surfing** within **all** these motions, and your kayak breaks off the wave above **Cat's Paw** rapid. Gravity accelerates and everything **gathers**-all of these velocities in one fast surge-down the chute. It has taken **all** this time for **all** these motions to come together for just this moment. There is an explosion of molten platinum as you crash through the standing wave and then you are through and the universe slows down.

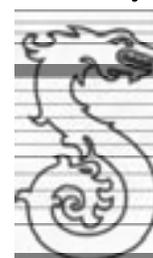
This is the way it is supposed to be. Gravity's glue holds you between Mother Earth and the sky, even though in the pools, where there are no ripples, you cannot tell where the sky ends and water begins. There are as many stars below you **as** above, and for all you know, you are riding on miles of moonlight.

The river has lulled you into a sense of security and contentment. All is so pleasant and peaceful... But wait!

There is a thought trying desperately to surface through your soft reveries. The river tries its best to placate you, but you break free of its spell.

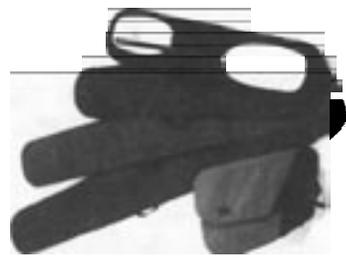
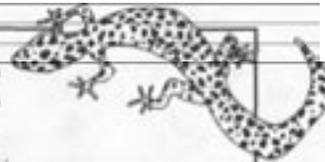
It's the dam! You're coming to the dam and you **know** there are things there! They know a morsel **ap-**proaches. They are rubbing their appendages in anticipatory glee. They want to steal your paddle. They want

to flip you and tear you from your boat and drag you under.



You are alone.
The moon is full.
They are waiting
for you at the dam.

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