

**H.A. Peak &
I.W. Morison**

DIVINE VESSEL



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Forward

Artists Ivan & Heather Morison took a cargo ship from Shanghai in China, to Auckland in New Zealand. During the voyage they wrote this science fiction novel, based upon the events onboard.



Gnarled Oak

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‘I went up for the header; I thought I was just alone. Suddenly I was hit by another guy in my head and I was falling on the floor. But after five minutes I began to play again. After the five-a-side training I went home to my wife. This was happening in 1988, in the middle of January.

‘For many years before I was playing football, and I am still playing football. But it was this accident with the header that made me think about my life. Before this I was living in this village, but I was baking bread. I had a bakery with five men working for me. I was getting up early every morning before it was light, and having to finish when it was dark every day. My wife was never seeing me, and I was counting the money all the day.

‘Fourteen days after the accident my wife made me call the doctor. The doctor said Oddbjorn, if you are not getting better come back and see me. But after that I was skiing and playing football again and driving, but when I went over a bump my head would hurt me like hell. The last week before the twenty fourth of March, when it was my wife birthday, I was in my bed at home all week. I was in a no good way. I don’t remember all this now, but my wife said I making some food for you and you don’t eat. All week I lay in bed, not myself. On her birthday my wife was so worried that she calling the doctor again, and straight away he got the ambulance. I don’t remember any of this just the ‘wee waa’ of the ambulance. So soon I was in the hospital in Oslo, and they are scanning my head. Then they took the drill and drill this hole in my head, about ten centimetres it measures, and they taking out the blood that was stopped. Look, you can feel the hole here.

‘When I had waken the doctor told me to stand on my feet, I was still shaky but it was like they had taking a

sack of fifty kilos off me. The doctor said, if your wife had waiting till the day after before phoning, then she would be called to the undertaker. It was very close to your wife becoming a widow. So it was so close to the death, very very close.

‘Then in hospital, after two days, I started thinking what about your life, you want to go back? Stress? The only thing that was happening was work, work, work. I was never leaving the village and I was not wanting my wife any more. I was thinking what I was really wanting to do in my life. So, I said no, this is not a life any more.

‘Still, I was a bit shaky, but it was ok, everything was ok. I started training up again, fit like I was before the header. The first thing I did when I went back to the bakery was say guys, this is not what I wanting to do any more, go and find yourselves something else to do. Then I went to my wife and said the same to her. After two more months everything was done. My business was sold and my wife was leaving the village. After the accident something happened inside, because then I had time to think about my life, and I was thinking about being a seaman. So I was calling an old friend from Finland who was a captain of a ship and he got me a job with a German company that was doing cargo ships. After another month I was a seaman on board a ship to South America. Now I am living here in the village in my little house some of my year, and I am skiing and doing things I want. Then I am on the sea, in many places around the world. Tomorrow I will go to Oslo, and then I will be flying to New Zealand to join a ship there.

‘Now I think it is very good. Now I have more time to do what I want to do. Now I am alone. Now I feel good.’

Oddbjorn Ballengrud finished his sentence. His gaze drifted from the couple listening on the orange couch opposite to the window behind them. The daylight was fading and the glow from the window was becoming quite blue. It is time to go, he thought. His eyes returned from the window, briefly lingered on the crotch of the man in front of him, and he continued. ‘But that was a long story. I hope I was not boring you. You can use it

however you are wanting. It will be dark in an hour, and I am thinking you have a long way back to walk...'

The couple rose from the couch and the man took the tape recorder from the table, switched it off and put it into his knapsack. The woman thanked Oddbjorn for sharing his wonderful story, and promised to send him a copy of the book when it was printed. Oddbjorn politely ushered them from his house onto the snowy street outside, and watched them walk off down the road, the man slipping often on the hidden patches of ice and the woman catching him each time by his arm.

Oddbjorn closed his front door. Stepping into the small room off the hallway he removed all his clothes revealing his muscular athletic body, excellent for a man in his forties. He was not handsome but his cleanliness and tidy appearance did make him attractive. He always shaved his beard and head and his tanned skin was deeply tanned from many days outdoors in the winter sun and soft from many hours spent exfoliating. He had a long pointed nose, pale blue eyes set above high cheek bones and a ready smile that showed off his white teeth and healthy gums. He pulled on his tight, almost florescent, yellow lycra suit and zipped up the fastening running from the crotch to the neck. Stroking and then adjusting his penis through the thin gripping material with one hand, he also gently fingered the plum sized indent on the left side of his shaved scull with the other. Then, bending slightly at the waist, he pulled on a pair of space age looking boots covered in a similar yellow material and turning swiftly, picked up his long skis, poles and gloves, and left the house, slamming the wooden door behind him.

Within a few minutes Oddbjorn was out of the village and down onto the cross country track that ran alongside the frozen lake and towards the forests. The light was now at its bluest, just like a filter had been placed across the snowy valley. Placing his skis into the two parallel cross country tracks, Oddbjorn snapped the toes of his boots into the bindings and set off with the powerful and steady rhythm of a semi professional cross country skier. He was quickly clear of the last few buildings that

made up his small Norwegian village, and was soon passing through the silver birches that lined the lake, now bent over the track from the weight of snow on their branches. In a moment of frivolity he grabbed at a particularly low branch and sent the snow flying up behind him. He inhaled deeply and smelt the nearby pine trees mixed with the crisp air and let out a long ‘aahhhh.’ Increasing his speed he mounted a small hill and glided down the other side, the only sound being the swish swish of his skis in the track and his icy breathing. He was quite alone now and the lights of the village had disappeared as the dark pine trees of the forest began to enclose both sides of the track. His arms and legs worked rhythmically, left-right-left, and he felt warm and glowing as the exercise began to take effect. Suddenly, just out of the corner of his eye, a movement caught his attention. Without losing his rhythm he glanced behind him but saw nothing but the big pillowy drifts of snow that lined both sides of the path. He unconsciously began to quicken his pace as he began to think about the evening ahead. Where would he be waiting tonight? Should he take the track around the lake, or maybe along the valley?

The light, already dim, was fading now. The blueness was being gradually washed out, and the landscape turned monochrome and two dimensional. Oddbjorn smiled widely to himself. He was now doing what he loved, skiing through the half light, working up a sweat, the temperature minus twenty, on his way to be bugged by a brutish husky musher against some tree in the snow. He reached a steep incline and changed his ski technique, herringboning up the slope in a fast comic waddle. His heart pounded faster and louder in his ears, partly from the greater exertion needed to scale the hill, but also from the excitement he was experiencing from imagining the large bearded man who was waiting for him somewhere amongst the dark pines. As he pushed off from the top of the slope, both hands pumping his poles simultaneously, he thought of those big rough hands peeling back the lycra of his suit and pulling it down to around his knees. He pictured himself reaching

inside the snow suit of this mountain man and pulling out his gnarly cock, as rigid and contoured as the trunk of an ancient oak. As he hit the bend at the bottom of the slope and lifted his right hand ski from the groove, using it to slow him down, he imagined being bent forwards and bracing himself against the scented bark of a pine, ready. But Oddbjorn was rudely snapped from his homoerotic reverie when another movement caught his attention. Swivelling his head quickly he saw something small and white disappearing into the thick pine forest. 'This is not so strange,' he told himself, but he did feel unnerved.

He was now on the flat, moving fast across the icy surface, and the blue light had completely faded into night. The snow around him appeared to glow as it reflected the weak moonlight. In front Oddbjorn could still just make out the parallel tracks that his skis were being guided by. He had skied this route a hundred times before, and he tried to reassure himself with this as he ruminated on the movements he had seen. He flicked his head quickly from left to right, and was sure he could make out things moving in the forest around him. Snow tumbled from a disturbed branch onto his face and he wiped it away with his glove. Quickening his pace he tried to turn his thoughts back to his imminent rendezvous with his favourite fuck. As he approached the next downhill stretch a cloud passed in front of the moon, casting a shadow of heavy darkness across the track. Without breaking his rhythm, Oddbjorn reached into the pouch on the back of his suit and took out a head torch. Slipping the tight elasticated strap around his head he flicked on the powerful beam. The downward sloping track in front of him was immediately illuminated and Oddbjorn was startled to see a white rabbit running fast, not five metres in front of him. Surprised, Oddbjorn momentarily lost his balance, but as he quickly found his rhythm again he realised that this rabbit was what must have been following him through the forest. 'Hah,' he shouted, 'I'll show you what you get for putting the willies up me,' and he pumped hard on both his poles, working to increase his speed and catch up the bunny.

Oddbjorn's concerns of monsters in the woods had now been forgotten as he picked up more speed. Flying down the slope he gained on the rabbit as it darted from side to side, struggling to stay ahead. He pumped furiously with his sticks and the rabbit was almost within his grasp. Bending lower he was about to lunge for the rabbit, his poles tucked behind him, when, CRACK. Oddbjorn let out a breathless scream as his head was filled by an immense white lightning strike of pain. In an instant he realised that his head had hit a heavy branch that seemed to have swung out of nowhere. He was aware of himself tumbling down the slope, and then nothing, just black.

Oddbjorn Ballengrud lay unconscious across the parallel cross-country tracks in the dark night, his limbs twisted and contorted by the fall. A large plum sized bump began to rise on the right side of his forehead, almost the exact inverse of the depression on the other side of his skull. All around him was just the silence and stillness of the forest when the white rabbit, illuminated by Oddbjorn's head torch, slowly approached and sniffed his body and then, out of the forest, it was joined by others.