

SUPER
SCIENCE
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SUPER SCIENCE SHOWCASE

stories

2025

CUYAHOGA
RIVER
RIDERS

BANSHEE

AND THE GREEN BRAVE

EXPLORE STEM TOPICS

FEATURES REAL SCIENCE FACTS & ACTIVITIES!

**SUPER
SCIENCE
SHOWCASE**
stories



CUYAHOGA
RIVER
RIDERS

BANSHEE
AND THE GREEN BRAVE

INSPIRED BY
"SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT"

WRITTEN BY
Lee Fanning

CUYAHOGA RIVER RIDERS CREATED BY
Lee Fanning



SUPERSCIENCESHOWCASE.COM

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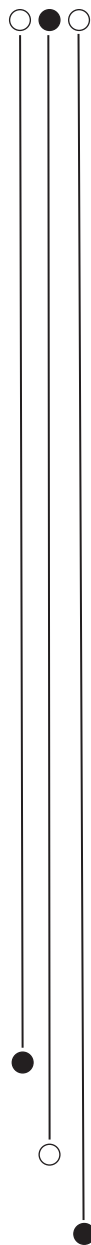
MISCHIEF MARIE



STARRING...

CUYAHOGA
RIVER
RIDERS

During the American Revolution, a band of
costumed heroes help settlers on the West-
ern Frontier.



CAST OF CHARACTERS



BANSHEE



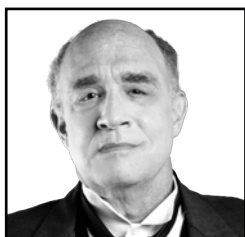
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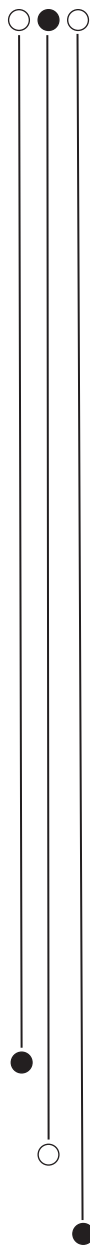
CIHUATETEO



ANSON



GREEN BRAVE







It's Christmas Day when the strange brave arrives.

The dark man is tall, shirtless despite the bitter cold, with a long torso, tight chest marked across in a strip of green paint, like the strip of green leather bound across his face over his quick brown eyes, as brown as his skin, which is so tight that the movements of his muscles beneath are almost frightening, like a man who is only tendons and bones, with no skin at all.

Green also marks his beaded buckskin breeches, the tips of his moccasins, and the feathers in the small head band that tangles with his long, straight,

jet-black hair. His tenacity is obvious, though he's not solely threatening—despite the musculature in his walk, and the rigid posture, there is a calmness in his stride and a smirk across his face that is more amused than unkind.

How the strange brave has made this breach into their fortified enclave isn't clear, and Banshee almost senses something of *destiny* in his sudden appearance, even if only he can tell. The secret home base of the costumed band of frontier heroes known as the Cuyahoga River Riders isn't exactly Fort Detroit, but it's far from defenseless—its many log cabins strung atop a long, sloping emerald hill (now blanketed white with snow) with an impossibly sharp incline on two sides, plateauing into a jagged cliff face, unscalable from beneath, and jutting over the wildest part of the Ohio river on two other sides, thick forest around every other part of its perimeter. Just laying eyes on the enclave is unlikely; abruptly appearing at the threshold of its rustic dining mess on Christmas morning like some sort of Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be—without even the *slightest* warning—well, Banshee would have hoped that impossible.

Banshee isn't alone, of course. Life on the

frontier is difficult, especially for ride-by-night costumed adventurers—so celebrations like this are especially rare. But Christmas morning they are all together—the riders Banshee, Thunderbird, Dispatch and Cihuateteo—or, today, without their dour masks and daring costumes—James Grant, Rebecca St. Clair, Frederick Kane and Maria de la Cruz—along with Anson, the middle-aged headmaster, and the rest of them, their Junior Legion: dozens of children, from every age and background, frontier war orphans taken in by the Riders who are the lifeblood of the enclave, tending to its stables, its daily chores, and supporting the Riders, squires to these great knights, as they learned to read, learned to shoot, and learned to survive in this brave new world.

The mess the strange brave steps upon is at first merry—dressed meagerly but appropriately for the season, in greenery, and red fabrics on the tables and bannered in short designs on the back walls above a large, if utilitarian, amber burning fireplace. The tables are full of food for the breakfast feast—pork, turkey, venison, eggs, preserved fruits and vegetables—and there's even tea, freshly brewed, and clear spring water from the cave beneath the

enclave's western plateau. The spirit of the place is joyful, full of unrestrained conversation and gleeful laughter, a rare relaxation of the usual discipline Anson expects of his Legionnaires.

But as the green brave steps past the threshold, the day's light flooding past his streaming silhouette, every sound in the long cabin suddenly surrenders in silence.

The four riders spot him first—their costumes and masks still hanging in their quarters across the enclave, each dressed now as an ordinary frontiersman—along with Anson—bald, bespectacled and belly bulging—who sits beside them, together in a row behind a long rectangular cedar table at the head of the room, facing the door. The Junior Legion are seated at long benched pine tables opposite the riders—a half a dozen of them—in two straight rows across the wide room. Some Legionnaires face the door—and, like the Riders, they are quick to notice the green brave—while the others soon follow, swiveling their heads in gawks and stares to parrot their peers.

The strange brave does nothing at first. He simply takes in the place, his smirk fixed, before he starts down the alley between the two rows of

tables.

The Riders, too, hesitate, but as the green brave starts towards them, they move quickly. Frederick, in a single bound, vaults over the table, his boots landing in a crackling thud, holding up a wide, dark-skinned palm.

“Stop!” he commands, his dark face stiffening, his muscular body planting firm. James, Rebecca and Maria rush around to join him.

The green brave keeps ahead. He shifts glances at the rows of Legionnaires, who back towards the cabin’s walls on either side, the older boys and girls stepping in front of the younger, a gesture the strange brave seems to notice, his smirk stretching just a little wider.

Rebecca, whose attractive face—framed by long, dark reddish brunette hair—grows as dark and severe as the mask she wears as Thunderbird, steps to the fore of the Riders, directly in the green brave’s path.

“We told you to stop,” she says flatly, standing as firmly as Frederick in her thin frame.

The green brave smirks even wider—there is no fear in the brown eyes behind the green mask—but there is calculation, and the powerful Indian

warrior gently rocks to a stop, almost fighting a laugh as he crosses his taugth arms.

“Who are you?” Rebecca continues. “What are you doing, trespassing here?”

The green brave takes a few more deliberate glances before finally speaking.

“Je ne parle pas votre langue.”

It’s French.

A strange Indian brave speaking French in this part of the country is hardly surprising. The Ohio Country was once heavily traveled by French colonists, before the British, almost twenty years before, won the French and Indian War, which excised most of the French influence from the area. Still, many Indian tribes of the region had adapted to the French language over the hundred or so years the French settlers were prominent—even this enclave, the Riders’ home base, was at one point a French fort—and many of these tribes have kept the tongue.

One by one, the Riders’ expressions wrestle with the revelation. Frederick raises his thick black eyebrows and glances cautiously at Rebecca; Maria turns her concerned round face to both of them; Rebecca turns a curious eye to James—and James

gives back a glance of understanding, and a nod. He trains his slate blue eyes on the green brave, his lean, athletic frame stepping forward.

“Je suis le seul à parler français,” he says cautiously, in French, explaining that he, alone, can speak the language.

The green brave gently nods, his stare fixing on the young man’s aristocratic features, his privileged upbringing still present in his posture and gait and handsome face despite the disheveled frontier clothes he wears. But it is too this privilege that serves him now; like all good sons of the well-to-do gentry in Maryland, James had been taught French—and to a lesser extent Latin—as extensively as he had been taught English.

James continues, in French, “<Who are you? You are trespassing. We have no conflict with any tribe, nor the Huron.>”

“<I am no Huron dog!>” the green brave bites forcefully, but his offense doesn’t stray his smirk. “<But I am not surprised you expect all Indians to be Huron. If you take orders from squaw.>” He glances starkly at Rebecca, his smirk finally falling.

There’s no French word for “squaw”—so Rebecca doesn’t need James’ translation to

understand the brave's insult—but she doesn't respond in kind. Instead, she steps to the side, keeping an angle on the brave, yet leaving to James the power position. For now, it's safest to let him think James is in charge.

James watches her move and he doesn't like it—but he understands *immediately*. They hadn't always been so in sync—but over the last few months, Thunderbird and Banshee—Rebecca and James—have developed a chemistry almost like siblings, if not something more.

James looks back to the green brave. “<I apologize, for my ignorance,>” he grimaces out. “<What do you call your nation?>”

The smirk slithers back on the green brave's face. He slants eyes at retreating Rebecca—who continues her amble as inconspicuously as she can towards the brave's vulnerable side—before glaring back down on James, who actually stands as tall as the brave—even if only he can tell.

“<I am of the Wendigu,>” the green brave says. The room gets even quieter.

No one needs James to translate “Wendigu” either.

All eyes widen at the word, including James', but

he calms as he translates to the others.

“<It is widely believed, proud warrior,>” James says, “<that the Wendigu tribe—is a *myth*. To scare Shawnee children.>”

The green brave’s smirk twists somehow wilder.

“<This land where you eat, belongs to Wendigu. By treaty with Shawnee and Wyandot for some five hundred years. Conquered by Wendigu blood. We surround you now. Your defenses are built by squaw and we pass them as easily as a forest path.>”

James, eyes holding steady, translates in English to the rest of the room. Rebecca stops her strategic angling to swivel a look out the window. There she can see them.

“Warriors,” she says, though calmly, eyes noting the approaching silhouettes of armed warriors—long rifles, flintlock pistols, bow and arrows—crouching forward, up the slope, shirtless, powerful builds, marked, too, with green. She turns to the other riders. “He’s telling the truth. Frederick, Maria—start for the cave pass, we’ll need weapons.”

“Aye—” Frederick begins, Maria nodding beside, their athletic builds jumping to act. But as they

start to step away, the brave holds up a dense hand.

“<Our attack is not certain. We roam the wilds and the shadows and have little need of our ancestor’s vast conquests. But we do not cede our blood-won lands so easily. I come with a challenge. Accept my terms, and we will not attack, and our land will become yours by covenant.>”

James’ face twists with the uncertain hills and valleys of his translation. No other sound—not even a breath—is heard in the mess. James gently turns his boyish slate eyes to Rebecca.

She knows what he’s asking; she glances again out the window—more and more green warriors hold position around them.

“Let’s hear him out. Might be our only hope,” she says.

James nods, gently, then looks back to the green brave, who watches the interaction between the young man and woman with a scowl.

“<Tell us your terms,>” James says.

The green brave nods, his smirk settling. With a simple move behind his back, he retrieves—a flintlock pistol. But he holds it by the mouth, not the butt, the barrel facing up at him, in a gesture that diminishes the threat.

“<I challenge one who dares to a contest.>”

James translates as the brave motions to the pistol.

“<One for one—one shot each warrior. Yours, today; mine, in a week’s time. The terms are simple. One warrior stands while the other shoots. Into the chest. I offer you great terms; your warrior shoots first. Then, at weeks’ time, at place of my choosing, the warrior will relent to me for my shot, just as I am relenting now. Which warrior will take shot, and receive shot I will return?>”

James can barely believe it as he speaks for the green brave to the rest of the room. The riders share scattered glances. Even from where he stands, James can spot more and more sentries surrounding the cabin. The Legionnaires huddle more tightly together, some of the older boys watching the windows like cornered game.

James and Rebecca share another look. James turns back to the green brave, his eyes locked, concerned and severe.

“<But surely, if you accept this ‘challenge’ first, you will be killed. We have sure aim, I can assure you. Our bullet will be true.>”

The green brave nods gravely. “<Believe me, warrior who looks to squaw, that the stories you

have heard of the Wendigu—the legends that made your eyes go wide—are not ghost stories. We are a capable tribe; and our secrets, like our lands and conquests, are multitudes. A warrior who wears the paint of the Wendigu, as I do now, cannot be harmed by arrow, axe, or bullet. My life is certain. But will one of your warriors accept a bullet back, when he knows it means death? For my bullet is true as well, warrior who looks to squaw.>”

James finishes repeating him with a solemn look.

“He really believes he can survive a bullet—to the *chest*?” Frederick gruffs, impatient. “This is madness. And if we take this absurd challenge, and he’s killed—we’re certainly under siege. We’re *already* under siege.”

Rebecca nods slowly, eyes back out the window. “I agree,” she says. “Our best chance is to hold them off while the Legion escapes through the cave. James—keep him busy while we—”

“Wait.” James says. His eyes stay fixed on the brave, and every eye moves to him.

“<If a warrior accepts your challenge>,” he begins in French, “<and yet is killed in a week’s time with your return volley—this land will be

ours, and safe from further threats from your tribe?>”

“James,” Rebecca starts, “what are you—”

“<That is my vow, warrior of the squaw,>” the green brave says back plainly, with a small nod.

James breaks his stare to consider. He glances to the room full of war orphans and his fellow adventurers, their protectors. He pulls back slowly eye to eye with the green brave.

“<I accept your challenge,>” he says in French.

“James!” Rebecca shouts with a sharp turn back towards him, dropping her crossed arms, understanding even though she doesn’t know the words.

The green brave nods slowly, smirk breaking again across his face.

James glances to Rebecca, then back to the other Riders. “I—have an idea,” he says. “Trust me.”

Rebecca takes a long breath, recrosses her arms. Her relenting is enough permission, and James looks ahead again to meet the green brave’s ceaseless stare, who now extends out the pistol, but for him.

“<Your courage exceeds your frame, warrior,>” the green brave says. “<Ensure your aim is true. Or

face my volley return.>”

“James!” Frederick shouts with arching, meaty shoulders, watching his friend take the gun. “James, are you out of your *mind*? When you kill him they’ll attack!”

James stare stays fixed on the brave, and his voice doesn’t waver.

“That’s not a concern,” he says. “I’m not going to kill him.”

Rebecca lands a hard look. “You’re going to palm the bullet?”

James doesn’t acknowledge. He’s moving backwards, as the green brave stays put, whose only movements are a rise in posture and chest as he stands up straight.

“There’s no other way out of this,” James finally says, slipping the ramrod from the rod pipe attached beneath the pistols barrel and—with a clever motion—slips the cap cover off the pointed ball puller on the end of the steel ramrod. He shoves the ramrod down the pistol’s barrel—careful to obscure the uncapped ball puller from the green brave’s gaze before burying it.

“<To ensure it’s loaded,>” he tells the brave, holding up the pistol as the ramrod hits the

resistance of the bullet in the chamber, its other end sticking high out of the barrel.

The brave keeps his eyes on the young rider with only a slight nod acknowledging.

Then, James deftly dips around, pivoting at his waist, and with more sharp, quick movements, twists the ball puller into the barreled round, and then pulls up taut—still half turned—before turning back squarely to the green brave and sliding the ramrod back into its original position beneath the barrel.

...as he lets the bullet he's just pulled out of its chamber disappear from his quick fingers into the sleeve of his shirt.

The green brave motions James forward with two fingers, and with sinking shoulders, the young rider abides. The brave guides the barrel within an inch of his chest—right above his heart.

Even though he knows the bullet isn't there, the sight sickens James. It again feels like destiny.

"James!" Frederick implores. "James, stop this madness!"

The green brave stares down the rider.

"James," Rebecca calls. She starts toward him.

"James, if you do this, he'll kill you!"

“He doesn’t know the barrel’s empty,” Frederick continues.

“His won’t be!!” Rebecca tries.

BLAAAASSTTT!!!

The gunpowder sparks at the drop of the hammer, and smoke expectorates from the steel barrel. James’ eyes flicker with the sound. The entire mess quiets with the receding echo of the bang.

And the green brave doesn’t flinch. His smirk stays fixed.

“<You doubted my powers, young warrior?>” he asks. “<A shot to my heart, and yet no wound is there. That is the secret of the Wendigu. Will your God save you from my blow in return?>”

James doesn’t say anything. His head is bent on his loose shoulders, only his eyes lift up, just beneath his brow, to the brave.

The brave takes the pistol back from James, then turns on his heel, back up the aisle between the tables. He glances at Rebecca, who still watches from the side.

“<We will leave, for now, squaw,>” he says, as James again interprets. “<But if the young warrior

does not find me in seven suns to grant me my blow, we will return.>” The green brave stops, again at the threshold, taking in every soul in the room. “<You know the Wendigu do not take prisoners.>”

He then sprints from the cabin. The riders and the older Legionnaires rush to the windows to watch as the horde of warriors that surrounded them, with agile, graceful, athletic movements, descend away just as skillfully as they had arrived. Then they are gone, the falling snow bleaching away even their footprints, as if spirits from some other plane.

Rebecca turns again to James, who hasn’t moved at the heart of the room. Frederick also steps up to his friend, watching as the young rider pulls from his sleeve—the palmed bullet. James twists it between his fingers.

“You’re not going after him, James,” Frederick says, touching his friend’s shoulder.

“Frederick’s right,” Rebecca says. “We have a week—we’ll start planning an evacuation now—”

“Don’t,” James says, eyes on the bullet. He then turns, sharply, to his friends.

“I gave my word,” he says.

“To a madman,” Frederick protests.

“Who will hunt us down, even if we leave,” James retorts. “You know the stories of the Wendigu. The massacres. Practicing cannibalism even into the last century—”

“We don’t know they are actually the Wendigu,” Maria chimes in with softening brown eyes. “Those are just legends—”

“We were surrounded!” James says, animated. “Effortlessly. You really want to risk a fight with them? I don’t care *who* they are, what the stories may or may not exaggerate—if they’re *that* good—it’s better I go. It’s not certain I *will*—”

“But it is!” Rebecca shouts, losing her usual cool. Every eye turns to her. She stands straight.

“James, if you go looking for him, you *will* find him.” She walks right up to James, her usually cool eyes warmer now, sunken, as she also carries a softness in her sharp cheeks that surprises him. James can’t even look at her, so he doesn’t.

“And you will die,” Rebecca says point blank, her voice’s usual steadiness slipping to a waver.

James doesn’t look up. He stares at the bullet in his fingers. And shrugs.

“That decision has already been made.”



2

The rest of Christmas Day isn't spent celebrating the birth of the Son of God—but rather in a solemn, hectic anxiety trying to out-manuever a deal with the Devil. Moments after the green brave and his horde have vanished, Rebecca calls all to high alert; some of the Legionnaires, led by Maria, take to the points of the perimeter for a constant watch; others, led by Frederick and Rebecca, take to the frigid forest in search of any sign of the green brave and his tribesmen.

It's Christmas night before the Riders regroup.

They come back together in the main yard of the enclave, though nothing has changed—except for

them. Now the Riders wear the strange masks and cloaks of their adventuring personas—Frederick as Dispatch, long black fabrics covering him, even his face, with only a touch of blue streaks around the eyes, under a long brim hat; Maria as Cihuateteo, her colorful dress traded for black gauntlets, black boots, grey and white frontier gear and a grey and black stripe mask across her eyes, her gray hood up; and Rebecca, turned Thunderbird, black cloak and gloves with a brown leather strap across her chest and torso, a symbol of the Thunderbird etched across her back, and a mask, its cowl black, its front piece white, with a black design scrawled on to it, like a tattoo of the skull of a bird. Each Rider marches though the snow—Thunderbird and Dispatch together, Cihuateteo from a sentry post on the far side—convening on James, now Banshee, dressed in a cloak that’s a patchwork of earth tones, black gauntlets and boots, his thin upper body wrapped in ragged black and crimson, which is the same shade as his hood and the side of one half of his mask, the other white, split down the middle in a sliver moon style.

As she steps up to Banshee, Thunderbird shakes her head. “They *just* left here—and we couldn’t

find a single trace,” she says, more grave than disappointed.

“You’ve learned a lot as a tracker,” Dispatch says, putting a hand on Banshee’s stooped shoulder, “but I doubt you’ll have any success finding him.”

“I have all week,” Banshee says, casting a look out to the frosted beyond. “And he wants me to find him.”

“Did the Legion see anything, Cihuateteo?” Thunderbird asks.

“Not even a fleck of green paint,” she says with a gritted sigh.

Dispatch shakes his head. “They’ll be back. I’m not sure what this game is, but it’s not about some strange contest. We should evacuate the girls and the children to the ridges. The boys and us can fortify, and prepare for an attack.”

Thunderbird nods. “We’ll start tomorrow.” She turns to Banshee. “I can’t convince you to stay?”

“If I find him,” Banshee says, his chest tight, “there’ll be no attack. I think he means what he says.”

Thunderbird shakes her head. “Even so. Anyone who would threaten annihilation over a parlor challenge—and who believes they are *invincible*—

isn't to be taken at their word."

Banshee nods. "I agree with that."

The Riders share nods and squared shoulders, the plan set. Anson calls to the Legion in the distance, pulling their attention.

"Night watch is ready," Dispatch says. "I'll join them. The rest of you should turn in." He touches Banshee's shoulder again, almost shaking his young friend. "You can decide in the morning, James. You don't have to face this alone."

Banshee nods as Dispatch and Cihuateteo step away crunching in the snow. But Thunderbird lingers. She pulls up her mask, as James does the same. Again, he can see something more than the calculating tactician whose lead he usually follows.

"What's this about, James?" she asks, quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"You're really going to go. You're going to let him shoot you in the heart."

Banshee just looks at her. "It seems like the best option—well, for *everyone else*." He smirks at that, but Thunderbird—Rebecca—doesn't flinch.

"There's more here than meets the eye," she warns. "You know that?"

"Sure," James says, nodding. "And I will

do everything I can to meet this challenge successfully—whatever that means.”

Rebecca shakes her head. “There’s no chance you can stop what’s coming, James. Don’t die for nothing. Stay here and help us—”

James shakes his head. “I’m not afraid to face him. And I have *faith*. With faith, death is never certain.”

“Death is *always* certain,” Rebecca says.

“That is true,” James answers, breaking into a sad smile. Rebecca sees it.

“James, you must understand,” she says, stepping in, now more than a leader. “You aren’t going to be able to cheat death like he did. He will not show you the same mercy. If you go to find him—and you *will* find him—and you give him his blow—he will *kill* you. Even if that does spare us from whatever aims he has for this place—it’s not worth it.” She holds up her pistol. “Our odds against them aren’t great, but they’re better than a pistol over your heart, James.”

James bites his lip. He’s surprised; the severity of what he’d agreed to do seemed clear to him at the time; but now—*now* it hits him, maybe for the first time, just how final the bargain he made is. The

reality of what's coming.

He sinks again into his shoulders. But shakes his head.

“The rules of the game are clear, Rebecca,” he says, sighing. “And I agreed to them. Perhaps it’s a foolish way to die, but... there’s more at stake than just my life. By all means, prepare for the worst but—let me stop it. It was my choice. It still is.”

Rebecca huffs, drops her shoulders, and steps away, leaving the young warrior, still in his little stoop, alone in the blackness and snow. And for a moment his mind slips into the bleakness of that world, and he almost calls to her, he almost follows her, he almost runs away.

But he doesn’t flinch. To the world around him, he’s as unmoving as a centuries-old oak. Only he can tell.





3

It's the next morning when he sees the others again.

They join Banshee at the stables, Legionnaire Gideon helping to mount the saddle on James' one-eyed horse Scarab. This foggy morning, only Banshee is dressed in his operatic costume of crimson and earth tones; he, alone, seems like a specter in the mist that strains across the blanketed knoll.

His good-byes are less solemn than perhaps they should be. A few words and nods, before a slap of the reins and a gallop towards the blunted horizon, which he's lost in before he reaches the

first marker. Rebecca thinks she can see him longer than the others.

The first day Banshee finds nothing but harsh cold, hunger, regret. His tracking has improved, as Frederick had said—but he's still an amateur, only these few years in the wilds with the Riders. He wasn't born here like the man he's trying to find.

That evening he cobbles together a crude lean-to and bunks in beside a fire, leaving on his costume, aside from the mask, which he eyes a moment before tossing into his saddle bag. A masked man after a masked man.

There's still no sign of a trail the next morning, and though Banshee knows he's not exactly lost, he isn't quite certain if he's heading northwest or northeast—only that he's heading *north*.

He *thinks*. He checks his compass but he doesn't trust it in this cold.

He crosses back to the frozen river to correct his bearings. He's still certain the green brave will make himself easily found. But fresh snow coming down, about midday, frustrates him—sure to cover any sign down trail. He hoofs Scarab to a gallop a mile or so, before the snow intensifies, and then he slows, any rush to the trail now pointless. The

whiteness skewers and rolls and captures the world around him in a bright blight, as if revealing and concealing everything all at once. Everything becomes white, even the frozen river—though he can make out the water, moving beneath, like an unborn child—the ice on top paper thin, such that even mallards nearby, down from the Canadian colonies on their way further south, won't land on it.

He brushes the snow off his slim shoulders when a fleck of color catches his peripheral vision—which isn't easy in *his* mask. It's something just past the towhead, on the other side of the tree line.

A long rifle.

"Ho!" he shouts instinctively, and Scarab gallops ahead, but the barrel doesn't move after them—it stays fixed on the cluster of mallards near the frozen river bank. Banshee rolls Scarab around and sees the man behind the barrel—or rather, the *boy*. A young Indian, from some tribe, his hair long, his face decorated in red and brown streaks, deerskins covering the rest of him. He fires the long rifle at his game—but *misses*. The shot clobbers the atmosphere, though, heard for miles—and the

ducks, startled, spread their wings and squawk towards safety. The young hunter—no more than ten or eleven years old, Banshee guesses—scuttles from his squat in the briars and chases after them—to the frozen river. He should know better—it's much too thin to step across—but he's flustered, focused on his escaping game.

“No—stop!” Banshee shouts. The young Indian ignores him and leaps from the bank in his pursuit—crackling through the thin surface and plunging into the frozen river, his rifle scuttling down the stretch of the thin ice.

Banshee moves swiftly, his colors vibrant in the blighted world. A moment in his saddle bag, then he dismounts and, in stride, sprints to the broken ice, slamming a spike head tied to a rope stiffly into a snowy oak, then tethering the rope to his belt, and dives towards the freezing water head first, his cloak and mask protecting him from the biting cold. He has the boy right away, and they thrash against the current which tries to pull them further beneath the ice, before Banshee leverages the rope attached to his waist and pulls them both up from the merciless waters, past and up beyond the cracking sheet of ice, finally back onto the

whitewashed bank.

The boy is shivering, his deerskins drenched, and Banshee helps him take them off before covering him with the colorful long wrap of fabric he wears around his waist. Banshee returns to his saddlebag for a few blankets, which he also wraps around the boy. He notices the young Indian—shivering, his brown skin almost pale—trying to reach back towards something at the river. His rifle. Banshee touches the boy's arms to calm him, and steps back to retrieve the firearm. He sets it beside the boy—who looks at his severe mask in almost fright. Banshee notices, takes off his mask, and smiles.

“You’ll be all right,” he says to the boy. “Do you know what I say?”

Teeth chattering, lean arms curling into the blankets, the boy nods.

Banshee smiles softly. “Hopefully, you’ve learned a very important lesson,” he says. “Never lower your defenses in pursuit of *anything*. Let your awareness drop and there are more dangers than—”

Banshee stops. Because he senses they’re not alone.

He glances—ahead of him, past the towhead; behind him, on the other side of the river; to his

right and left. They are surrounded by the young boy's tribesmen. Adult braves. They wear skins, like the boy's, and their faces are painted the same.

And every single one of them, too, carries a rifle.

On Scarab, Banshee is led by the tribesmen back to their camp, and at first he's not sure if he's a hero or a prisoner.

The masked rider is escorted amongst the fires and wigwams, the scouts and women, the chiefs and children, mostly wearing deerskin, and bearskin, and elkskin, feathered and painted, beaded and adorned. Banshee still struggles to tell one tribe from another. The markers of nomads—of traveling people—are clear. The conditions of the wigwams, though constructed with great skill, are intended for abandonment. There's no agriculture—what food James sees is either freshly killed, found, or traded for.

Banshee hasn't said a word since saving the boy, nor has he been spoken to. He listens for the tongue in the crowd—clearly some Indian language, mixed with French, common among the Mingo—is that who this is? If so, he *is* a captive.

The braves lead him and Scarab to a council of

chiefs who sit in thick hides, their paint the finest, most of them old, brown skin crackling like tree bark—perhaps a war council? But between them all in the power position, a younger chief sits with long black hair, whom the boy Banshee saved suddenly rushes to embrace. One of the braves gestures to this young chief, speaking to him in his language, motioning between the young boy and Banshee, to whom the young chief looks. The chief nods slowly, patting the boy, before stepping up towards Banshee and his horse, touching Scarab's face as he looks up to the masked rider.

“My scouts say what you do. Are you yengee?”

English. It's a little surprising—not unheard of, certainly—English is rapidly replacing French as the language of trade in the Ohio Country—but it's an unexpected blessing. A reward of faith. Banshee nods softly, responding he is a “yengee”—a “yankee”—or an American.

The young chief reaches up an open hand, motioning towards himself.

“Come down,” he says. “We talk in the wigwam.”

Banshee glances down at the crowd that surrounds him and Scarab. More scouts join the braves now, and elders, too, not in the council.

Some women, some children—but mostly men.

Armed men.

Banshee nods as he dismounts. The young chief motions, and in his tongue, directs two scouts to take Scarab's lead.

"We'll feed oats and rest the horse," the young chief says in a calm, assured tone. Banshee nods and pats Scarab on the side as his horse is led away. Then, after a nod from the young chief, he follows behind into a nearby tight wigwam.

The wigwam is similar to the others Banshee has seen, though his experience with natives is still limited. A rounded hut, some sixteen feet across, a near dome-top shape, bent saplings bound and insulated with swamp moss and clay, covered in shingles skimmed from the trunks of birches and elms. Inside it's open enough, this young chief—clearly of importance—having perhaps a larger dwelling than most. A decorated woven mat lines the back half of the wigwam—clearly a privacy partition—while mats on the floor are dotted about the fire, burning in a pit in the center of the structure, smoke breezing out of a small opening in the dome above. The wigwam is otherwise sparse—some Indian clothing, some weapons, some clay

dishes. Unlike the home of a “yengee,” the wigwam is almost solely used for sleeping—outside with the tribe is where the young chief lives his life.

The chief passes along to the other side of the fire and crosses his legs in front of him as he sits down on the mat. Banshee follows, too sitting, mirroring the chief, with his legs crossed in front, and suddenly remembering his mask, takes it off in a gesture of friendship.

“Why you wear such a headdress, yengee?” the young chief asks.

“Protection,” James says calmly. “Maybe a little ceremony.”

The young chief chuckles. He motions fingers towards himself, and James, with a curiously raised brow, hands the mask over to him. The young chief looks it over, amused, then glancing back at James, points to the red marks on his own face. “Strange paint for a yengee,” he says, placing the mask down beside him. James smiles, nods with tight shoulders.

“Thank you for saving the boy, my son,” the young chief says, stretching fingers over the fire. “My scouts said none were close enough to touch him.”

James simply nods again. "I reacted as any would, were it their privilege," he says. The chief shakes his head.

"Yengee can be good. Yengee can be bad. It is not clear, with yengee. With Indian, I know. I can read their paint, or their dress, or their stoop or their stride. With Indian, tribes are good, or tribes are bad, or tribes are on the warpath. I know with Indian. But yengee—yengee on the warpath now, against yengee, but still yengee does good."

James bites his lip.

"Surely there are good and bad in all tribes, as well," he says. "You and I—the Indian and the yengee—are alike in that. Because the colonies are at war with the English, it doesn't mean I'm at war with your son."

The young chief nods. "Yes. Dark and light exist in the chest of Indian as they do in yengee. But if a tribe is on the warpath, then so its tribesmen; there is no single brave, no chief—nor even squaw—who is not. If the paint is of Mohawk, and the Mohawk is on the warpath, then Mohawk axe will find your throat. Maybe that's not the way of all yengee—though I have seen it such, with the red coat, and the militia men—but that is the way of

the Indian.”

James considers with a panning gaze, nods along gently, before flicking slate eyes back to the chief.

“Might I ask, what paint you wear?” he asks.

“Your tribe?”

“We are Mohican.”

James’ face is curious. “I’m not—”

“We are far from our ancestors’ lands. The yengee war pushed us here, too close to the Shawnee, the Mingo. Mingo are on the warpath—lost good scouts to their flint pistols and axes. We move as the season changes, further to the west. The destiny of the Indian, I fear.”

James doesn’t even nod, and his shoulders do not flinch.

“Is the headdress ceremony you wear when on the hunt?” the young chief asks.

“In a way,” James says, eyebrows lifting. “Not game, though. I’m after... a man. An Indian.” He sees the young chief’s gaze growing colder. “Not on the warpath. But a debt—I *owe* a debt—to a strange brave, not of these parts.”

The young chief nods cautiously. “Yengee with debt to Indian, much as my debt to you. Who is this strange brave you are after?”

James shakes his head. "I know not his name. But he claims his tribe is—*Wendigu*."

The young Mohican chief's eyebrows dance now. "Surely he mocks yengee? There is no *Wendigu*. Many, many seasons have passed since the last *Wendigu* scout's throat was cut by Huron blade."

"I feared such," James says as he shakes his head. "Nevertheless, I must find him. If I do not, in less than a week—five days—he'll return to where I live—my, um, tribe—and attack with his army, who—whichever they are—seem formidable."

"Tell me of this strange brave."

"I know little. Only that he is Indian, claimed he is a chief of the *Wendigu*, spoke French, and wore green—in paint, in beads, and over his eyes in a mask—a mask, as I wear."

The young Mohican glances at Banshee's mask by his side and listens to every word with clear focus, his eyes unblinking. He says nothing, at first. He shifts his posture again, and James can't read him.

"I know not of such a brave," the chief says. "But I am in your debt. I and my scouts will spend the next four suns on hunt for this green brave. We will find him in time—to repay my debt to you, so

you may repay your debt to him.”

James’ lower lip dips a moment, his crossed arms breaking in front of his chest.

“I—that’s—incredibly gracious, I,” he stammers. “Having your help as I search—”

The Mohican chief shakes his head. “No—no, you will stay in wigwam and rest. Stay with the squaws and children and rest for meeting the green brave.”

James protests, but the Mohican chief is ceaseless, adamant about the debt he owes the young rider, who finally relents, though the thought of simply waiting around for his destiny to find him makes him restless. The chief calls for women, and a wigwam is made ready for James, as is food and drink from the night’s dinner, and he is led away—before he can take back his mask, which is kept by the young chief—and as the second sun of his search takes its rest beneath the horizon, so too does James.





4

The next morning James' first thoughts are of the green brave.

He quickly dresses in his colorful costume—apart from the mask—before finding the morning outside the wigwam back out amongst the tribe, where he sees women working and children helping and elders smoking and what men he can see are only the sentries keeping guard. He wanders back to the horses, finds Scarab among the few remaining, and learns from the sentry there—more in hand gestures than words—that the braves had left before dawn on the hunt. The hunt, James knows, for the green brave.

He seeks to make himself useful, but every woman or elder he approaches just smiles or nods and ultimately ignores him, until finally a woman with long hair, little paint and softer skin finds him.

“You should rest,” she says, in uncomfortable but clean English. “You have important debt, yes?”

James nods politely. “Yes. But I will be all right. I feel so out of place. If I am not to join the scouts on the hunt, surely I can be of use here—”

“You saved chief’s son,” she says, touching her chest. “My son.”

James eyebrows perk up, and he nods again slowly.

“Please, rest. Let us repay the debt, as you will.”

James scratches his head, shrugs, as the young woman—the chief’s wife—leads him back to his wigwam. He stays there the rest of the day—his food brought to him by another young woman who nods as she leaves. He’s surprised—not by the meal, but by the lidded pot it’s in—cast iron, clearly from a trade with other “yengees”—and he stirs the stew inside as it hangs over the fire pit. James really sinks into his thoughts now, his focus turning from the strange actions of the tribe, to the

stranger green brave, and then—the one thought he'd been avoiding since starting his search—to the bargain made.

To the blow he owes.

Pistol. Point blank. To the chest.

His mind moves in circles like the stew he stirs, first remembering the moments the green brave had come, what options there had been, could he have done something differently. He reimagines the exchange over and over, both in its fixed form and in a dozen variants. Should he have killed the brave, instead of sparing him? Then he circles to what's facing him. To finding the green brave. To losing precious time—three days now—as this strange tribe searches instead, leaving James almost a prisoner to their gratitude.

More and more each circle, he fixates on, sees how the blow will come, how the green brave's contest will end. The pistol touching his chest, just above his heart. The blast—the last thing he hears. How will it feel? Will he be spared the great pain—killed instantly—or will he suffer?

He thinks of his faith and prays to God but he isn't spared these visions. These thoughts.

And what of the Riders? What of the war?

What of all he leaves behind? Of Rebecca. And the others, too.

But of Rebecca most of all.

Each circle the visions are stronger. More severe. And James—who was fearless and shortsighted when accepting the challenge—now sees the full road, and starts to feel the *fear* he should have felt then. Alone in the wigwam, a prisoner of circumstances he did not choose, he almost laughs at himself for ever having thought he was immune to such—*uncertainty*.

His mask is still gone but it suits the moment, for right now he does not feel like Banshee. Not the fearless American knight of the Western frontier. For the moment he's simply James Grant, the boy of the gentry from Maryland who had fled his Tory parents for adventure in the wilds of the burgeoning new world, which led him to the Riders.

Which led him to the blow.

James knows he can simply go back there now, to that life in Maryland. Many of the cherished memories of childhood return to him. Living is better than dying, he knows, even in the gentry.

But the Riders. Rebecca.

Hour by hour, he struggles. With fear. Faith.
Destiny. A marked man. Even if only he can tell.

Days pass. Each night, at dinner, the young Mohican chief visits him. He is delighted to see James still with the tribe, and tells him such, owning that he could have fled and avoided whatever debt he owed to the Indian, but instead stayed constant in his word. The young chief then regales the rider with tales of the hunt—of what beasts had been slain—prize bucks, silver foxes, even a black bear—though no sign of the green brave.

And each day the spiraling thoughts that haunt James are more and more severe. By his fourth day with the tribe—day six of his quest, his time almost up—the visions of his destiny are so startling, his desperate impulse to flee almost captures him. He steadies himself—stuck in this wigwam, cornered with that which is coming. It’s an agony all its own, far longer and far more pointed than a bullet to the heart. And sitting with this agony, James can’t help but hope for release. A way out.

He’s suddenly aware of how much he envies the green brave, who believed his “magic” protected

him, and spared him similar dread. Not to mention the luck and mercy found at James' hand.

But James has neither luxury. He *knows* a bullet to the chest will kill him—and he also knows that the green brave will not pull *his* punch. If only he could turn to sorcery himself....

Suddenly, a spark—a *hope*. Not for true sorcery, of course—but a sorcery convincing enough to a man who believed in it.

James' bare chest couldn't survive a bullet. But if he could convince the strange green brave that he, too, was enchanted with invulnerability...

Banshee first tests leather wrappings—a dense knot of leather, tied in place around one of the large bracing branches of the wigwam, under it a small target which could easily slip over his chest, and places his pistol just above it—and fires.

The bullet rips through all two dozen layers.

He tries other pieces of makeshift armor. Pottery. The blade of his knife. Even a spun together contraption of moss and mud. Nothing stops a bullet—not that James is particularly surprised. He's just desperate.

Around dinner on this last day, as every day in his purgatory here, James' meal is brought to him

by a young woman of the tribe, who leaves it with a solemn bow.

But this time its not the aroma of the stew that stirs his attention.

It's the cast-iron pot.

Abruptly, James slips off the lid and fashions a rope through the hole in the top of it's short handle, banding it like the others to the support branch.

He touches his pistol to the iron, then aims just above it.

And fires.

The soft bullet lodges in the lid—but doesn't penetrate.

For the first time since Christmas, James smiles.

The iron pot lid's a perfect size. Thick enough to stop a bullet; wide enough to cover his entire heart; and small enough to wear beneath his cloak.

Now at least he has a shot.

As the full moon crests above the distant snows, the young Mohican chief returns with his scouts whooping triumph. He calls for the young rider immediately and James is brought to the chief's wigwam, where he sits, again a mirror to the

young chief, across the pitted fire.

“We have found green brave, yengee,” the chief says with a bowing head.

James’ eyes are both bright and heavy. “Truly?”

The Mohican chief nods, then asks the young rider to sit with him as he dines, and James agrees. The young chief tells again of the hunt—until stumbling upon a strange spring—its water a cold emerald color—which had led his scouts to the trail of the green brave. The young chief describes the way. Soon after, James is sent back to his wigwam for one final sleep with the tribe, before he is off to face his fate.

Though now it is not so inevitable.





5

It's finally New Year's Day when James steps out of the wigwam for his horse. The young chief is there, holding James' mask, which he returns to him. Then, again cloaked and masked as the mysterious rider Banshee, the young rider mounts Scarab, nods in gratitude and friendship to the Mohican chief, and pushes forward towards the misty, awakening morning, after the trail of the emerald spring, the fate of the day, and the green brave.

The sun barely licks the eastern horizon when he finds the spring. He reins back Scarab and

considers it carefully; the water isn't actually emerald in color, just amazingly clear, its strange emerald glow an optical effect of the surrounding, dense evergreens, reflecting in its ceaseless flow. Banshee dismounts and takes a thirsty drink from the spring before checking his bearings and compass, and then mounts Scarab again, his eyes fixed on the revelations of the trail ahead, remembering the directions from the young Mohican chief, and tracking as Frederick had taught him. But the markers of the trail are sloppy—even an untrained gentry eye can spot them.

This trail is meant to be followed.

When the sun is just above the distant hills, the trail opens into a little crooked valley, cutting near a large creek bed, frozen and dry. Unlike the dense evergreens that scaffold up the incline and surround the upper trail that's behind him, this little valley is one of death; only bare, jagged limbs breach up from the hard, lumpy earth, spilling down flatly to the dried creek bed. The trail dies here too, and Banshee slows Scarab with a holler and looks around. It's the end of the line.

He knows that even before he sees the green

brave.

Coming up the opposite way, down the center of the dead creek, Banshee spots the strange masked brave, still painted in green, now on the back of a powerful horse, with saddle and reins touched with the same color as the rider. He approaches ceaselessly, like the current of that creek must during the spring, ever ahead, his pace steady. There is no excitement; only *inevitability*.

Banshee's stomach drops when he sees the figure—still startling, still all tendons and bones—a specter of what is to come, now imminently here. Pulling up from the creek bed, the brave stops his horse just before Scarab, and the two masked men share a long, silent moment.

“<You honor your race with your word,>” the green brave starts, again in French. Banshee just nods quietly, behind his red and white mask.

“<Come down. I am ready for my blow.>”

With an athletic pounce, the green brave dismounts, and steps back to the dead creek bed. Banshee follows, though more burdensome in his movements, and steps over to join him.

The green brave pulls from the back of his buckskin pants the same flintlock pistol. He, too, as

Banshee did, removes the claw hammer from the front and places it into the barrel—it juts out again as before, the pistol clearly loaded. The green brave returns the claw hammer, and then squares up to the young rider in a widened stance.

Banshee watches every flex, holding his posture upright and true. There’s something familiar about the green brave—the way he moves—not something he noticed the first time—but something is *nagging* at Banshee. Something of destiny. But as the warrior pulls up the pistol and places it just above Banshee’s heart—Banshee’s only impulses circle around what is about to happen, and if that cast-iron lid will hold.

The green brave lets slip a loose smirk.

“<I took your blow to my bare chest,>” he tells Banshee. “<Will you not offer the same?>”

Pure panic suddenly spikes up Banshee’s back—but only he can tell. Nothing gives him away. He gently shakes his head.

“<The way of the yengee is to face his maker dressed,>” he tells the brave. “<Bare breast was not in your terms.>”

The green brave’s smirk coils.

“<As you wish,>” he says. “<Ready are you, brave

rider, to take my return blow?>”

Banshee glances behind towards Scarab.

“<Return my horse to the others,>” he says.

“<Then you and your tribe will leave them be. That is the bargain. Yes?>”

The green brave nods. “<You have my word, yengee.>”

Banshee nods. He slowly lifts a hand up—and takes off his mask, clasping it to his side. The green brave nods again, and then straightens out the pistol above Banshee’s heart.

Who closes his eyes.

“<Surely you will not take my blow as a coward?>” the green brave mocks. Banshee snaps his head back down, glares at the warrior.

“<What is it to you, madman?>” he asks.

“<Face that which you must, warrior of the squaw. Do not even blink.>”

Banshee sucks in a breath, nods quietly, and keeps his eyes on the brave, who again steadies his pistol. Agonizing in his deliberateness.

“<I did not dally,>” Banshee says sharply. “<My blow was swift. Strike.>”

The green brave’s laugh ruptures. His arm wavers and gently rocks with his chuckling.

“<Do not fear. My blow is coming.>”

Banshee’s stare doesn’t waver. “<Then spare me further pain—>”

CLANG.

The green brave’s head twists at the sound—his pistol’s barrel scraping against Banshee’s chest. He butts his pistol again against it.

CLANG. CLANG. CLANG!

His smirk coils. Banshee’s face swells, his eyes going wide now.

“<It’s not—>”

POOOOWWW!!!!!!

Banshee’s eyes squeeze close at the shot. He’s only human.

And he’s hit with a wallop. He falls to the earth, coughing violently. His chest heaves—like he’s been clubbed by a cannon—and he tumbles to his hands and knees.

It’s going to be a nasty bruise. But he’s survived.

Opening his eyes and catching his breath, Banshee juts forward suddenly, snatching the smoking pistol from the startled green brave. Banshee throws his mask back on and clatters

behind in a ready stance, chest still heaving.

“<There!>” Banshee declares. “<I have taken your blow! Our covenant is complete! Your challenge is answered!>”

The green brave is surprised only a moment, then his smirk stretches back across his hard face. He nods gently.

“Yes, yengee. It is,” he says.

In English.

Banshee steadies, stands fully upright though his breath is still staggered, and he pulls off his mask again, his slate eyes gleaming in the misty mid-day, wide.

“You speak my tongue?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“So—you understood *everything*. All that was said, at the mess at Christmas—”

“Yes.”

“So you knew I palmed the bullet—the flintlock wasn’t—”

“Yes.”

Carefully, the green brave reaches behind his head, to the back of his own mask, and unties it—and James suddenly understands.

Because it’s the young Mohican chief.

“You,” James says quietly. “I—don’t understand—why did you—what—”

“What do you know of my people, yengee?” the young chief asks.

James shrugs, head absently shaking. “The Mohicans? I don’t—”

“We are not Mohican, yengee,” the young chief says. “The Mohicans are a dead people from our former lands. That was a ruse. Like this.” He motions the green mask. “I told you. We are the Wendigu.”

“I was—I spent a *week* with the Wendigu—?”

“Yes, yengee. And all of our horrors?” The young chief smiles.

Banshee shakes his head, himself smirking.

The chief’s smile twists wider. “Yengee, maybe those ways were once the ways of the Wendigu. Hundreds of years past. But not so now. We do protect our lands, yengee, from those who might harm us. That is true. But we do not seek the warpath. That is last resort. Do you understand?”

Banshee looks down. He touches his chest—he reaches beneath his cloak and pulls out the cast-iron lid—and sees the second bullet lodged aside the first.

“This—was a test. *All* of it?” he asks.

The young chief nods.

“Every part. Had you not armored your heart I would have shot only powder as well. But I can not judge one *harshly* for will to survive—the bruise you will carry is mark enough. Your vow is kept. And no true warrior stands and waits for slaughter. What I say in the wigwam is true, warrior of the squaw. So hard to know with the yengee. If to trust. If of honor. But we do not seek the warpath—if you do not threaten us, yengee, we do not threaten you. Many have taken our lands—many Indians before the yengee—that is the way of all men. But only with good men do we let it stay.”

The young chief steps forward to Banshee, putting his hand on his shoulder.

“You are a good man, yengee. You will have no more trouble from us.”

The young chief smiles, gently taking back his pistol from James’ stunned grasp, and then—as a gesture of friends—hands James *his* green mask, as he had taken James’ earlier. He starts to step away. James eyes the mask, his face falling grave.

“And if I’d failed your... *test*?”

The young chief smirks just as gravely. “You

know the answer, yengee. We do not seek the warpath. But we do not *fear* it.”

With an athletic pounce, the young chief dashes back to his horse to mount, and without so much a final glance, gallops back down the dead creek bed towards whence he had come, before James, watching him go, loses him in the mist.

James steps back over to Scarab, gently rubbing his mane. He looks over the green mask a moment more, before stashing that in his saddlebag, mounting his horse, and starting back towards home. He prays to God, and feels the cold.

It's still New Year's Day when Banshee arrives. The sun still floats in the western skies. But it is not the same James Grant who returns, greeted right away by Rebecca and the rest. Even if only he can tell.

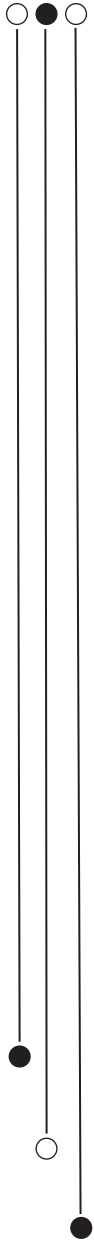




STOPPING A BULLET: BALLISTICS ON THE FRONTIER

When the green-painted Wendigu brave placed his flintlock pistol against Banshee's chest, James Grant knew he needed more than courage to survive—he needed *science*. Throughout “Banshee and the Green Brave,” the story hinges on one critical question: what can stop a bullet? Let's explore the fascinating science of **ballistics**—the study of how projectiles move and what happens when they hit their targets—and discover why that cast-iron pot lid was Banshee's best hope for survival!

First, we need to understand what happens when a gun fires. When the green brave pulled the trigger on his flintlock pistol, several things occurred in a split second. The hammer struck a piece of flint, creating a spark that ignited gunpowder packed inside the gun's **chamber**—the



hollow space where the bullet sits. This gunpowder exploded in a controlled way, creating hot gases that expanded rapidly. These expanding gases created enormous **pressure** that pushed the lead bullet down the barrel and out of the gun at incredible speed. Flintlock pistols from the frontier era could fire bullets at speeds between 120 and 180 meters per second—that's about 400 miles per hour! Imagine something smaller than your thumb traveling faster than a race car, and you'll understand why bullets are so dangerous.

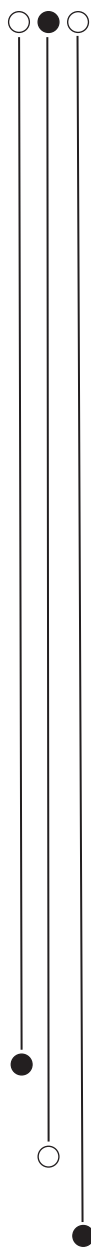


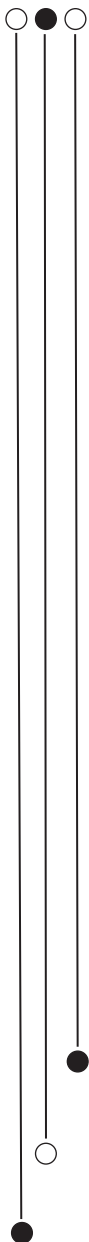
When a bullet travels through the air, it carries **kinetic energy**—the energy of motion. The amount of kinetic energy depends on two things: how heavy the bullet is (its **mass**) and how fast it's moving (its **velocity**). Scientists calculate kinetic energy using the formula: $KE = \frac{1}{2} \times \text{mass} \times \text{velocity}^2$. This means that if you double a bullet's speed, you actually quadruple its energy! The lead

bullets used in flintlock pistols were relatively heavy and slow compared to modern bullets, but they still packed enough energy to be deadly. When that energy hits a human body, it can cause devastating damage to tissue and organs.

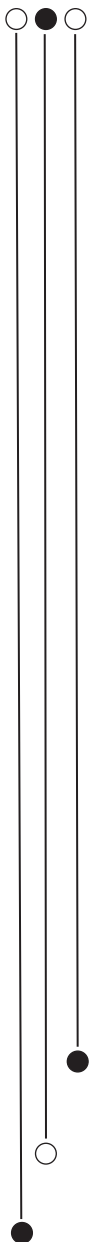
So how do you stop all that energy? This is where **penetration** comes in—the ability of a bullet to pass through a material. Different materials resist penetration in different ways. Soft materials like cloth or leather offer almost no resistance because the bullet’s energy easily pushes the fibers apart. Wood is better, but bullets can still punch through several inches of it. Human skin and muscle, sadly, provide very little protection against bullets. That’s why armor has been so important throughout history—from knights’ metal suits to modern bulletproof vests.

Banshee tested many materials in his desperate search for protection. Leather wrappings failed—even two dozen layers couldn’t stop the bullet. Pottery shattered. Even moss and mud proved useless. But the cast-iron pot lid succeeded, and understanding why teaches us important lessons about **materials science**—the study of what substances are made of and how they behave.



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Cast iron is an **alloy**—a mixture of metals—made primarily of iron with a small amount of carbon mixed in. This combination creates a material that is both hard and thick. The pot lid had three crucial properties that stopped the bullet. First, it was made of a material harder than the soft lead bullet. When the bullet hit the iron, the lead actually **deformed**—changed shape—flattening out like a pancake instead of maintaining its pointed shape. Second, the iron was thick enough to **absorb** the bullet’s kinetic energy. As the bullet pushed into the metal, all that energy of motion was converted into heat and the work of deforming both the bullet and slightly denting the iron. Think of it like catching a baseball with a glove—the glove doesn’t just stop the ball instantly; it cushions and slows it down over a distance. Third, cast iron is extremely **dense**—it has a lot of mass packed into a small space—which means it has more atoms for the bullet to push through.

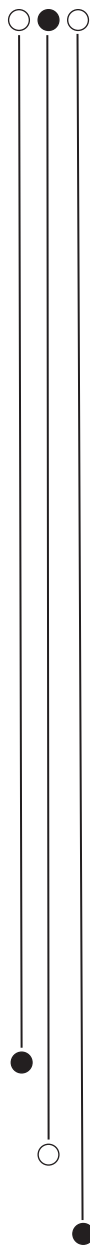
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The story tells us that the bullet “lodged” in the lid, meaning it got stuck partway through without fully penetrating. This is exactly what Banshee needed! Modern body armor works on similar principles, though with more advanced materials.

Bulletproof vests today often use layers of **Kevlar**, a super-strong synthetic fiber, or ceramic plates. These materials are specifically designed to spread out the bullet's energy over a larger area and to be harder than the bullet itself, causing it to deform and stop.

Of course, even though the cast iron stopped the bullet from entering Banshee's body, he still suffered. The story describes him falling to the earth, coughing violently, his chest heaving "like he's been clubbed by a cannon." This is because even when a bullet doesn't penetrate, it still delivers a tremendous **impact force**—the concentrated push of all that kinetic energy. Police officers who wear bulletproof vests and get shot often suffer broken ribs or severe bruising, even though the bullet never touches their skin. The energy has to go somewhere, and it gets transferred to the body as a powerful blow. Banshee knew he'd survive with a "nasty bruise," but that was far better than a bullet through the heart!

The science of ballistics has been studied for centuries, ever since the Chinese invented gunpowder around the 9th century. On the American frontier, understanding guns and what



could stop their bullets was literally a matter of life and death. Banshee's quick thinking and desperate experiments with different materials showed him what countless soldiers and gunsmiths had learned over the years—that stopping a bullet requires the right combination of hardness, thickness, and density. His cast-iron pot lid was crude compared to modern armor, but it was based on the same scientific principles we use today to protect soldiers, police officers, and even the President of the United States. Sometimes survival depends not just on courage, but on understanding the laws of physics!

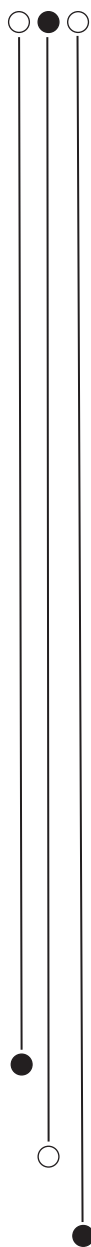





THE LEGEND BEHIND THE GREEN BRAVE!

Have you ever heard of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table? These legendary warriors from medieval England were famous for their bravery, honor, and daring quests. One of the most mysterious and exciting stories from these legends is called “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” written over 600 years ago by an unknown poet. In this tale, a strange green knight bursts into King Arthur’s castle on Christmas Day and issues a shocking challenge that tests the courage and honor of Arthur’s bravest knight, Sir Gawain. Sound familiar? That’s because “Banshee and the Green Brave” is inspired by this classic medieval story!

In the original legend, the Green Knight rides into King Arthur’s court during a Christmas feast



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and challenges any knight to strike him with an axe—but with one condition: whoever takes the blow must meet the Green Knight one year later to receive a return blow. Sir Gawain accepts the challenge and beheads the Green Knight, only to watch in horror as the knight picks up his own head, reminds Gawain of their bargain, and rides away! Now Gawain must journey to find the Green Knight and face what seems like certain death. Throughout his quest, Gawain faces tests of his courage, honesty, and honor—discovering that the Green Knight’s challenge was never really about violence, but about testing what kind of man Gawain truly is.

“Banshee and the Green Brave” takes this medieval tale and reimagines it on the American frontier. Just like the Green Knight appears at Arthur’s Christmas celebration, the green-painted Wendigu brave arrives at the Riders’ Christmas gathering. Both mysterious visitors issue deadly challenges involving exchanged blows—the Green Knight with an axe, the Wendigu brave with a pistol. Both Gawain and Banshee must journey to find their challenger and face a seemingly impossible fate. And most importantly, both stories reveal that the challenge was never just about

physical courage—it was a test of character, honor, and what it means to keep your word even when you're terrified. The Green Knight tests whether Gawain is truly honorable, while the Wendigu brave tests whether the “yengee” (American settlers) can be trusted as good neighbors. In both tales, the heroes discover that facing your fears with honesty and integrity matters more than simply surviving—and that sometimes the scariest monsters turn out to be testing whether you're worthy of friendship after all!





ACTIVITIES & MORE



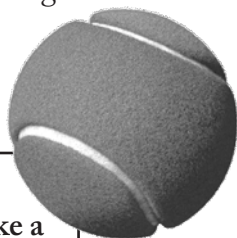
AT-HOME SUPER SCIENCE

WITH MISCHIEF MARIE

Not every warrior survives by magic. Sometimes, survival comes down to physics, just like when Banshee discovers that a cast-iron lid can stop a bullet. Let's explore how force and energy behave when something moving fast hits something strong in **STOP THE STRIKE!**

WHAT YOU NEED

- Cardboard (corrugated, like a shipping box)
- Aluminum foil
- Paper towel or cloth
- Small hardcover book
- Rubber bands or tape
- Tennis ball or rubber ball
- Thin baking sheet or metal lid



QUICK HACK! *layering different materials works better than using just one thick material—just like armor.*



STEPS

OBSERVE NORMAL CONDITIONS

First, gently toss the tennis ball against a single piece of cardboard held upright. Watch what happens. Does the cardboard bend? Does the ball bounce back? Take a moment to think: where does the energy go?

BUILD YOUR “ARMOR”

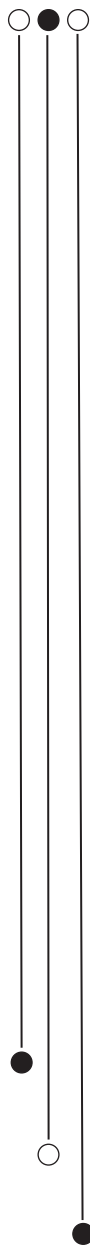
Now stack your materials in this order:


1. Cardboard
2. Paper towel or cloth
3. Aluminum foil
4. Another piece of cardboard

Hold or tape the stack together. This layered setup represents protective armor, like the hidden cast-iron plate Banshee wears over his heart.

TEST THE IMPACT

Throw the tennis ball at the layered armor with the same force you used before. Observe carefully. Does the armor bend less? Does the ball lose more energy? Write down what you notice.





Now place a thin metal lid or baking sheet behind the layers and repeat the test. Listen to the sound it makes. That sharp clang tells you something important!

SAFETY FIRST! *never throw hard objects at people. Do not use real weapons or projectiles. Always test against a wall or sturdy surface, and ask an adult before using any metal objects.*

HOW DOES IT WORK?

This experiment demonstrates ballistics and energy transfer. When an object moves, it carries kinetic energy. When it hits something, that energy must go somewhere—it can:

- Bend materials
- Create sound
- Transfer motion
- Turn into heat

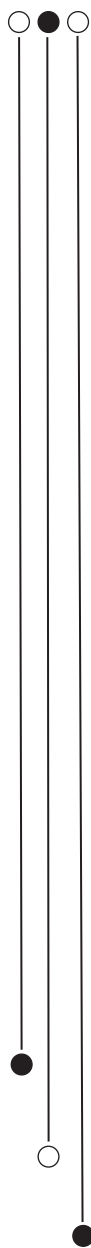
A single thin layer absorbs only a little energy. But layered materials spread the force out over time and space, making the impact less dangerous. That's why a cast-iron lid can stop a bullet in the story:

- The iron is dense and strong
- It spreads the bullet's force across its surface
- The bullet loses energy before it can pass through

This same principle is used in:

- Body armor
- Helmets
- Car crumple zones

No magic required—just physics.

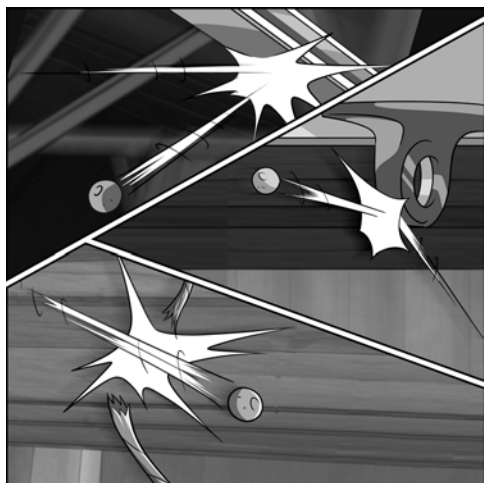




DEADSHOT

WRITTEN BY Lee Fanning
ILLUSTRATED BY Alejandro Fernandez





RICOCHET (r.)

rebound one or more times
off a surface.



GAME TIME

The Riders faced a deadly challenge on Christmas morning—and you can test your own nerve and skill with **BANSHEE'S ARMOR CHALLENGE!**

WHAT YOU NEED

- Buckets or boxes (one per team, labeled “HEART”)
- Soft balls (foam balls, rolled socks, or beanbags)
- Cardboard sheets
- Paper towels or cloth
- Aluminum foil
- Tape
- Stopwatch

HOW TO SETUP

First, divide players into two or more teams. Each team builds a piece of “armor” by taping together layers of cardboard, cloth, and foil, just like Banshee’s hidden chest plate. Place each team’s armor over or inside their bucket or box labeled “HEART,” and

set it several steps away from the throwing line.

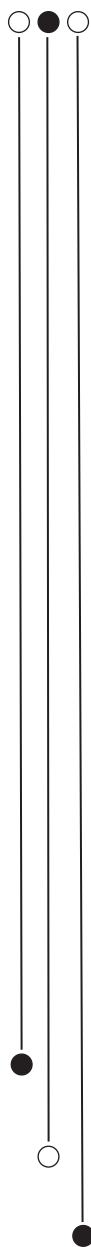
Give each team an equal number of soft balls and line them up behind the throwing line.

NOW YOU'RE SET, HOW TO PLAY

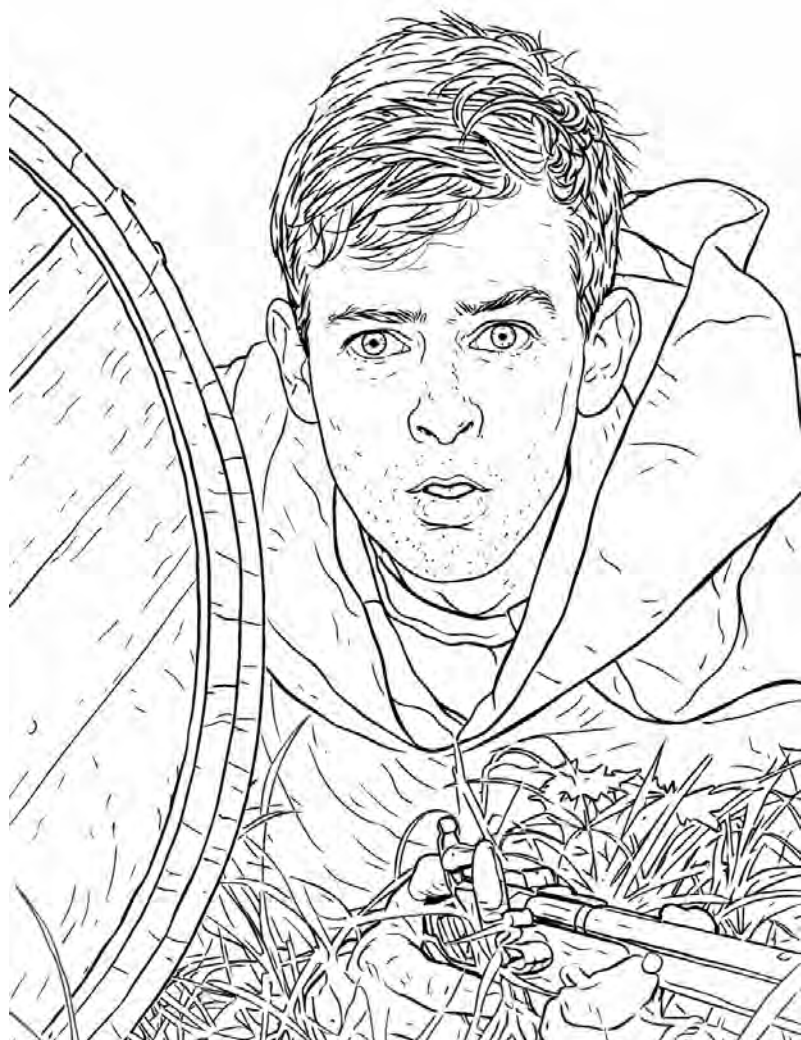
When the timer starts, players take turns throwing soft balls toward the opposing team's "HEART." The goal is to test the armor, not destroy it. Each throw represents a "trial blow," like the one Banshee had to face.

- If a ball bounces off or is stopped, the armor holds—and that team scores a point.
- If a ball lands inside the bucket, the armor failed—and the throwing team scores instead.

After one minute, teams switch roles: builders become throwers, and throwers become defenders. The team with the most successful defenses at the end of the game wins!



COLORING PAGE



DID YOU KNOW?

HARD TO BELIEVE SCIENCE FACTS

- A single teaspoon of **neutron star** material would weigh about **six billion tons** on Earth.
- The smell of **rain** has a name—**petrichor**—and it comes from plant oils and bacteria in the soil.
- **Octopuses** have **three hearts**, and two of them stop beating when the octopus swims.
- The **human body** **glows** faintly in the dark due to **chemical reactions** in our cells—but our eyes can't see it.
- The **largest** living structure on Earth is the **Great Barrier Reef**, and it can be seen from space.
- It takes about 8 minutes and 20 seconds for **sunlight** to reach **Earth**.
- In 1647, **Christmas** was **banned** in England because it was considered too rowdy and unholy.
- A **day** on Venus is **longer** than a year on Venus because it rotates so slowly.
- The song "**Jingle Bells**" was originally written for **Thanksgiving**, not Christmas.

WORD SEARCH

L	N	H	R	N	M	E	N	O	S	O	G	N	C
E	B	S	H	L	O	V	T	E	E	R	F	I	R
C	A	D	A	S	H	E	G	M	N	S	B	B	A
L	N	I	R	I	I	A	R	K	G	C	I	G	H
A	S	L	M	E	C	M	E	C	H	A	G	I	B
W	H	N	O	D	A	E	E	O	E	R	I	A	L
H	E	O	R	O	N	C	N	R	W	A	E	A	E
A	E	R	R	A	E	W	B	T	A	B	R	R	D
M	A	I	I	M	A	E	R	N	E	E	Y	E	N
M	B	T	C	C	E	N	A	I	E	E	E	N	B
E	B	S	E	D	Y	D	V	L	G	M	N	B	M
R	L	A	O	D	R	I	E	F	E	N	G	R	D
G	A	C	I	E	R	G	D	E	B	G	E	E	N
E	B	E	M	E	N	U	R	I	D	I	E	R	O

WENDIGU
ARMOR
FLINTROCK
BANSHEE
MOHICAN

CAST IRON LID
SCARAB
CLAWHAMMER
GREEN BRAVE
YENGEE

QUIZ

1. Why does Banshee accept the Green Brave's dangerous challenge instead of fighting back or fleeing?

- a. He believes he is invincible
- b. He wants to prove his aim is better
- c. He hopes to protect the Riders and the children from an attack
- d. He is forced to accept

2. Why does layering materials (like cloth, cardboard, and metal) stop impacts better than using just one layer?

- a. It makes objects heavier
- b. It spreads out the force and energy of the impact
- c. It slows gravity
- d. It makes objects bounce farther

3. What object does Banshee secretly use to protect himself from the pistol shot?

- a. A cast-iron pot lid
- b. A leather breastplate
- c. A wooden shield
- d. A stone talisman

4. How is the Green Brave similar to the Green Knight from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight?

- a. Both are evil villains who want to start wars
- b. Both use magic to defeat their enemies
- c. Both are defeated by brute force
- d. Both arrive at Christmas and issue a challenge that tests honor and courage

5. When a fast-moving object hits a solid surface, what usually happens to its energy?

- a. It disappears instantly
- b. It turns only into light
- c. It is transferred into sound, motion, heat, or deformation
- d. It moves backward into the object

6. At the end of the story, what does the Green Brave reveal the challenge was really testing?

- a. Strength and marksmanship
- b. Magic and superstition
- c. Honor, courage, and keeping one's word
- d. Loyalty to one's tribe

DISCUSSION

Banshee accepts the Green Brave's challenge believing that death may be unavoidable, and at first he seems ready to sacrifice himself simply to keep his word. However, as the story continues, Banshee struggles with fear, doubt, and a growing desire to survive—leading him to secretly prepare and protect himself. Do you think true courage means accepting death without resistance, or doing everything possible to live while still honoring your values? How does Banshee's choice challenge the idea of what it means to be a hero, and what does the story suggest about the difference between dramatic sacrifice and genuine bravery?



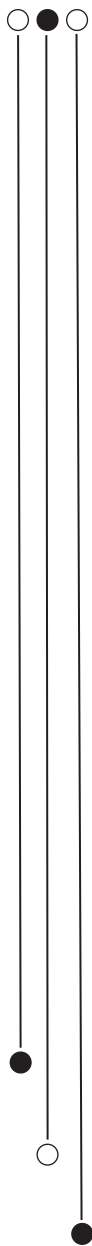
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MORE TO CONSIDER

Written in the late 1300s, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” is one of the most famous stories to come out of medieval England. Unlike many legends about King Arthur, this tale was written as a poem by an unknown author—now often called the “Gawain Poet.” The story was originally composed in Middle English, a form of English very different from what we speak today, and was meant to be read aloud, using rhythm and repetition to make the story memorable. At its heart, the poem explores ideas that were deeply important to medieval society, such as honor, loyalty, courage, and keeping one’s word.

For centuries, the poem survived in just a single handwritten manuscript, which was nearly lost to history. It wasn’t rediscovered and widely studied until the 1800s, when scholars realized how rich and sophisticated the story truly was. Today, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” is considered a masterpiece of medieval literature, not because of its action alone, but because it asks timeless questions about what it really means to be brave and

honorable. Even hundreds of years later, the Green Knight's strange Christmas challenge continues to inspire new stories—like “Banshee and the Green Brave”—that remind us courage isn't about being fearless, but about choosing integrity when fear is at its strongest.



GLOSSARY

Absorb to take in energy, force, or liquid instead of letting it pass through.

Alloy a mixture of two or more metals, or a metal mixed with another element. Alloys are often stronger or tougher than pure metals.

Ballistics the science that studies how projectiles like bullets move through the air and what happens when they hit something.

Chamber the hollow space inside a gun where the bullet and gunpowder sit before the gun is fired.

Deformed changed in shape because of force or pressure.

Dense having a lot of mass packed into a small space.

Impact Force the strong push or hit that happens when one object strikes another. Even if something doesn't break through, impact force can still cause damage.

Kevlar a very strong synthetic fiber used in bulletproof vests and helmets.

Kinetic Energy the energy of motion. The faster and heavier an object is, the more kinetic energy it has.

Materials Science the study of what materials are made of and how they behave, including how strong, hard, or flexible they are.

Mass the amount of matter in an object. Objects with more mass are heavier and harder to stop when they are moving.

Penetration the ability of an object to pass through another material.

Pressure the force that pushes on something over an area.

Velocity the speed of an object in a certain direction. Higher velocity means something is moving faster.



ANSWERS

QUIZ

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. d
5. c
6. c

L	N	H	R	N	M	E	N	O	S	O	G	N	C
E	B	S	H	L	O	V	T	E	E	R	F	I	R
C	A	D	A	S	H	E	G	M	N	S	B	B	A
L	N	I	R	I	I	A	R	K	G	C	I	G	H
A	S	L	M	E	C	M	E	C	H	A	G	I	B
W	H	N	O	D	A	E	E	O	E	R	I	A	L
H	E	O	R	O	N	C	N	R	W	A	E	A	E
A	E	R	R	A	E	W	B	T	A	B	R	R	D
M	A	I	I	M	A	E	R	N	E	E	Y	E	N
M	B	T	C	C	E	N	A	I	E	E	E	N	B
E	B	S	E	D	Y	D	V	L	G	M	N	B	M
R	L	A	O	D	R	I	E	F	E	N	G	R	D
G	A	C	I	E	R	G	D	E	B	G	E	E	N
E	B	E	M	E	N	U	R	I	D	I	E	R	O



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