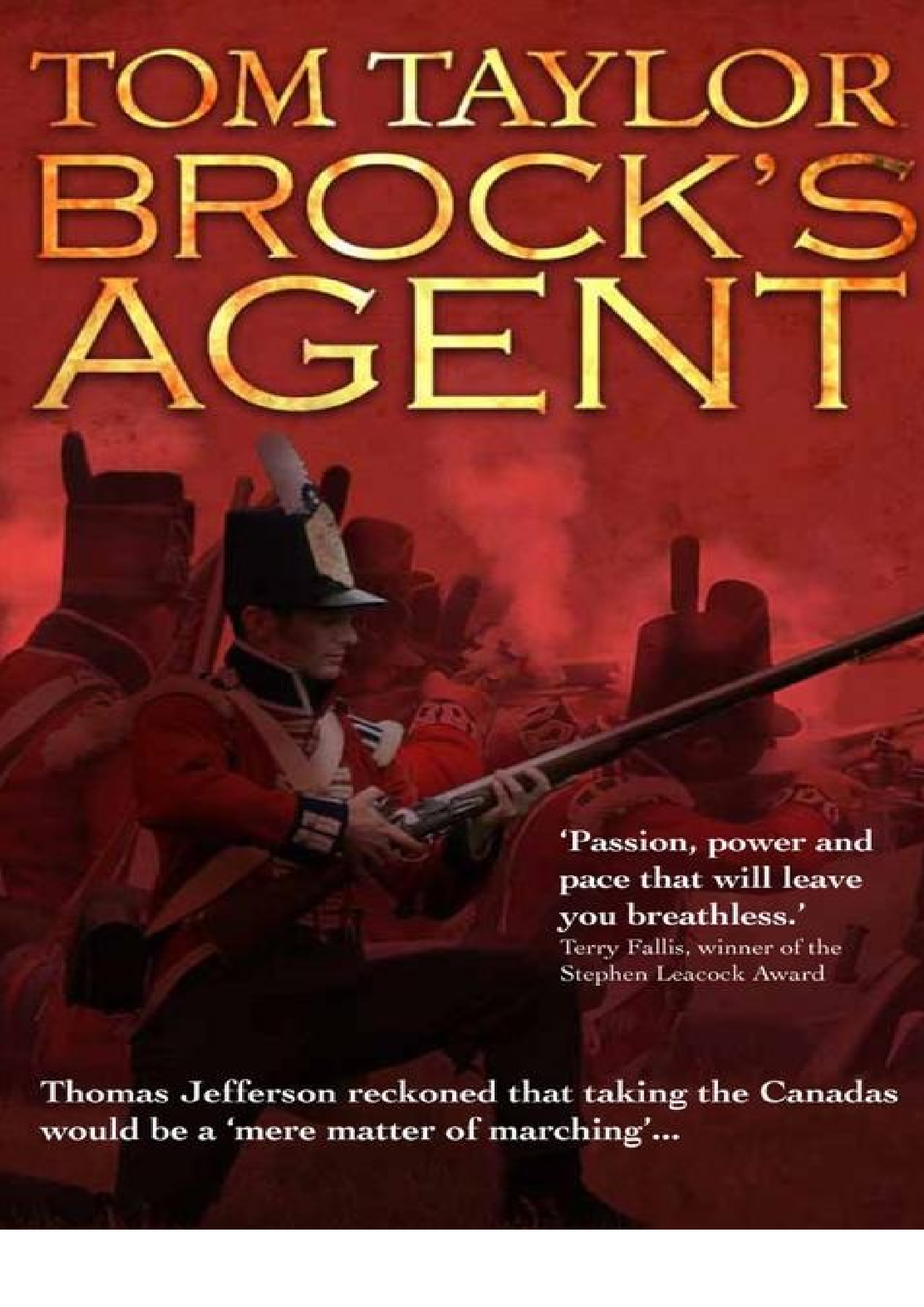


TOM TAYLOR BROCK'S AGENT



**'Passion, power and
pace that will leave
you breathless.'**

Terry Fallis, winner of the
Stephen Leacock Award

**Thomas Jefferson reckoned that taking the Canadas
would be a 'mere matter of marching'...**

Praise for Brock's Agent

'BRAVO! In the great tradition of master storytellers Bernard Cornwell and C.S. Forester, Taylor takes you to another world until you don't want to leave! One of the most thrilling stories I've read in years!'

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41st Regiment of Foot MLHG

'In BROCK'S AGENT, Tom Taylor writes with a passion, power and pace that will leave you breathless and thirsty for more. A born storyteller, Taylor weaves a gripping yarn with the very strands of our own history.'

— Terry Fallis, winner of Canada Reads and the Stephen Leacock Award for his book *The Best Laid Plans*, and author of *The High Road*

BROCK'S AGENT

Tom Taylor



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For Mum and Dad
Who took me to the library all those years ago

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every novel takes a team of interested people to bring it to fruition so I would like to thank the members of the *Brock's Agent* team: Geri Das Gupta, who believed from the beginning I could write this thing; my family, who sacrificed their time to allow me to write; Natalie Taylor, who helped me with this damn computer; Fred Ford and the Pickering Writers Circle; the Humber School for Writers; my great humanities teacher, Brayton Polka; Rick Olsen; John Stewart; Frances and Bill Hanna; Tom Fournier; David Brunelle; Terry Fallis; Tania Craan; Elizabeth Woodley-Hall; Barbara Kyle; Dr. J. Rosenberg; Ray Argyle; Bob Coffey; the gang at Open Mic in Newmarket; Bernard Cornwell for showing the way; and my patient editors, Peter Lavery and Heather Sangster. Lastly, thank you to two special writers who nudged me to be better at my writing craft, Lory Kaufman and Sally Moon. Please accept a heartfelt thanks to all of you, without whom it would not have been.

One last mention: Certainly, there would be no novel, and perhaps no Canada, without the extraordinary efforts of both Tecumseh and Sir Isaac Brock. To them, we will forever owe our deepest gratitude.

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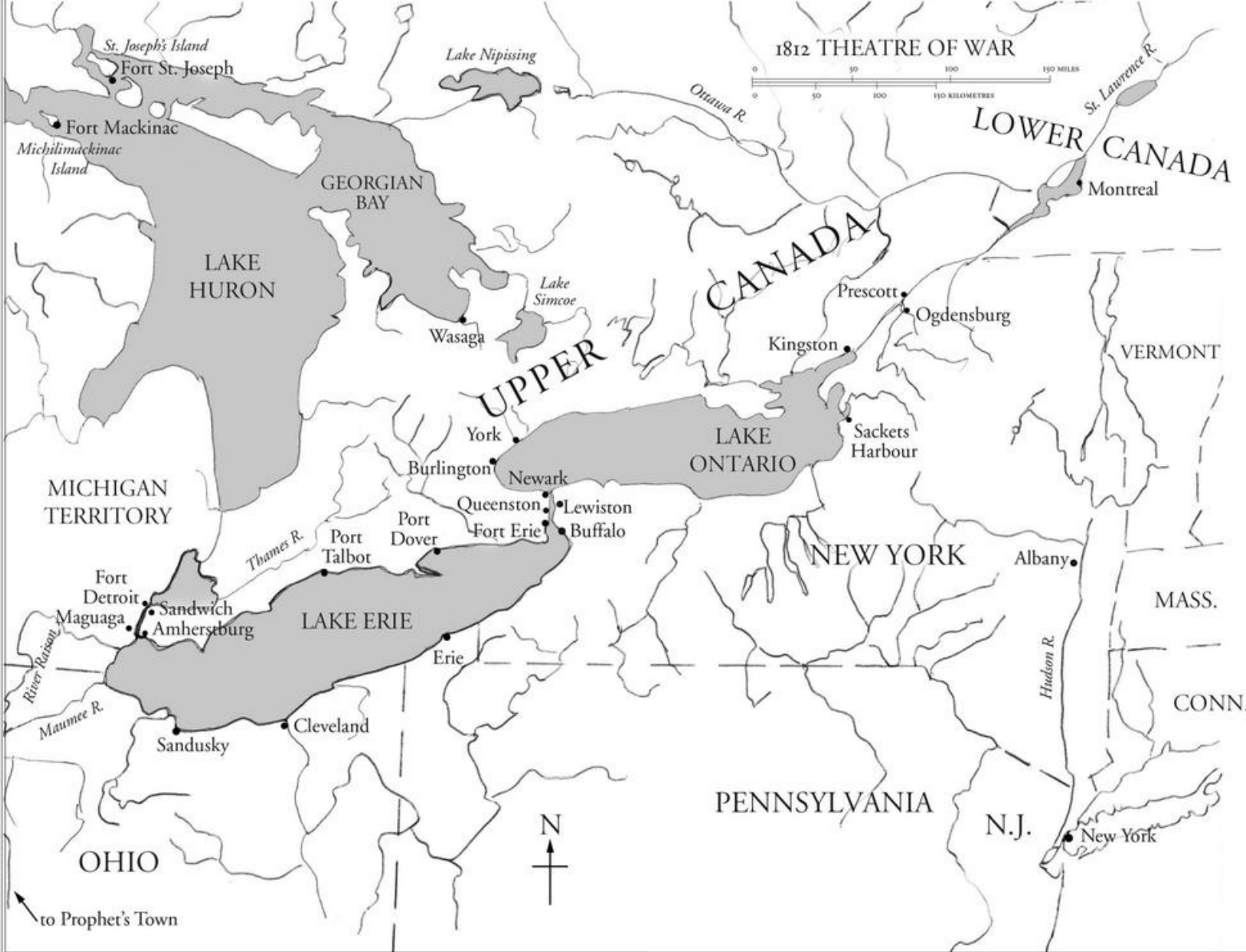
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To ease us into the story ...

By 1811, the nascent United States had suffered enough at the sharp end of Royal Navy tactics. Impressment, the act of seizing able bodies to fight in British warships was standard policy for Her Majesty's fighting ships. However, when those seamen "jumped ship" for better conditions in America's navy, they were considered deserters whether or not they became instant citizens of the new republic. British warships simply stopped American merchant shippers and seized whoever they thought might have deserted. They were often right, but sometimes wrong. America called these actions an affront to their newly won sovereignty.

Add to these indignities the Orders in Council, whereby all American shipping had to stop at a British port before proceeding to the continent, and the U.S. government's fuse burnt toward an explosion. Then, when westward expansion of American settlers pushed against Indian settlements and the British provided the natives with muskets, to resist with bullets instead of arrows, American authorities quickly realized a plan to sweep away all their British problems.

They peered north to the British territories – the Canadas – and found what appeared to be low hanging fruit. Thomas Jefferson declared that seizing British North America would be "a mere matter of marching", but Jefferson hadn't counted on British Major General Isaac Brock, and fifteen hundred redcoats, defending an area larger than England itself.

While Britain continued to battle Napoleon and considered abandoning Upper Canada, Brock moulded a reluctant citizenry, the natives, and his meager army into a fighting force. The future of North America would hang on the outcome of their battles.

Unknown even to General Brock, Jonathan Westlake, a young man ready to make his mark, was about to be the difference between defeat and victory.



UPPER CANADA

March 1811

Jonathan Westlake stood on the snow-covered path and wondered. It shouldn't have come to this. He stared back at his school door. On the other side of it, his schoolmates continued their lesson minus the "troublemaker." That's what Reverend Strachan had called him before ushering him out by the collar.

It didn't matter that Westlake was in the right: three-time offenders got expelled, no exception. Just one punch to blacken the eye of the class bully and Westlake was going home, leaving the town of Cornwall and his friends forever, never to graduate, at least not from this school. *And so close to the finish line.*

As he inhaled the sharp morning air to calm himself, he smelled smoke from the schoolhouse fire which reminded him of home, of his father, and the hell to come after this kind of news. And he'd have to watch the disappointment and sadness in his mother's face. She held such faith in him.

"This is going to be awful," he said out loud to no one. He'd have to think of the right words to explain to her what had happened and why.

The sky had clouded over gray and a light snow began to fall. Westlake rubbed his palms over both ears and tugged down the rim of the knitted hat that covered his blond hair. He stamped his feet to keep them warm, then in anger kicked hard against the snow on the partly shoveled path. Some broken rocks appeared. He glanced back at the school door again, twenty-five paces away, and picked up a handful of stones. An inner voice told him not to do it. He hesitated yet still leaned back to throw, but instead of the door, he aimed for a tree beside the schoolhouse. The stone struck its target.

He clenched his other fist in victory: "Dead center." He laughed as an idea came to him, something to make amends for the bad news. The family fur-trading business needed a special type of help from someone able to write. A proposition to his father now formed in his mind, one that also offered independence and perhaps adventure. He could work out the details on his long ride home to York.

The next stone, bigger than the first, smacked the same spot but ricocheted aside to hammer the school's external wall. Seconds later the door burst open. In his black garb, Reverend Strachan stood there with legs planted well apart, gripping a cane ready for battle. That chiseled face, large and round with sunken cheeks, was set hard to project his authority. The gusting wind rippled the hem of his gown.

"God doesn't suffer troublemakers, laddie," the clergyman announced in his harsh Scottish accent. "Heaving rocks at my school will only make matters worse for you in the eyes of the Lord."

"I was just aiming at the tree, sir." Westlake pointed. "If I wanted to hit that door, it would be too easy." He tossed a stone in the air, caught it again, and grinned.

Strachan glanced back at the open door where he stood and frowned. A few students had gathered just inside and Westlake's friend, Danny Lapointe, waved to him from behind the teacher's back.

Strachan shut the door.

~~“Was that a threat, young man?”~~ Twice, he slapped the cane against his palm and one black boot began tapping. “You’re finished here, so go home. Trouble follows some characters around all the lives, and you’re one of those characters.”

Strachan had said much worse on other occasions to different students. Anyone deemed the least bit out of order—his order—was labeled “God’s enemy” or “Satan’s imp.” What such intimidation had to do with teaching, Westlake couldn’t understand. In the contemptuous curve of Strachan’s lip there was a nastiness that reminded Westlake of another reason he had come to hate this school. Reverend Strachan was a prick.

Westlake reared back to throw his missile and yelled, “Your problem is that you have no sense of humor.” The snow blew harder and he felt some flakes melting on his cheek.

“Don’t you dare!” Strachan shook the cane in the air, but he didn’t budge from the doorway, as if the fate of the world depended on how rigid he stood.

Westlake tested the smooth stone between his fingers, his arm poised behind his head. The schoolhouse couldn’t do any worse than expel him, and Strachan was right: there was no reason to linger. Besides, he had that proposal to offer his father. He would never enter the Cornwall school again, and in that moment he realized that was fine with him.

Westlake let the stone fly. It bounced off the tree and shot right between Strachan’s boots.

“Just like I told you,” he shouted. “Dead center.” Then, laughing quietly to himself, Jonathan Westlake took one last look, through the falling snow, at the black figure of Reverend Strachan and his schoolhouse. He gave a broad smile, saluted goodbye, and turned his back. He was free.



TIPPECANOE

THE FIRST TIME young Paxinos tried burning down a settler's log cabin, the beams wouldn't catch flame. The settlers had by then vanished, leaving their wooden bed frames bare and even the windows stripped of their curtains. Paxinos scanned the interior of the cabin, happy the family had gone but wishing they had left something easier to burn.

In one corner of the room, his friend Kawika helped him rebuild the flagging embers by adding dead grass and small sticks, soon throwing on entire branches. As the fire hissed to life and filled the cabin with smoke, Paxinos coughed and rubbed his eyes. He finally broke apart a crude table and threw its narrow legs into the flames before running out the door, his eyes watering but with a face lit up in a wide grin. After the fire stretched its way through the roof, black smoke billowed up against the blue morning sky. In their triumph, Paxinos and Kawika locked arms and sang.

Later that same year, in early September 1811, across an elbow bend in a narrow stream, Paxinos crept toward another cabin. It sat twenty paces from the water, and to the rear of it stood a gray board outhouse. The place appeared deserted. This time he had brought fire with him: burning embers cradled in a small hollowed-out log.

Accompanied by six other Shawnee warriors, Paxinos and Kawika circled the house for signs of movement. The front door was ajar, leading Paxinos to expect that at any moment the settlers might lunge out with muskets blasting. His mouth was so dry he could barely swallow as he stopped, then crouched, and waited. The cabin and the acres of cornfields around it were still.

Paxinos and his circle of painted warriors closed on the cabin like a noose tightening around a neck. Since no smoke swirled from the chimney to indicate a breakfast fire, he hoped the place was abandoned. A warrior peered through the only window but reported nothing.

Musket in hand, Kawika was first through the door. He poked his head in quickly, then jumped back, but there was no welcoming blast so he stepped farther inside, waving on Paxinos to follow quickly. Kawika howled a cry of victory and smashed out the window with the butt of his musket.

As Paxinos entered the cabin, he realized the occupants had disappeared in a hurry because in the race to escape, they had abandoned the gray blankets on an unmade bed. This house would be easier to burn. He heard a warrior hollering and ran back to the door in time to see a skinny white man bounding from the outhouse, pulling up a loose suspender. The man stumbled and ran on again, but by now a warrior was tackling him from behind. Paxinos could hear the man whimpering in terror.

The warriors gathered around the kneeling captive, shouting at him to be silent, but the frightened man couldn't stay calm. "Mercy, please. Oh God, have mercy," he cried, rhythmically rocking back and forth, his hands praying in front of him. A warrior threatened him with a club, but the prisoner only wailed louder.

Paxinos cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled in English from the doorway, "Be quiet, whi

man. You make them angry by showing your weakness. They must put an end to your shame.”

“Please, I’m sorry, please,” the thin man pleaded.

Kawika ran out from the cabin and joined the shouting circle, calling him a coward and a thief for stealing Shawnee land. The white man stumbled to his feet, turned to his left, then lurched right, falling to his knees. Tears trickled from great bulging eyes over his scrawny cheeks.

Paxinos shook his head; there was no hope for this foolish white man who couldn’t control his emotions. Although the prisoner knelt in surrender, the warriors would not continue to endure his whining. “You take our land,” Kawika yelled, “so our people starve.”

The thin man stood suddenly and drew out a knife, whereupon Kawika charged at him with his tomahawk raised. Paxinos winced. The captive threw his hands in the air, the knife useless, and cried “No!” Kawika darted behind him and slashed the tomahawk down through the man’s neck, severing the back of his head from the spine. The head lolled forward, arterial blood arcing out of the hideous gash in his neck. He was dead by the time his limp body crumpled to the ground. In the silence that followed, Paxinos sighed, hung his head, and looked away.

One hundred yards away, a white man and a boy lay hidden among the cedars at the forest edge, the muskets pointed at their farmhouse.

“Oh, Christ. No, for God’s sake.” The man suppressed a moan, his forehead dropping to the ground as he drove his fist into the grass. “That was plain murder, your Uncle Victor wasn’t given a chance. He told him he didn’t have time, but he wouldn’t listen.” He tried to quiet his whimpering son with a gentle pat on the shoulders.

“If we fired together, we’d kill at least one of them,” the boy suggested, his eyes full of tears.

“And then what? Your mother and sister are still running not a mile down that path. They’d only catch and kill us all.” He spit. “Those are goddamn British muskets they’re carrying. Look how they paint themselves, the savages.”

The warriors were dressed only in breechcloth with black and red streaks covering their faces and bare chests; one man’s head was completely shaved and painted blood-red. Two of them appeared in the cabin’s doorway, peering south, as if they knew they had observers.

“Uncle Victor always said this was Shawnee land.” With the back of his hand, the boy wiped his damp cheeks while his father watched the Indians in the doorway, remembering their faces.

“We’ve got to get out of here, now. Back away slowly. I can’t watch the place burn.” Never taking his eyes off the Indians in the doorway, the man edged backward on his stomach after tugging at the boy’s collar. He stood up and turned round only when he knew for sure they were well out of sight. “I’m not building another house, not without the army cleaning out these bastards first. Let’s go quick. They could still come this way.” He started to run, and his son ran along beside him.

“But is it Indian land?” the son persisted.

“Governor Harrison will decide. The Indians say it’s their land, but I say it’s mine. We need the army to settle it.”

A glance over his shoulder and the man saw yellow flames already licking out through the shattered window. “Your mother forgot the goddamn blankets.”

Their campfire slumped and a birch log rolled to one side. It could have escaped the flames, but the warrior kicked it back into the center of the red coals. The bark flamed and filled the air with the smell of burning birch.

“My brother cannot make the sun disappear, so what did you see?” the warrior asked. “Explain it to

me.”

The young man, Paxinos, listened. There were just the two of them at the fire, under the night sky. Paxinos wanted to believe in the legend. He had witnessed it, yet here in front of him stood this great warrior chief who claimed that the story of the Prophet’s dark sun was false. But if Paxinos could not believe in the Prophet, then all his beliefs would have to be questioned. White smoke curled up from the fire, changed direction, and blew toward him. Paxinos jerked his head away and pushed out both hands to block its path.

“The Prophet stretched out his arm to the sun and shouted, ‘Behold, the earth grows dark.’ Paxinos stood and pointed upward with a straight right arm. Thick nighttime clouds drifted across the sky, blocking out the sweep of stars. With the smell of fresh air, an October breeze gusted down the Tippecanoe River and over the breastworks protecting the scattered wigwams of the Shawnee village.

“All the world went cold as a black ball rolled across the sun—and it stayed dark. The great chief crouched down, so the Prophet said, ‘Do not be afraid.’ He looked up at the sky, raised both his hands, and said, ‘Great Spirit, bring light back to the world.’ The Great Spirit heard him, and the light slowly returned to warm the earth. I saw this with my own eyes.” Paxinos raised his eyebrows with the excitement of his tale and sat down again, satisfied that he had proved the Prophet held great power.

Close to the fire, the warrior leaned back on his elbows and glanced up as the last few stars visible in the eastern night sky disappeared behind drifting black clouds. Paxinos watched the warrior, who was perhaps thinking how to accept defeat and admit that the legend was true. He thought back to the precise moment the sun went black.

Tenskwatawa, known as the Prophet, had been challenged by Governor William Harrison of Indiana Territory to perform a miracle as proof he commanded a power greater than other men. If he was truly a prophet, then he could perform miracles, Harrison taunted. Now, the miracles were complete and it was reported that, on hearing the news, Governor Harrison’s entire head turned different shades of red.

The warrior chief jabbed a branch into the glowing coals. He stared into the fire and then pulled out his burning staff that now lit up the young Shawnee face of Paxinos. His round brown eyes showed no sign of concern at the stresses he would soon face. If this young man were to become a chief, or a leader, the warrior knew that Paxinos would need to distinguish between a description of the world and an explanation of it. One day soon, Paxinos would have to think for himself.

“We need the tribes to believe in my brother so they will follow the Shawnee and refuse the way of other chiefs who would give away their land for nothing. This belief in the Prophet is in our interest,” the warrior declared. “Many tribes are now coming to the Shawnee because they believe in his power. Do you understand why we need this miracle?” After a pause, giving Paxinos time to reflect on what he had just heard, the warrior continued, “But you have given me only a description of the legend. I asked you to explain it.”

Paxinos gazed at him with an expressionless face, so the warrior decided to show him the difference between description and explanation. He stood up as a first light sprinkle of rain struck his cheek, then swept out his arm toward the blackened sky and shouted, “Rain!” A few more drops fell, and Paxinos held out his palms also. “Rain!” the warrior repeated. He then waited, and as the drops fell heavier he shouted again, only in a deeper voice, “Cover the earth with rain!” The rain descended, and he asked Paxinos, “How did it come to rain?” He crossed both fists over his chest. “Did I make it rain or did the clouds make it rain?” Then he stretched both his arms skyward, as the Prophet had done when the sun darkened.

The young man laughed. “You waited until the rain clouds came, then shouted and pointed at the sky. You cannot fool me with such a simple trick.” Paxinos uncrossed his legs and stood up again as raindrops caused the fire’s red coals to hiss. The rain fell even harder and the two men hurried toward their wigwam. The warrior peered around from the under entrance to watch other villagers scattering for cover.

“Do you understand how my brother made the sun go away? Your description was no explanation. Can you *explain* it to me?”

“There was no magic,” Paxinos replied. “The Prophet figured out exactly the right time to shout up at the sky, when he already knew the sun would soon go dark. Am I right—is that what he did?”

The warrior nodded. “You must learn to see truth and not believe in magic or miracles. Have faith in yourself or your friends, or even in your enemies, but do not believe in tricks or those who claim to perform them.” The warrior glanced back at the fire as the rain continued its assault on the coals. “Do not be satisfied with simple descriptions of the world, or those who offer them. Instead, seek out the explanations. No one can make the sun vanish and, my good friend, no one can make it rain.” He laughed loudly and slapped the young man on the back.

Paxinos dipped his head to enter through the low door of a small hut that kept out most of the weather. Outside, a sudden wind hammered the wigwam, flapping the roof of birch-bark shingles, and he glanced up at the sound of banging, his eyes wide. The Shawnee camp was in for a storm.

“I have told my brother that he must not attack the Long Knives while I am away,” the warrior said. “Never can he do this without me, and I am telling you the same. Soon I travel south to persuade the other tribes to join us in stopping the white man from taking Indian land.”

He spoke with a forceful urgency that Paxinos had never seen in other men. It was always as if he was almost out of time. This warrior saw deeper into the world than did other chiefs, and all men agreed that he had a commanding presence: some unique attraction that Paxinos could not quite describe or understand. He could even read and understand English books. Paxinos remembered listening as he read “to be or not to be” and then explained it to his English teacher, a white woman who once loved him.

“If the warriors force my brother to fight, then you must save the little ones when the enemy comes against our village. This is a promise you must keep for me.” The temperature was dropping, and when the warrior lay down, he snatched a bearskin to cover himself and then propped up his head on one elbow. Physically, he was a big man, almost six feet tall, with a striking oval face, clear eyes, and a copper complexion.

The rain continued tapping steadily on the wigwam’s roof. “But why would the other tribes believe what you have to say?” Paxinos asked him. “Why will they follow you?”

“They will know I have journeyed far so that we may stand together, and they already know my brother as the one who can darken the earth.”

But Paxinos understood differently. The tribes knew of this chief as a fierce warrior, and it would be enough for him to mention his name, “Tecumseh.”

They marched in two parallel columns but far apart, close to a thousand men in four battalions, two battalions in each column, all kicking up their separate trails of mud. In their blue jackets, the U.S. 4th Infantry hastened at the front of each column, followed by the dawdling militiamen of Kentucky and Indiana dressed in their gray and brown homespun. Scouts galloped ahead to give ample warning should they spot a force of Indians. Intermittently, the ground rumbled under three companies of

mounted Indiana riflemen patrolling one hundred and fifty yards out on either side of these marching columns.

When the front of his column wavered, Sergeant Frank Harris winced, knowing he was in for a rough ride. He didn't want to bother. Lieutenant Daniel Jackson spurred on his horse, only to haul up the animal until it danced. Harris stepped beside the mud-stained sergeant.

"Sergeant Harris, bring these men back into line. You have the privilege of leading the entire battalion. For God's sake, do it right and show some pride." Jackson had spent hours drilling these same men in basic maneuvers, so Harris knew there would be trouble if he let them flounder now.

"You took the words right out of my mouth, sir. I was just telling the boys here how lucky we's to be the first to get to kill Injuns when they attack. Straighten out your line, lads. Keep the lieutenant happy," Harris shouted. "That's better already. Privates Haggard and Mack, march to your left."

Harris had been given his orders from the outset of the march. If they were attacked from one side or the other, one column was to turn and close with the side under attack, so as to support their fire. Attacked from both sides at the same time, each column was to turn outward and battle back to back with the other column as they retreated together. The most difficult drill came if they faced a front attack, and then it could be performed only on open ground. The columns were to pivot at their center so that the regulars of the 4th Infantry would form a single solid line at the front. The militia would do the same and form a similar line behind.

After Harris had caught sight of Indians among the trees earlier that day, each man kept a keen lookout. For the most part, their path gave way to bare dirt or short grass on either side, so it was easy to keep watch, but every few hundred paces the path narrowed amid bulrushes growing past shoulder height. When the waving reeds closed in thick on the path ahead, Harris was unnerved to find himself prevented from seeing anything at a distance. Though he could see his own breath, he became aware of sweat trickling down over his thumping heartbeat.

Luke Haggard tugged hard at Malcolm Mack's arm, forcing him to the left, and gradually the blue column straightened, the men marching again in good order.

"See for yourself, sir, as good a bunch of soldiers as exists anywhere on God's green earth," Harris replied once the column was straight again. In truth, he cared less about maintaining straight lines than about angering his lieutenant.

"Do you understand why we must keep the columns straight, Harris?" Jackson again pulled his horse to the sergeant's side.

Despite his aching feet, Harris managed a smile while he thought about his answer. On a narrow path, as they marched up a small incline, he skidded in the mud but caught himself before he fell and then straightened up to give his reply, "'Course I do. 'Cause you said so, that's why, sir." Harris felt proud of himself and stood to a sloppy form of attention while leaning slightly to the left, trying to salute without fumbling his musket. Except for young Ensign Poole—whom he had managed to convince that old Sergeant Harris knew more about soldiering than anyone else on earth—Harris had never known of any good coming out of too much talk with a probing officer. He was determined not to let this officer cause him any grief.

"We can only maneuver out of straight columns," Jackson barked. "How could we pivot our columns if there is no column? We would just have a bunch of stragglers wandering all over the place getting scalped by the Indians."

Jackson held up his finger like a schoolteacher giving a lesson. "Stay in column, though, and it will save your life." Before Harris could respond, Jackson spurred his horse and wheeled away.

Harris had survived the interrogation, but he gritted his six remaining teeth, fuming inside. F

watched Jackson gallop away, with a light-blue knitted scarf bouncing off his back. To make up for the distance lost while prattling with Jackson, Harris now had to march at double time, his broad shoulders and barrel chest heaving until he fell in again beside his men.

“I’ll cuff you two hard and piss on your boots if I’ve any more fuss with him. Maybe I’ll even take a round with that new pretty wife of yours.” Harris spit the last words out close to Mack’s unshaven face. The man did not look him in the eyes, for it was safer to stare down at his worn boots as they marched along. “Did you get those brainless militiamen to ditch the bloody shovels and axes like I asked you to?” Harris was still panting.

“They were happy to, Sergeant,” Mack replied with a grin.

“At least you did something right then. We’ve been digging trenches every night for nothing, and I ain’t seen one Injun drop dead just ’cause we dug a trench.” Harris cleared his throat and spit. “We’re all sick of bloody digging.”

Lieutenant Jackson had galloped off to where a group of officers with field glasses were surveying an Indian camp at the base of a ridge. At seven hundred yards’ distance, precise details were difficult to see. A gust of wind forced one officer to turn his head away from the swirling leaves. Lieutenant Colonel James Miller of the U.S. 4th Infantry beckoned Jackson over and offered him the field glasses. “You’ve always had good eyes, Jackson, so tell me what you can see.”

Jackson studied the camp, which was a village of wigwams placed haphazardly in a clearing. Hundreds of men and women scurried about, scooping up children who cried under the tight grip of their elders’ arms. Jackson closed the glass with a snap and handed it back to Miller.

“They certainly know we’re here. The ground sloping up to that village appears to be some kind of marsh, sir. There’s also a solid breastwork of logs surrounding the village, at least on this side. Without the glass, Jackson squinted. “Fires are still burning, but it appears they’re getting ready to leave ... or perhaps attack us, hard to tell for certain.”

A large man wearing a beaver fur hat, topped by a waving ostrich feather, wheeled his tall gray mare out of the pack of officers who were all watching through glasses of their own. After his horse had taken a few steps forward, the man peered down at Jackson with a frown on a face so gaunt he looked ill.

Governor William Harrison didn’t take kindly to negative messengers. “Nonsense, man, you’re looking at Prophet’s Town, and those Indians are scared to death. Tecumseh is away inciting riots elsewhere so they know they have to vacate that village or get wiped out.” Harrison urged his mare forward and leaned over to speak into Miller’s ear. He then turned and shouted, “Major Davies is with me.” Clad in a white blanket coat, another large man pulled on the reins of his horse and with a slight spur was off at a gallop. Although Harrison looked thin and breakable to Jackson, the other ruddy-faced individual appeared to be made of iron. The enormous white plumes in his hair floated on the breeze as he galloped alongside Harrison.

Miller’s horse stepped up beside Jackson’s. “Don’t worry, Daniel. He’s a little sensitive these days. I’ve always admired you for telling me the truth, and not just what I wanted to hear.”

Lieutenant Jackson had served in the regular army his entire adult life and he judged Miller a fair man, but how much of the truth did Miller want to hear? Jackson considered how far he should push. For these few moments they were alone, he decided to speak his mind. “That village is obviously on Indian land, and I should add, sir, so are we. Are we trying to provoke a conflict?”

Jackson took off his brown leather glove and with his bare hand patted the smooth neck of his horse, then looked Miller in the eyes for an answer. It was November 6, 1811, and Prophet’s Town

Indiana, was in frightened chaos.

“Our job is to protect white settlers from getting killed by the Indians living in that village.” Miller gestured. “If we have to fight them to achieve that, so be it.” There was a hard edge to his voice, his breath emerging in white puffs.

“But those settlers are trespassing on Indian land, sir, as are we,” Jackson pressed.

Miller made no comment, preferring to stare up at some rolling gray clouds. “Did you notice anything unusual in the village?”

“The young white man playing with the child,” Jackson replied. “Difficult to speculate on what he’s up to.”

“No matter, for our purposes. Now, these are your orders.” Miller then explained how Harrison wanted them to halt near Prophet’s Town. Scouts had earlier reported a flat clearing just beyond the village, and Jackson was to camp his men there.

At least it was above the marsh, Jackson reflected, beyond the thick smell of swamp vapor that made his clothes sodden. But from Miller he had received no answer to his question about provoking the Indians.

Lieutenant Jackson galloped back to the front of the column just as it started to rain. “Ensign Poole, march the men a thousand yards farther to a ten-acre clearing just northwest of Prophet’s Town. We camp there for the night. That Indian village will still be within a mile’s jog so keep your wits about you tonight.”

Ensign John Poole, recently promoted, stood sharply to attention and snapped an impressive salute. Jackson returned it from the saddle. Like everyone, including young Poole, he was tired and cold, in need of a good night’s sleep, and wishing he could stay dry. Only another thousand yards would do fine for him.

Jackson jerked the reins, turning his horse to face his men. “Everyone sleeps with muskets loaded. He tapped Poole on the shoulder. “In this bloody drizzle, make sure your men keep their muskets dry and ready to fire. Wrap rags around the locks if you have to, but be ready.”

“Sir.” Poole saluted again as murmurs passed through the ranks about their new camp ahead.

Haggard whispered to Mack, “At least we won’t be digging bloody trenches again tonight.” They both laughed.

Paxinos watched the one-eyed man as he listened to the chiefs of the other tribes. Tenskwatawa—the name meaning “the open door” in Shawnee—was the famous Prophet, brother of Tecumseh. Assembled around the grand fire, all dressed in feathered head garb, this nighttime council of chiefs would follow the Prophet anywhere. The Prophet pointed to a Shawnee chief called White Horse to speak.

“Tecumseh has ordered that we must not fight while he is away. This is a command, not a request. The army of white men is more than one thousand and we are five hundred. We will die if we force battle on them. We must do as we have been commanded.”

The Potawatomi chief stood up next, a tomahawk in one hand, punching the air with the other fist. “But Tecumseh is not here, and we must defend ourselves. My scouts have counted more than one thousand Long Knives marching against our land. They have not come for a visit between friends but to kill us and destroy our village. Therefore, we must attack tonight.” The chief glared at others around the campfire as they bobbed their heads in agreement.

A burnt branch collapsed at the base of the fire, sending up a blaze of vanishing red sparks. Paxinos saw the Prophet’s face grow concerned. There was tension in the air as he pointed to yet another man

The chief of the Winnebago was a small man with a soft voice who wore buckskin breeches and a oversized deerskin poncho to keep the cold off his thin frame. Each chief in the circle leaned forward straining to hear. "Despite Tecumseh's command, he would not have us die for nothing in our beds. Can we just stand aside and let them destroy our village? Even if we run, they may pursue us and we will still have to fight. They have come here to kill, so we must attack first to show them how we will fight to protect our land."

Paxinos sat up straighter from the damp ground. Except for Chief White Horse, each warrior in turn made an argument to attack that same night. The enthusiasm for battle was so strong, even the Prophet had to accept the consensus of the council. Since Paxinos had received Tecumseh's direct order, he could take no part in any battle. After the Prophet announced that they would attack that night, but be gone the next day, Paxinos jumped to his feet, thinking of his task ahead. Along with his white friend, he would arrange a safe journey for all the children.

Malcolm Mack was sure he'd heard something, yet in this darkness he could barely see the steel bayonet at the end of his musket. The rain maintained a steady drizzle, and he wiped his forehead with his shirtsleeve. Noises, again, and he turned his head to listen. Every few minutes he thought he heard footsteps, but this time he raised the charged musket, his nervous finger on the trigger, and held his breath, waiting to sight a target.

"Christ, Luke, you scared the hell out of me. I almost shot you!"

Private Luke Haggard of the U.S. 4th Infantry stumbled out of the bushes and put a shaking hand on Mack's shoulder. Mack shivered as he felt a cold dribble trickling down his neck.

"I think I saw something moving through the bushes, but I can't be sure of a bloody thing in the darkness. What d'you reckon the time is?" Mack whispered.

"Must be four. First light won't be for a while yet."

Perhaps the wind tossed branches made the noise. Mack squinted, exhaled slowly, and watched the frost from his breath dissipate amid the light rain. The wind in his ears made it hard to distinguish sounds, and for another moment he stared questioningly at Haggard, listening hard.

"If the damn Injuns are out there, then why haven't the other pickets fired yet?" Haggard asked.

Before sundown, Mack had counted at least a dozen pickets scattered around him, and while a couple may have dozed off, surely one of them would have spotted any Indians on the move.

"Just the leaves, I reckon. Sergeant Harris will kill us if we set off a false alarm. You know how the bastard likes his sleep ... and my new wife. What was that?" Mack interrupted himself. A shape flitted by, only a few feet away. He studied the surrounding dark, praying for nothing to be there. But instead he glimpsed a vague shape, then something more definite: the silhouette of a man's head, with the hair plastered straight up on end. It could only be an Indian, and when it disappeared, Mack sat motionless, hoping to remain unseen. He saw another shape and another, and again heard the rustle of leaves. Christ God, his stomach clenched, they were all around him.

"Haggard, did you see it?" he hissed.

The sound of an arrow whizzed passed before it slapped the tree he was crouching beside.

"I'm not waiting to see anything. Let's get the hell out of here," Haggard gasped.

Half a step taken too late: an arrow pierced Mack's left shoulder and in agony he cried out. Haggard turned and fired. So close to Mack's left ear, the musket sounded more like a cannon. His foot skidded and he fell to the ground, his ears ringing and his hands covered in slippery wet leaves. A dozen pickets then fired, shots exploding in sparks and flame. Their musket blasts lit up the forest, illuminating painted demons running through flashes of light.

The sounds of hell shrieked and hooted all around him. Where the arrow stuck in his shoulder, the pain now seared him unbearably, and Mack began to faint. He groaned, "Oh Christ," and felt blood oozing down his chest, wondering briefly if he would live to see his newly wed wife again. With one hand resting against a tree, he staggered to stand upright.

Two white eyes appeared out of the darkness; too late Mack saw the axe. He clutched his throat where the blade sliced through, and he fell to his knees, pain still burning in his shoulder and now his neck too. Through his fingers gushed his own warm blood. He rocked backward, then slumped forward, face down. Malcolm Mack was dead.

Ensign Poole bolted upright at the sound of the first shot. He peered through a gap in his tent door to see that the soldiers who slept around the campfires were sitting up. More muskets exploded near his tent, lighting up human shadows on its sides. As he glanced out through the door again, the first soldier standing up tumbled backward, shot as he rose from beside the fire. Poole struggled to jam his foot into his boot, seeing a second man shot as he also tried to stand. More shots cracked and a soldier wailed while another fell, clubbed by a musket butt. A screaming red-painted Indian was now inside the camp perimeter. Then two more of them lunged out of the darkness, firing point-blank at a fourth soldier who had barely got to his feet.

His heart pounding, Poole realized how the fire was silhouetting all who stood close to the flames. He needed to warn everyone to stay down for it would be the same throughout the camp. His hands thrashed about under his cot until he found the second boot and rammed in his foot. Poole grabbed his loaded musket, but even as he charged out of his tent, three Indians, with chests and faces painted white, came running for him.

"My God, they're everywhere."

The Indians fired together, and Poole's chest took the full blast, lifting him off his feet and throwing him back inside. He didn't even have time to fire the musket but collapsed still holding it to his side. Above him he caught the glint of a knife as a smiling white-striped face came into view. Poole felt blood seep from the side of his mouth and knew he was about to be scalped.

"Not yet," he whispered. He jerked the musket up and fired just as his life left him. The bullet penetrated one eye and erupted out the back of the Indian's skull. The attacker fell forward, on top of Poole. Face to face, they died.

"Sergeant Harris, where's Ensign Poole?" Lieutenant Jackson shouted.

"Dead, sir. I saw him get blasted back into his tent. Bastards have a lot of muskets. They've pulled back to reload."

"They broke through our northern perimeter easy enough, and there's hundreds of them. Stay away from the light of those bloody fires and you'll live longer." Jackson gestured his men away from the flames. "Those damn muskets they have are British, I'll stake my life on it." He dismounted and unsheathed his sword.

"We's ready for their return, sir. Ain't we, lads?" Harris declared, putting the best face on their predicament.

"No, we are not—no trenches dug, no breastworks, nothing. Pathetic, if you ask me. Make three lines of twenty, well behind this fire. Now, move yourselves!" Jackson ordered. "All these men die needlessly," he added bitterly.

Haggard winced as he shuffled into line with the others, remembering the discarded shovels and axes. *Poor Malcolm.*

“Sergeant Harris, straighten out the lines,” Jackson hollered.

~~He heard scattered musket fire from the south end of the camp. The Indians were obvious attacking at both ends, and Jackson only hoped the south would fair better.~~

“The front rank will kneel and fire only on my command. The second rank will fire over the head of the first rank, and then kneel. The third rank will fire on command, as the other two ranks reload. Jackson had positioned his three ranks safely in the shadows, twenty-five yards behind the blazing fire. “Remember, you fire only on my command, just like we practice in those drills you love. Make ready, here they come.”

The Indians charged toward the fire, and this time it was they who were lit by the flames. They stopped, fired, then resumed their charge. The man standing beside Jackson slumped to the ground without a sound. Jackson sheathed his sword, picked up the man’s musket, and took the dead soldier’s place in the line. The musket slid within his sweaty palms, and his heart was beating so hard it felt like it would burst through his chest.

“Front rank, present arms!” The soldiers brought their muskets to shoulder level, pointing at the Indians, who, packed together, were now clear targets.

“Fire!” The muskets crashed out in a solid line of sparks and smoke. Through ringing eardrums Jackson couldn’t hear himself shouting his commands. The first volley dropped a half-dozen natives, yet it seemed to have no effect on their charge.

“Second rank, present, fire! ... Third rank, present, fire! ... All ranks, make ready and present.”

For a few seconds the gun smoke blinded everyone so Jackson could not see more than a couple feet in front of him. When it cleared, there were bodies scattered on the ground near the campfire. The remaining Indians had checked their charge and now stepped onward cautiously. A flying spear appeared out of nowhere and lanced through the neck of a kneeling soldier. He strained to call out but could make no sound as he tumbled sideways, clutching at the shaft.

“All ranks, fire.” A sheet of flame erupted beside Jackson. “Fix bayonets!” he shouted as his heartbeat pounded in his ears. *Now this fight’s going to get nasty.*

The Indians were several steps past the fire now, and this last volley exploded at point-blank range. The center of the native line collapsed into the darkness of the ground as bullets ripped into their flesh and bones. Directly in front of Jackson, one Indian with red stripes painted on his chest groaned and thrashed at the earth until he suddenly stopped. The volley fire proved too much, and the Indian flank skirted to either side of the camp. Jackson squinted through the dense smoke to see the last of his enemy flee. Beyond the light of the fading embers there was soon only blackness.

For a few moments there was silence, each man looking for signs of further movement by the fire. There, a single Indian lifted and began carrying off one of their wounded.

“There’s one,” a soldier shouted.

“Can we fire, sir?” Harris asked.

Jackson held up his hand. “Hold your fire. We’ll not waste another volley on just one Indian.” The men obeyed, waiting in line for another charge.

With Jackson’s hand raised, minutes passed, but it seemed like hours before a soldier proclaimed, “The Injuns have gone.” Jackson unconsciously lowered his arm.

“We’ve won, then,” Harris cheered.

Three lines of grinning soldiers, faces dripping with the sweat of fear and drizzle, yelled, “Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!” Now out of the smoke and the battle, with a slightly dizzy head, Jackson started to breathe again. It felt like he had held his breath for the entire bloody skirmish. He cheered and pumped his musket overhead, thrilled to be still alive. Many of his men were shaking hands with

comrades and some even embraced.

He spit out the taste of gunpowder and marched to the front of the lines, his ears still ringing. The acrid smell of burnt powder filled his nostrils while, about him, isolated pockets of gun smoke hung thick in the air.

“We’ve held them off for now, but they may be back,” he declared. “Move up six paces behind the fire, toward our new perimeter, till morning.”

Jackson scanned an overcast sky for the first hints of light, thinking dawn could not come too soon.

“Spread out and stay close to the ground. Don’t let me catch any of you lit up by that fire, and for God’s sake keep your firing pans dry in this drizzle.”

From behind their lines, a young boy darted out of the darkness.

“Lieutenant Jackson, sir, Major Daviess has got himself killed. Colonel Miller requests you personally take over on your right. Thank you, sir.” With that, the boy scurried back into the night.

Jackson imagined that, in his white coat and plumed hat, Daviess must have made a pretty target. “Sergeant Harris, you’re in charge here until an officer arrives.” Jackson took a deep breath, turned sharply, and strode off.

“You heard the lieutenant, spread out and stay down,” Harris ordered. “Haggard, you come with me.”

They crept out from the front line toward the campfire. Harris guessed that the natives had meanwhile carried away their wounded, for there were very few dead Indians to count. A slight movement on the ground, just past the smoldering fire, caught his attention and told Harris he had found what he was looking for. He ran straight toward the figure holding up a hand as he approached.

The Indian, whose face was lined with charcoal from his nose to his ear and then down to his chin, had taken two musket balls in the left side of his chest. He was coughing up goblets of blood and it was clear he was going to die. The warrior’s head was completely shaved except for a three-inch-wide lock of greasy black hair that ran from the center of his forehead, over his skull, straight back to his neck.

Harris drew his knife as he lunged forward to yank at the hair on the man’s head. “This is for what you bastards did to my friend Mr. Poole,” he growled.

A right arm thrashed out in panic as the wounded prisoner used up his final strength even as Harris ran his knife hard just under the man’s hairline and slit it round from front to back. A little groan that became a gurgle was all the Indian could manage as more blood spurted out of his mouth. Stepping quickly to one side, Harris puffed his chest out as he held the bloody scalp above his head.

Haggard, who had been watching, twisted away and stared at the ground.

“Stomach a little queasy this morning, Luke?” Harris grinned and shook the dripping scalp toward him.

“That’s disgusting,” said Haggard, waving him away with both hands.

“It’s what they do to us.”

“I haven’t seen it, but anyways, they’re savages,” Haggard protested.

A discharge of muskets sounded from the southern end of the camp. Then came another as the Indians shifted the direction of their main attack. The man on the ground moaned and closed his eyes. Harris gazed down briefly at the pathetic figure with no scalp before running the sharp edge of his knife across the man’s throat.

Paxinos followed his orders from Tecumseh obediently; he and his white friend did no more than watch as the attack was made on the northern perimeter of the white soldiers camp. Even before dawn

he had ushered the children along with their mothers deep into the safety of their forest-hiding place. Their trip through the marsh terrain of bulrushes and tall grass had been arduous in the dark, each individual closely trailing the one who proceeded directly in front. Feeling sick in his stomach about deserting his home at Prophet's Town, he knew there was no choice but to flee for safety. Children clung fearfully to their blankets and their mothers wept. On their backs the women lugged young children, or tools, clothing, and food, as they wound in silent procession through the swamp. His sad face expressed the thought that much of the winter's food supply had to be left behind.

By first light Prophet's Town was empty, and returning warriors had a long run to catch up with this exodus. They guarded their rear against a constantly expected counterattack, but curiously the Long Knives never appeared.

Not until late that evening, the night following the battle, and when half their new camp was already asleep, did Paxinos realize that two people were missing. He went round to ask if anyone had seen them: an old woman with a young boy no more than four years old.

"That crazy woman, Wapana, has always done just what she wants. She has taken her grandson and she listens to nobody," Chief White Horse complained tiredly. He'd been awake for more than thirty-six hours, having spent much of the day escaping after the fighting the previous night.

"But Tecumseh told me to bring *all* the children," Paxinos insisted.

"I can no longer stay awake," the chief said, closing his eyes. "Now I sleep."

Paxinos took a deep breath and glanced silently at his white friend. He could face death if they returned, but there was no hesitation.

"I'll come with you, let's go, and I won't need this." His friend downed his musket, and the two young men headed off in the dark, back to Prophet's Town. With little light to guide them, their progress was more like a series of continuous stumbles, but by first light they reached the edge of the village. There they halted, out of breath, before creeping on through the northern breastworks. The quiet of the empty wigwams seemed strange and unnerving, as if the entire village was already dead. In the center of the camp a few leaves tumbled with the wind, but otherwise there was silence. Convinced the place was empty, Paxinos hurried along to the home of elderly Wapana while his companion jogged to the southern breastworks to watch for soldiers.

In her hut, Wapana slept, her grandson lying by her side. Paxinos nudged the old woman's shoulder to wake her, and she opened her eyes with a start.

"The soldiers are coming. We must go now."

Wapana groaned, trying to wake up. "Paxinos, you are young and full of energy, but I am too old to run away." She sat up, heavy on the cot, and rubbed her eyes.

"They will kill your grandson."

"This is my home, and I am not leaving." As she tried to stand, Paxinos reached under her arm to give her support.

"Tecumseh has ordered to take all the children to safety, so I must take your grandson as well."

Awakened by the sound of their voices, the little boy had rolled off the end of the bed. Now he stood waiting near the door. Just then a young white man stuck his head through the wigwam door and said, "Horses approaching the south end of the village. We must leave immediately."

Paxinos jumped between the old woman and her grandson. "Pick him up," he instructed his friend. He nodded to Wapana. "We will return him when it is safe."

The two men raced to the north end of the village, the child bouncing and giggling on the white man's back. At the breastworks, Paxinos stopped and put a finger to his lips, urging the child to keep silent. He peered into the dim light and saw a mist rising off the long grass, then nothing beyond that.

first few feet of a footpath that lead into a labyrinth of similar trails that would take them through the marsh. The long grass waved and rustled in the wind, but Paxinos heard no hint of soldiers ahead. He inhaled slowly, waiting for the scent of horses, but only the thick smell of the marsh reached his nostrils. As they launched their way through the breastworks to escape the silent village, at the same moment, the soldiers were entering it at the other end.

“Movement at the far end, sir. Was that a white man I saw?” Sergeant Harris pointed. “He’ll know too much, sir. Maybe we should go after them.”

“We’re here to burn a town, Sergeant, and I’m not particularly proud of it either. Tend to your duties and fire the damn torches.” Lieutenant Jackson guessed that Tecumseh would never forgive what they were about to do to his home, but he was pleased that at least the village was empty. In the previous night’s battle, the U.S. 4th Infantry and accompanying militia had taken one hundred and eighty-eight casualties, of which sixty-two were dead, but he had so far counted only forty Indian fatalities. Tired and dirty, he did not feel like killing anyone today.

“But, sir.”

“I didn’t see a thing, Sergeant,” Jackson lied, for he’d be damned if he was going to start killing children. But he did wonder again what a white man was doing here in Prophet’s Town, on the bank of the Tippecanoe River.



YORK

WHERE THE SNOW lay flat and hard, exactly at the shoreline, a solitary figure pushed his snowshoes along the northern edge of Lake Ontario. Certainly one could no longer call him a boy; he was past that now. Jonathan Westlake was considered a young man ready to make his mark.

Intended to last only three months, his trek to the great middle of the continent had taken more than twice that time. He reached down to rub his aching thigh, aware of the strain in his frozen shoulder. *Keep your feet moving—almost home.* He leaned forward into the cutting winter wind that stung his face as he peered up at the wooden palisade surrounding the barracks of York's garrison. Long barrel cannons watched him, ready to pound any intruders approaching from the south.

Westlake turned north up Yonge Street, glancing back over his shoulder to the lake's ice and slate gray waves that rolled to an indistinct horizon. Low-scudding clouds made it too dark to see clearly across to the south side. However, America was there. Everyone sensed it. Always.

A few paces farther up the street he stumbled and put a steadying hand against a cabin wall. Not quite midday, most residents were indoors, preparing to eat. In the strange quiet of a busy town with deserted streets, he paused in the stillness to relax his muscles.

A scream, seemingly from nowhere, made him crouch slightly, like a man about to receive another blow. He untied his fur cap, tilted his head and listened, his eyes searching from house to house. A woman sobbed and something crashed against the interior wall of the log cabin beside him. As she wailed, her moan sent his heart thumping.

He released the straps on his snowshoes, stepped backward, and pressed down on the wooden latch, but the small door would not open. *Good.* Westlake knew enough to mind his own business, and he was tired. Nevertheless, he hesitated to leave.

"You nosy little bitch, I'll kill you." From inside the cabin, he heard a man's slurred voice. Westlake looked up and down the row of houses covered in ice and snow. There was no one in sight, no one he could ask for assistance. *Why do I have to be here, now?* He just wanted to go home, but the more he listened to the woman's sobbing, he knew had to intervene. The man inside had threatened to kill her.

Westlake unharnessed his pack and lowered his fur overcoat on to the snow. He blew a white shak breath, and as his shoulder struck the door, the wooden latch exploded into slivers. His headfirst charge pitched him to the middle of an oven-hot room, illuminated by a blazing fire. To a man accustomed to months of winter chill, the heat overwhelmed him. He staggered but checked himself enough to turn back to the fresh air and deeply inhale. A stiff blow to the back of his skull sent him sprawling forward, his jaw striking the dirt floor and jarring his neck. He felt a dull head pain and the cold air gusting across the floor from the outside was all that kept him conscious.

A gruff voice snarled, "Get the hell out of here. Who d'you think you are, breaking into my home?" Westlake rolled over to stare up at large man with a birch log raised above his head, ready to strike.

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