

Ghost Coils

By

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EXT. BODOANTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - NOON

An Albion Airways passenger jet lands on the tarmac. The plane taxis towards the airport terminal. An aircraft marshal on the ground directs the plane towards a gate.

MONTY (V.O.)

Five years ago, my father passed away. While I was going through his things after the funeral, I found a box in the attic of his house where he had kept all of my mother's things. One of the things in that box was a collection of newspaper clippings.

The scene cuts to the interior of the plane. A flight attendant smiles and tells the departing passengers to have a good day. After a few passengers deplane, the camera focuses on MONTY SALO. His clothes are travel worn and he is carrying a backpack and a copy of a book titled "Bodoanta Sunrise".

MONTY (V.O.)

At first, I didn't see anything particularly interesting about them. They were mostly things that happened while I was a child, like the mayor got elected or when a big warehouse in the neighboring town burned down, that sort of thing. But at the very bottom of the pile, I found a very interesting clipping. It was dated to when I was born. And it was about a mass sighting of ghost light in Bodoanta.

Monty enters the airport terminal and heads to the baggage claim where he waits for his suitcase. Around him, there are passengers getting bags and meeting with relatives. Some of them are obviously Albionese with their western clothing. Others are Bodoantans, wearing brightly colored robes. Monty finally picks up his suitcase.

MONTY

(to the camera)

When I was a kid, whenever I got in trouble, my parents would just shake their heads and say that I was "born under ghost light". I didn't think much about it. I just thought it was a saying. In

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MONTY (cont'd)
school, we're all taught that one meaning for "ghost light" was as a term for the aurora borealis. But there is another meaning, too. And it originates here in Bodoanta where the concept of ghost light was first developed.

Monty walks out the doors of the baggage claim area and hails a taxi.

MONTY
(to the camera)
And that meaning is what I'm searching for here.

INT. THE CENTRAL SQUARE HOTEL

Monty drags his baggage to the registration check-in counter.

CHECK-IN LADY
Good afternoon, sir. Welcome to the Central Square Hotel. How may I help you?

MONTY
I have a reservation.

CHECK-IN LADY
Name?

MONTY
Monty Salo.

CHECK-IN LADY
(tapping on the computer)
Ah, here you are Mr. Salo.

The check-in lady writes down something and then hands an electronic key card to Monty.

CHECK-IN LADY
You'll be in room 532. If you need any assistance, please let us know.

MONTY
Thank you. And yes, I will.

(CONTINUED)

CHECK-IN LADY
Have a nice stay!

Monty heads to the elevator and finds his room. He dumps his luggage at the foot of a king sized bed and heads to the window and pulls aside the draps to look at the busy street below. In the distance are the high peaks of the Devanagari Mountains.

MONTY (V.O.)
Bodoanta. We westerners think of this country as a place filled with Eastern mysticism. At the moment, it seems like a very modern city that could be as interchangeable as Lud or New Amsterdam.

He turns back to the stuff he had dumped near the front of the room and grabs his copy of "Bodoanta Sunrise".

MONTY
(to the camera)
Guide books like this one like to emphasize the culture and religions of Bodoanta, rarely touching on its history. If they even mention anything about ghost light, they say that it's what the locals call the light phenomena they see in the sky. However, books like these are written in a western point of view. We should go ask some locals on what they think "ghost light" is.

EXT. STREETS OF PUTHYME - EVENING

MONTY (V.O.)
The capital city of Bodoanta is Puthyme, the political, cultural, and religious center of the country. There are almost a hundred thousand inhabitants in this place.

As Monty crosses a street, several cars honk at him. Once at the sidewalk, he looks up at the storefronts which are filled with western brand names and electronic billboards.

MONTY (V.O.)
And contrary to what all the guide books say, it is highly
(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
industrialized. If there was any
ghost light here, I highly suspect
that it would be drowned out by all
of the electric lights.

Monty walks down the street and moves in on one of the
locals, a street performer taking a break in between sets.

MONTY
Hello there!

STREET PERFORMER
Er. Hello.

MONTY
I was wondering if you could
explain something for me.

STREET PERFORMER
Sure.

MONTY
Okay. Do you know what "ghost
light" is?

STREET PERFORMER
Ghost light?

MONTY
Yeah.

STREET PERFORMER
Isn't is something they use to call
the weather?

MONTY
The weather? What sort of weather?

STREET PERFORMER
Some sort of atmospheric
disturbance. Like rain.

The camera cuts to Monty flagging down a lady carrying a
designer bag.

MONTY
Excuse me, ma'am.

LADY WITH DESIGNER BAG
Yes?

MONTY

I was wondering if you could ask
you a question. Do you know what
ghost light is?

LADY WITH DESIGNER BAG

Ghost light? Isn't that a brand
name for cigarettes?

Monty wanders further down the street an encounter a gaggle
of teenage girls.

MONTY

Hello there! I was wondering if any
of you know what ghost light is.

TEEN GIRL 1

Ghost light?

Teen girl 1 turns to her friends and furiously
whispers. The girls giggle.

TEEN GIRL 1

Ghost light is a ball of gas.

MONTY

A ball of gas? Like the sun?

TEEN GIRL 1

No, no, no. It's a ball of gas. I
don't know how to explain it. You
see it in the forest or in the
swamp.

MONTY

But wouldn't you call it swamp gas
then?

Down one block, the store fronts surrounded a square. Monty
finds a young man busy sticking some books in a back pack.

MONTY

Excuse me. I would like to ask you
a question.

YOUNG MAN

Uh, sure.

MONTY

What is ghost light?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG MAN
What is ghost light? Hm.

The camera pans back to the other side of the square where earlier, Monty encountered the teenagers.

TEEN GIRL 2
Sure, you'd call it swamp gas, too. But I think ghost light is another name for it.

TEEN GIRL 1
Yes, that's right.

MONTY
I don't know. Aren't they two different things?

TEEN GIRL 2
No, no, no.

TEEN GIRL 1
No, I don't think so.

Cutting back to Monty and the young man.

YOUNG MAN
Ghost light? Hm. It sounds like a band. No, that's not right.

MONTY
But you are right in a way. It does sound like what some band might use as a name.

YOUNG MAN
Yeah.

On the other side of the square, Monty had also encountered a gray-haired man wearing a peasant dark coat that looked like it was designed fifty years ago.

MONTY
Excuse me, sir. Could I ask you a question?

GRAY-HAIRED MAN
Who are you?

MONTY
I'm Monty Salo, a television presenter for the Albion Broadcasting Center. I'm asking
(MORE)

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MONTY (cont'd)
the people here if they know
anything about ghost light.

GRAY-HAIRED MAN
Huh.

MONTY
So do you?

GRAY-HAIRED MAN
About ghost light, you mean? Hm.
Everyone here knows it's light in
the sky. You can see it during the
night. It's when the ghosts of our
ancestors come out.

MONTY
Ghosts of your ancestors?

GRAY-HAIRED MAN
That's right. Ghosts.

MONTY
Why do they come out whenever the
ghost light shows up?

GRAY-HAIRED MAN
How the hell should I know? Dead
people have their own purpose.

The camera cuts back to Monty and the young man.

MONTY
But I don't think it's a band.

YOUNG MAN
No. Well. Hm. Ah! I think I read
about it in a high school science
class. It's another name for a
particular scientific phenomenon
that happens during the night.

MONTY
Scientific phenomenon, huh? What
sort of phenomenon.

YOUNG MAN
(with definite emphasis)
Vampire bats.

MONTY

But I thought vampire bats lived in South Brasa, not in Bodoanta.

YOUNG MAN

Man, I'm telling you. It's vampire bats. Bats!

MONTY

Um, thank you.

Monty wanders a bit away from the crowd, scratching his head.

Monty passes by the food court which is a couple of brightly painted food carts clustered at the edge of the square. He gets in line to a food cart selling fried fish on a stick.

MONTY

(to the camera)

Well, as you can see, it doesn't appear that the locals know very much about ghost light. Or at least the locals here in Puthyme don't know anything about it. It's entirely modernized in the city with very little evidence of the old ways.

Monty is now at the front of the line.

MONTY

(to the food vendor)

One please.

He exchanges some bills for a fried fish. He bites into it.

MONTY

(wiping his mouth with a napkin)

Mm. This is good. But definitely not one of Bodoanta's traditional treats. We will have to go elsewhere if we're to find out more about ghost lights.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CENTRAL TEMPLE - EARLY MORNING

Monty is standing in front of the Central Temple, the largest religious building in Puthyme. It is square with a red roof with corners turned up. Golden ornaments decorate the roof and pillars. A stream of worshipers head toward

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the temple. The sky is a dark gray and the wind is blowing quite strongly.

MONTY

(to the camera)

Well, after a nice breakfast, I'm heading to the Puthyme Central Temple, the official center of religion in Bodoanta. Most of the people in Bodoanta practice Siddhartan here, but there are many sects. This temple is dedicated to Mantra Siddhartan. You can see it in the decoration on the roof.

The camera pans to the roof revealing the strong geometrical patterning of the decoration.

MONTY

(to the camera)

In Mantra Siddhartan, it is believed that it is specific sounds that will bring one to heaven or nirvana. I've heard that their hymns can be quite beautiful. Let's go take a look.

While holding his hat to his head to keep it from flying off, Monty walks off to merge with the throng of worshipers heading into the temple.

INT. INSIDE THE CENTRAL TEMPLE

The interior of the temple is dark and there is the faint sound of chanting in the Bodoantan native language. Monty enters with the other worshipers to the main atrium. He takes off his hat.

The main priest, in a bright red robes, chants loudly and the background chanting dies away. Monty follows the other worshipers as they are seated.

MAIN PRIEST IN RED

Ommmm....

A monk in yellow robes hits a gong at the side of the room. The worshippers raise their hands. Monty looks around and follows suit.

WORSHIPPERS

Ommmm....

The gong sounds again.

(CONTINUED)

MAIN PRIEST IN RED

Ummmm....

WORSHIPPERS

Ummmm....

Monty follows what everyone else is doing.

MONTY (V.O.)

It's all rather calming, actually. With the sonorous gong and the chanting, I'm sure one could fall asleep in here. But that would definitely be beyond the pale. The reason I went in here was that some of the guide books mentioned that ghost light was something that was part of the native religion here. But so far, I don't see anything pertaining to ghost light. Just Siddhartan rituals.

With a final ringing of the gong, the main priest nods and a phlanx of priests in orange robes fan out to hand out bronze collection plates. The plates are handed down through the pews and coins clink on the metal plates.

Monty puts a couple coins into the collection plate and heads out of the temple.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CENTRAL TEMPLE

On the top steps of the temple, Monty puts his hat back on his head as the worshippers stream out behind him.

MONTY

Well, that was very nice. But it wasn't anything different than any other Siddhartan temple that you might go to in Ganar or even in Albion. I don't think I can find what I'm looking for here.

Monty walks down the stairs back to the square below.

MONTY (V.O.)

If I can't find out what ghost light is at the Central Temple, where can I go? Well, if we look back at the history of Bodoanta, we find that Siddhartan wasn't the

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
original religion here even though
it is indeed already established
here for thousands of years. We
will have to look back even further
to the ancient religions.

MONTY
(to the camera)
But first some lunch.

At the edge of the square are more food carts. These, however, are painted gold and red like the Central Temple. From the roofs of the food carts dangle gold and glass wind chimes. Monty approaches one cart which appears to be selling a variety of food dishes that are comprised of tofu.

MONTY
(pointing)
What is that?

STINKY TOFU VENDOR
Stinky tofu, sir.

MONTY
Stinky tofu?

STINKY TOFU VENDOR
Stinky tofu. It is very
good. Very good for your health.

MONTY
(looking doubtful)
Okay then. I'll have one.

Monty gives the vendor some money and retrieves a small plate with a square of gray stinky tofu topped with some brown and green condiments of unknown origin. He shows the camera the dish as he wrinkles his nose from the smell.

MONTY
(to the camera)
It doesn't look like much, does it?

He lifts it to his nose to take a whiff.

MONTY
Whew! That's stinky all right. But you won't know anything until you taste it. And as a traveler to many different cultures, you have to try everything at least once to at least try to understand the appeal.

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With a plastic fork, Monty takes a bite of the stinky tofu.

MONTY

Ack. Bloody hell. That is pungent.
And rank. If this kills me, I'll
become a ghost myself.

INT. BODOANTA MAIN LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Monty is walking along the first floor corridor to the offices at the Bodoanta Main Library.

MONTY (V.O.)

In the guide book "Bodoanta
Sunrise", the Bodoanta Library at
Puthyme is said to have the largest
collection of documents in the
world on registered ghost light
sightings, some of them dated back
all the way to 2000 B.C.

Monty knocks on an office door which is opened by one of the librarian scholars working at Bodoanta Library, Dr. Ataya Bilguun.

MONTY

Dr. Bilguun?

BILGUUN

Yes, that's me.

MONTY

I'm Monty Salo from Albion
Broadcasting.

BILGUUN

Ah, Mr. Salo! Please, please, come
in and have a seat.

MONTY

Please call me Monty.

The two men shake hands and enter a cluttered office filled with books, papers, and the occasional knickknack.

MONTY (V.O.)

I'm here to see Dr. Ataya Bilguun
of the Bodoanta Library. He's an
expert on the library's special
collections on Bodoantan
folklore. Hopefully he can tell me
more about ghost light.

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Monty and Dr. Bilguun sit down at a desk.

MONTY

So Dr. Bilguun, I've heard a lot about this thing called "ghost light". It's a term for a scientific phenomenon, of course, but I know it's also a term for something else. I was hoping that you could tell me what it might be.

BILGUUN

Well, Monty, the term ghost light has been around for a long time, even before scientists figured out what the aurora borealis was. The ancients witnessed the lights in the sky and called them "ghost lights" because they believed that they were ghosts of their ancestors.

MONTY

Ah! So they thought the ghost lights were literally ghosts.

BILGUUN

Correct. We have evidence that they believed that they were ghosts that date back to 2000 B.C. In fact, I have something here.

Bilguun pulls out a stone tablet along with a photocopy reproduction from a drawer in his desk.

BILGUUN

This was a stone tablet that was found in one of the ancient tribal tombs in some of the ruins in the northern district. It's one of the oldest artifacts we have on the funeral practices of the ancients.

MONTY

Wow. And this is from 2000 B.C.?

BILGUUN

Yes. The script carved here is Ancient Bodoantan. On this particular tablet, it talks about ghost light here.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Huh. What exactly does it say?

BILGUUN

Translated, this tablet is one of the ancient funerary hymns. It talks about getting the blessings of the ancestors and reading the ghost light as communication from the ancestors and other forces in the underworld.

MONTY

How fascinating. So the ancients practiced some sort of ancestor worship?

BILGUUN

We believe so. In the ancient tomb, the archaeologists have also found several other tablets just like this as well as small statuettes that they believe were lucky charms representing their ancestors.

MONTY

Right. Well, what I also want to know is, was ghost light also used as an omen? When I was younger, my parents would tell me that I was born under ghost light, especially if I, uh, had been particularly misbehaving.

BILGUUN

Like the Albion saying of being born under an "ill star"?

MONTY

(laughing)

Yes. Exactly. Except my parents never used that saying. I think they probably got the notion of ghost light here. I knew that they vacationed in Bodoanta before they had me.

BILGUUN

Hm. Well, ghost light is well known in Bodoantan folk superstition. There are quite a few texts in our special collection

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BILGUUN (cont'd)
that talk about ghost light as an omen on par of that of an eclipse or comet. But the meaning of that omen is fairly ambiguous. Depending on the region or even the village, it could mean good fortune or bad fortune.

MONTY

I see. So someone would see the ghost light and then ask the village soothsayer on what it meant...

BILGUUN

Oh no. It wasn't as simple as that. It involved a series of rituals.

MONTY

Really? A series of rituals?

BILGUUN

The first written account of all the rituals involved in interpreting a sighting of ghost light was first recorded by Shahadi in 5 B.C.

MONTY

Shahadi. I'm not familiar with the name.

BILGUUN

Shahadi is very famous in Bodoantan science. He was a first rate astronomer. He made his own telescopes, of a unique design. I have a replica here.

Bilguun points to an unusual bifocal telescope sitting on a nearby shelf.

BILGUUN

He was also the first to postulate that comets were actually rocks of extraterrestrial origin and not some sort of sign of the gods. However, one thing he could not explain was ghost light. In the last ten years of his life, his wife died and he literally went insane with grief.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Oh dear.

BILGUUN

And he became obsessed with trying to contact her from beyond. That's when he hit upon the superstition that ghost light was what the ancestors used to communicate with the living. He thought he could communicate with his dead wife using ghost light. That was when he went to the local oracle and recorded the steps on the ritual for interpreting ghost light.

MONTY

Was he successful?

BILGUUN

(shaking his head)

Who knows. It was said that he died in the middle of performing one of the rituals used to summon ghost light.

EXT. STREETS OF PUTHYME - LATE AFTERNOON

Monty walks along a crowded street in a less commercialized district of Puthyme. There are quite a few street side vendors hawking food and tourist trinkets. There is also an open market and other local businesses.

MONTY

(to the camera)

Dr. Bilguun was very helpful in explaining what ghost light was to me. So apparently, aside from it's meaning for the aurora borealis, it was also something mystical in folklore that the ancients believed in. They thought it was their ancestors. Or messages from their ancestors.

POSTCARD VENDOR

Hello sir! Would you like a postcard? You can get three for five rups!

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

(to the postcard vendor)
That's lovely, but no thanks.

Monty walks by another vendor ringing a bell and shouting that there is a sale.

MONTY

(to the camera)
But if we're going to find out how the ancients might have tried to communicate with their ancestors, we're going to have to go somewhere less lively.

Monty turns into an alleyway, away from the crowds. Up ahead is a small store front with a battered wooden sign hanging above the door. The store name is in Bodoantan script, but there is also a picture of the evil eye, crudely painted, underneath the store name.

MONTY (V.O.)

The Bodoantans have what they call oracles. They're sort of like what we would call psychics and palm readers and fortune tellers--all rolled into one. Since Dr. Bilguun told me all about how the astronomer Shahadi consulted with an oracle to interpret ghost light, we'll see if we can ask an oracle ourselves about ghost light.

INT. ORACLE JIMMY'S SHOP

Monty pushes open the door and a bell sounds. He walks into a cramped room with a couple of plastic chairs on one side which serves as a waiting area. The rest of the room is decorated with mandalas and metal charms. Several insect collecting cases are stashed in one corner.

MONTY

Hello? Is anyone here?

He walks around examining the charms and dead insects.

MONTY

Looks like the oracle's butterfly collection. And look at that orange one! Isn't that the rare midnight mountain moth...

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Monty is interrupted by the sound of a beaded curtain parting. A man dressed in a striped robe and dreadlocks appear.

ORACLE JIMMY

Hello. My name is Jimmy. May I help you?

MONTY

Ah! I'm Monty Salo from Albion Broadcasting. I heard that oracles around here know something about ghost light.

ORACLE JIMMY

We do. Come right this way, Mr. Salo.

Monty follows the oracle through the beaded curtain and come through to a dimly lit room that is crowded with strange disturbing artifacts. A stuffed yak head serves as the chandelier above a center table where Monty and the oracle take a seat.

ORACLE JIMMY

So, Mr. Salo. What do you wish to know about ghost light?

MONTY

I've heard that oracles know rituals on how to interpret ghost light. Or even to summon ghost light.

ORACLE JIMMY

(staring at Monty)

What you propose is not a trivial thing, Mr. Salo. You can't just summon ghost light willy-nilly. It can be a confusing and dangerous endeavor if one just summons any ghost light. There are different kinds.

MONTY

Really? I did not know that. All I've been told points to it being one thing. So what do you suggest?

ORACLE JIMMY

Hm. Do you have anyone from beyond that you want to talk to?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

Sure. There were plenty of dead people I would have loved to talk to, both close to me and of relatives. But to be honest, at this point, I got the feeling that this was all a bit hokey. I mean really, an oracle named Jimmy? I wouldn't be surprised if he had a little business on the side as a phone-in psychic.

MONTY

I just want to know a bit about ghost light. I don't know, wouldn't there be some kind of spirit who could answer some questions?

ORACLE JIMMY

There is one spirit who could perhaps explain about ghost light from the other side. It doesn't have a name, but I call it the Gatekeeper.

MONTY

All right, the Gatekeeper it is.

ORACLE JIMMY

Just sit back and relax. And I will see if I can channel the spirits today.

MONTY (V.O.)

To be honest, I'm expecting a bit of a show. A seance. Maybe with knocking tables and bells.

ORACLE JIMMY

(closing his eyes)

Gatekeeper, are you there? A visitor wishes to talk to you.

The yak chandelier blinks in a series and Monty briefly looks around to the light switch to make sure that no one was accidentally playing with it.

ORACLE JIMMY

(voice rising)

Gatekeeper, is that you?

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The yak chandelier begins to shake and Monty ducks, holding his hat as it begins to swing. A strange sound like crackling electricity fills the air.

ORACLE JIMMY

Ahhh!

Oracle Jimmy suddenly falls over and the yak chandelier brightens back to its normal intensity. However, it is obvious that some sort of electronics has shorted out as there is a thin vapor of smoke trailing out of the lights. Monty hurries over to the fallen oracle.

MONTY

Oh my goodness. Are you all right?

ORACLE JIMMY

(shaking his head and getting up)

I'm fine. But I'm not sure the Gatekeeper is. It is obvious that the spirit is unable to answer your questions. You might want to try later. Or elsewhere.

EXT. STREETS OF PUTHYME

Monty emerges from the oracle's shop just as he is shaking the oracle's hand, thanking him for his time.

MONTY (V.O.)

Unable or unwilling? I have my doubts about some spirit called "Gatekeeper". I suspect that Oracle Jimmy was unwilling to show the rituals for interpreting ghost light to a foreigner such as myself. Or, gauging the ignorance about ghost light from the general populace, Oracle Jimmy didn't know either and was unwilling to admit so. Thus the invention of a close-mouthed spirit.

Monty exits the alley and heads back into the bustling street where he stops near a shop that is selling noodles.

MONTY

Puthyme is a large wonderful city filled with almost anything imaginable.

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Monty pauses for a moment to observe a monkey in a fez riding a Segway through the streets. The hawkers and residents don't act as if anything is wrong, but other tourists gawk and there are a gaggle of children trailing the Segway.

MONTY

Well, maybe everything imaginable and then some. Finding an oracle in the city was a piece of cake. But as for ghost light? Not so easy. So it's a dead end with Oracle Jimmy. But if an oracle doesn't have the answers, then where could we possibly turn?

EXT. PARO ROAD, JUST OUTSIDE OF PUTHYME - MORNING

Monty is riding in a taxi. The driver, named Sidi, is a native Bodoantan. Brightly colored charms of stylized birds and mountain goats hang from the rearview mirror.

MONTY (V.O.)

Last night, I came back to the hotel in a rather wretched state, having no luck in trying to find what I traveled here for. However, I did have a chat with the nice chap who worked at the concierge and he suggested that maybe I look beyond the city.

They drive by a fleet of bicyclists and the driver vigorously honks. He rolls down the window to yell at the bicyclists in Bodoantan.

MONTY (V.O.)

Mr. Rupee, the concierge, recommended Sidi who is my driver today. Sidi apparently grew up on the outskirts of Puthyme and is a local who knows the place like the back of his hand. Sidi seems like a rather excitable fellow. But he has promised me that he knew some locals who knew about ghost light. For real.

MONTY

So Sidi, exactly where are we going again?

(CONTINUED)

SIDI

Artura's.

SIDI

(to a passing bicyclist)

Hey! Keep on the bike lane! Do you want to be mown down?

MONTY

Artura's?

SIDI

Artura Del. It's a shop not far from here in the Thrumsing district. It sells everything. Including charms and superstitious stuff.

MONTY

I don't really want to buy charms. I want to find out what ghost lights are.

SIDI

(gesturing with a free hand)

You don't have to buy anything. We're going to Artura's because the owner probably knows some things about ghost light.

The car rounds a corner and pulls into a shop front that is next to a small noodle restaurant and a shoe store. An old sign on top of the shop front is faded, but the words in Botoantan, presumably translated as "Artura Del" can still be read.

MONTY

(getting out of the car)

So this is Artura's, eh?

SIDI

Yes. I'm sure he knows everything that you are looking for.

MONTY (V.O.)

I didn't know about that. The store facade looked a little shady to me. At best, it could just be a tourist trap. But Mr. Rupee recommended Sidi's services and Sidi seemed like an earnest chap so I figured I might as well take a chance.

INT. THE ARTURA DEL SHOP, THRUMSING DISTRICT

A bell rings at Monty and Sidi's entrance. The interior of the shop is dark, cramped, and dusty. One side of the shop has shelves of old leather bound books. The proprietor, at first, is nowhere to be seen.

SIDI

(in Bodoantan)

Hello! Mr. Artura, are you here? I have a visitor here for you.

MONTY

This place looks deserted.

SIDI

I assure you, it's all just appearances! Artura doesn't like to have people who are not serious coming into his shop.

MONTY (V.O.)

But wouldn't that be counterproductive? If you're in a business, don't you want more customers, whether they're serious or not? Or perhaps this Artura fellow is one of those guys who value principles over money.

The sound of footsteps overheard can be heard.

SIDI

Ah, that's Artura now!

One of the bookshelves abruptly slides open revealing stairs and a figure dressed in dark brown robes. The man coming out of the secret opening wears his hair in graying dreadlocks and there are many rings on his fingers.

SIDI

(in Bodoantan)

Greetings, Mr. Artura!

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

Greetings, Sidi. Who is this with you.

SIDI

(in Bodoantan)

This is Mr. Monty Salo from Albion Broadcasting.

(CONTINUED)

ARTURA

Huh.

SIDI

Monty, this is Mr. Artura, the owner of this shop.

MONTY

Hello Mr. Artura. How do you do?

ARTURA

Heh.

MONTY (V.O.)

It seems that Mr. Artura is a man of few words.

SIDI

(in Bodoantan)

Mr. Artura, I've taken Mr. Salo here to see you since you might know the answers to some of his questions.

ARTURA

Huh.

MONTY

(glancing at Sidi with uncertainty)

So, Mr. Artura, I heard that you were the local expert here on a variety of local rituals here around Puthyme. And I was wondering if you could explain something to me. What I want to know is, what is ghost light? The oracle I met in town said that the spirits were unable to talk to me about it.

Sidi translates Monty's question to Artura, but the shop owner cuts him off in midsentence with a furious hand gesture.

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

The oracles in the city are all frauds.

As Sidi translates Artura's reply back to Monty, Monty frowns.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Well, I suppose I gathered that. But do you know anything about ghost light that I don't know after gleaning the information from books that are undoubtedly written by westerners?

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

Westerners know nothing about ghost light. They simply want to exploit something that is supernatural or new age to sell books or hawk cures that only work as placebos. If you truly want to know what ghost light is, come with me.

Artura gestures towards Monty to follow him toward the back of the shop where there are more shelves, some of them filled with books, others with vials of dark liquid with labels in Bodoantan, and even some with strange equipment.

MONTY (V.O.)

Mr. Artura takes me to the back of his shop which looks like a mad scientist's lab. What is all this stuff? And does it even work?

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

Our ancestors are a big part of our lives. We believe that as our elders, they hold advice for how to behave in our daily lives and even information on how we should conduct ourselves in the future.

MONTY

That's what I've heard from other venues...

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

However, communicating with our ancestors is a difficult and perhaps even hazardous thing. The easiest way to contact our ancestors is through prayer. But even if it is the easiest, it is not the most effective.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

I see.

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

Another way to contact the ancestors which is far more direct, also is more problematic. It involves rituals, some of them more arcane and dangerous than others. I will show you one kind of way we can call the spirits directly.

Artura rummages in the shelves and pulls out what looks like a bowling bag. He sits at a nearby table and gestures for Monty and Sidi to take seats. Then he opens the bag and takes out a black quartz gazing globe.

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan)

This can be a relatively safe way of calling the spirits. It is called hernu.

MONTY

(to Sidi)

What does hernu literally mean in English?

SIDI

Hernu is the Bodoantan word for "to see", but it has many meanings in our language. I think the closest analogue in your language would be scrying.

MONTY

Fortune tellers scry the future in crystal balls.

ARTURA

(in Bodoantan, frowning at Sidi's translation)

We do not tell fortunes with hernu. It is to send messages to our ancestors.

MONTY (V.O.)

At this point, Mr. Artura had Sidi turn off most of the lights and he took out a bottle of something from his jacket and drank it and went

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
into a trance. I was a bit afraid
of interrupting the trance. To be
blunt, I wasn't sure what was
happening.

Artura begins to sway in his seat and begins to chant gibberish. His hands move above the crystal ball and his fingers tremble. Suddenly he shouts and slumps into his seat.

MONTY
Oh dear. Should we do something.

SIDI
No. Artura will come out of it in a moment.

Artura's eyes flicker open and he sits up. He glares at Monty and begins talking in Bodoantan, a fast lecture that even Sidi has a hard time to keep up.

MONTY (V.O.)
What we just saw was Mr. Artura going into a spirit trance after he took a tincture of audsad, a chemical brew made from boiling a hallucinogenic mountain plant of the same name that is in the same family as nighshade. Once he went into a trance, Mr. Artura said that he "traveled the spirit highways" to deliver a message to one of his ancestors. I asked what sort of message he had delivered.

ARTURA
(in Bodoantan)
I told him that you had a question about ghost light. You may get an answer soon. In the form of ghost light.

MONTY
Well, that doesn't particularly answer my question does it?

ARTURA
(in Bodoantan)
Hah! You westerners need to learn patience. Ghost light is how our ancestors communicate with us once we send our messages to them. You

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARTURA (cont'd)
will see the ghost light. You will need a guide to help you interpret the signs. The guide can be a priest or an oracle or simply someone who is very receptive to the otherworld.

MONTY (V.O.)
So now, I suppose, we wait.

EXT. SARBANG COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Monty is riding in a van with a fixer, a driver, and others in his camera crew. They are driving along a recently paved road winding around some high hills in the Sarbang countryside. To their south is a view of the Himal Mountains.

MONTY (V.O.)
The next morning, we head out to the province of Sarbang, south of Puthyme. The countryside rises sharply. By nine o'clock in the morning, we're already at three thousand meters above sea level. By noon, we will rise another thousand meters. Already, I can feel the thin air. For mountain climbers, it would be necessary to stay in one of the villages at the base of the mountains for a few days to help acclimate to the elevation.

ABU
We're almost there at Samsi. Another mile and you'll be able to see the temple.

MONTY (V.O.)
That's Abu. He's the fixer for our trip into southern Bodoanta. The temple that he mentioned is located in Samsi, the capital of the Sarbang province. The temple is called the Varj Temple. Literally translated, it is called Thunderbolt Temple. The reason why we're here is to see the priests at the temple. Hopefully they will have more insight into this thing called the ghost light.

(CONTINUED)

The car turns a corner and ahead, they see the beige square buildings with thatch roofs and red paint decorations of the small city of Samsi. At the side of the clutch of buildings is a cliff face. Thunderbolt Temple is a white and red edifice built onto the cliff with the only access, a flight of winding stairs.

MONTY

Oh my.

ABU

That's Samsi. And Thunderbolt Temple. Nice, isn't it?

MONTY (V.O.)

Abu has arranged for us to meet with the abbot of Thunderbolt Temple later in the day, after afternoon prayers. In the mean time, we have the rest of the morning to explore the town.

EXT. STREETS OF SAMSI - LATE MORNING

Monty is walking along the main street in Samsi. Vendors are out in the streets selling various wares and food. Some of the locals, dressed in traditional clothing made of yak wool, look on in curiosity.

MONTY (V.O.)

In some ways, Samsi is very similar to Puthyme. The main streets are busy and the vendors are out selling you everything from cell phones and meat-on-a-stick to knock-off designer purses. But in other ways, it's also very different. Not only in the way that people dress but also in their demeanor. I find the people here a lot more friendly and less preoccupied with where they are heading.

MONTY

(to a local food vendor)

Hello there! What have you got here?

SAMSI FOOD VENDOR

(in Bodoantan and translated by Abu)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAMSI FOOD VENDOR (cont'd)
 We have several delicacies on sale today. We have some kebabs with beef, onions, and liver. And we have some hemadatsi.

MONTY
 What's hemadatsi?

ABU
 It's the Bodoantan national dish. It's an entire meal. You get rice, which is a mix of white rice and Bodoantan red rice. And there's also meat with a cheese sauce. Sometimes it's yak cheese.

MONTY
 Is that yak cheese?

ABU
 (in Bodoantan)
 Is that yak cheese?

SAMSI FOOD VENDOR
 (in Bodoantan)
 Of course it's yak cheese! It's the local delicacy! We mix it with some grilled mutton and it's very spicy with some of the local chili.

ABU
 (to Monty)
 The vendor here says that it is indeed yak cheese and there is also mutton and chili. It's also very spicy.

MONTY
 Well, I'm all for spicy. I'd say, why don't we go for it.

SAMSI FOOD VENDOR
 (in English)
 It's very spicy!

MONTY
 I don't mind spicy.

Monty gives the food vendor some money and in return, the food vendor spoons rice and hemadatshi into a styrofoam container and gives that to Monty. Abu also orders the same thing and the two men retreat to a nearby square shaded with trees to sit down and eat.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

(eating)

Oh! It is spicy. It's enough to make one's nose bleed!

ABU

(eating with no problem)

The vendor and I did warn you that it was spicy! Do you need water?

MONTY

No, I'm good. This food is good. I have to tell you, most of the cuisine I've tried here has been excellent. Except for the moldy tofu I tried in Puthyme.

ABU

Ah, you have to be careful with modly tofu. It isn't strictly Bodoantan cuisine. It was imported several hundred years ago from the east.

MONTY

How interesting. Well, tell me a bit about the this city. How long has it been here?

ABU

It started as a village several centuries ago, around 1400 or so. The people who lived here were farmers. And as they developed their farming techniques in these mountains, the population grew and grew until it is as you see it today. There's probably about ten thousand inhabitants now. Fifty years ago it was very rural, but now everything is modernized. Everyone has electricity and running water. There are schools and hospitals and buildings for government even though the main university is still in Puthyme.

MONTY

Samsi didn't have electricity and running water just fifty years ago?

(CONTINUED)

ABU

No. It was very rural as I've told you. It wasn't until the current king's grandfather came into power that he decided to modernize everything and bring the people here to the modern world. All in all, it has been a success.

MONTY

I'd say that it is. But I've also noticed that the people here are also still wearing the traditional clothing.

ABU

Some of the old ways are still hard to die out. But wearing traditional clothing is one of the smaller, easier things that people do to keep their identity.

MONTY (V.O.)

What Abu hinted about there is that Bodoanta, although modern in its technology, is still struggling between the old and new ways. It might seem all quaint to you and me while the locals are wearing their cultural robes--after all it's giving this place color and uniqueness that sets it apart from all of the other metropolises in the world--but it is also in the front lines of this cultural struggle.

INT. THUNDERBOLT TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Monty and Abu enter the atrium of Thunderbolt Temple. Despite the light afternoon light filtering in from windows, the interior is dark. Tall columns of dark stone support the roof overhead. Geometrical designs decorate the interior. Incense wafts out of hidden censurs on the floor like fog.

MONTY (V.O.)

Thunderbolt Temple is a thousand years old. It was built on the ancient Siddhartan principals with vraj or the thunderbolt

(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
interpretation. On the original site, there were underground springs that were said to emanate a sweat smelling vapor that could put a person into a trance so that he could be able to access the otherworld more easily. It is very much like that of our western Oracle at Delph.

Monty and Abu walk further into the temple and arrive in a brightly colored anteroom painted with murals in gold leaf and red pigment. The abbot of Thunderbolt Temple, Abbot Haan, arrives to greet the visitors.

MONTY (V.O.)
We're here to meet Abbot Haan who is in charge of Thunderbolt Temple.

MONTY
(bowing)
Good afternoon, Abbot Haan. It's an honor to meet you.

ABBOT HAAN
Welcome to Thunderbolt Temple, Mr. Salo. Shall we?

MONTY
Yes, of course.

The three men head off into the interior of the temple, passing by a large prayer room that is bare except for a gong and a row of prayer wheels.

MONTY
How long have you been abbot here at Thunderbolt Temple?

ABBOT HAAN
I've been abbot for about ten years. But before that I've been here almost all my life. I was inducted into the monastic order when I was five years old.

MONTY
Wow. So you've been a monk all your life. Yet you speak English very well.

(CONTINUED)

ABBOT HAAN

(laughing)

Oh, thank you! Not every monk gets the opportunity to learn English. When I was a younger man, when I had the chance to go out to the world, I chose to go to Albion.

MONTY

Albion!

ABBOT HAAN

I did religious studies at Cambridge.

MONTY

Wow. So now you're back here as abbot.

ABBOT HAAN

Yes.

MONTY

So tell me about Thunderbolt Temple. I've been to the Central Temple in Puthyme. How is this different than the Central Temple?

ABBOT HAAN

In many ways, Thunderbolt Temple is very similar to any other Siddhartan temple. Many of the usual elements that are in other temples are also in this temple. But what makes this temple unique is the history.

MONTY

Ah.

ABBOT HAAN

The village of Samsi was here before the temple, but even back then, the people believed that the surrounding mountains were sacred. About a thousand years ago, some of the villagers coming up to the mountains began having visions of the Siddharta. And then, one day, there was a thunderstorm and the entire mountain side was lit up in a fire that burned for a week. After the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ABBOT HAAN (cont'd)

fire went out, the villagers decided to build a temple here. And thus, Thunderbolt temple was built.

MONTY (V.O.)

That was a very interesting story. But like a lot of old tales that spring up around religion, there are some unbelievable and supernatural aspects to it. Visions and a mountain on fire? It seems, quite frankly, made up. However, geologists who have been to the area believe that the stories might have a grain of truth. Like the oracle at Delph, the villagers in Samsi might have had their visions because due to geological processes, vapors such as ethylene and carbon dioxide seep up from the cracks in the rock. Ethylene and carbon dioxide are known to cause hallucinations in small concentrated doses.

Monty and the abbot walk to a hallway painted in a long mural. There is a prominent picture at the end of the hallway showing a mountain on fire.

MONTY (V.O.)

The tale of the mountain on fire is a little more difficult to explain. However, geology can explain this as well. If there was sufficient gas being emitted by the rocks below, the spark generated from lightning would be sufficient to set the mountain on "fire". And because the gases come from deep within the earth, it can then be easy to see how it would burn for a week straight.

ABBOT HAAN

There is one more room I would like for you to see.

The abbot and monty step through a narrow passageway and emerge into a dark room that is only lit with a few candles in the corners. The entire room is painted in black except for wisps of green, blue, and pink that look like an aurora borealis.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Wow. What is this?

ABBOT HAAN

This is what we call the ghost room.

MONTY

The ghost room?

ABBOT HAAN

What's painted here are messages from the otherworld that previous abbots have seen prior to great events that have happened in our history.

MONTY (V.O.)

Abbot Haan goes on to explain that Siddhartans don't really believe in ghosts. He makes the distinction that ghosts are not the same as spirits. In Siddhartan, there is a belief in reincarnation and so after a person dies, their spirit goes out into the otherworld before it is summoned back to another body. And while it is out there in the otherworld, there are ways that it can still communicate with the living. By ghost light.

ABBOT HAAN

The paintings start here at the north wall. This is the first message that the first abbot of Thunderbolt Temple saw.

MONTY

What does it say?

ABBOT HAAN

It was interpreted as a message that there would be a great upheaval. And the message was correct. A month after the first abbot saw the message, one of the great Khans came over the mountains to conquer the region.

MONTY

Wow.

(CONTINUED)

ABBOT HAAN

And here on the east wall is the message that the tenth abbot received near the end of his tenure during a particularly harsh winter. It says that there would be a tragedy before joy. And indeed, there was tragedy. The tenth abbot died in a rock slide the following spring. However, soon after that, the temple received a significant endowment from the government.

MONTY

Hm. Well, how about you? Do you have any of the messages that you received from ghost light painted here?

ABBOT HAAN

My tenure here has been rather uneventful. However, my predecessor, Abbot Bai, had a message. It is over here. It predicted the modernization that would come to the country and a long era of prosperity.

EXT. ROOF OF THUNDERBOLT TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Monty is standing at the railing, looking out at the surrounding mountainous countryside.

MONTY

It does make you sit back and think for a moment after Abbot Haan talked about all the predictions that ghost light was able to make. Perhaps there's something there. But the skeptic in my questions that as well. I mean, all of the predictions seemed rather generic somehow. I mean, what would you think if someone told you that sometime in the near future, something bad would happen or you might get a lucky windfall. That could be interpreted any number of ways, fulfilling the prophecy. It's sort of like your friendly neighborhood

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (cont'd)
phone astrologer gave you a rather
vague prediction that could come
true no matter how things
occurred--because it would all boil
down to interpretation.

MONTY (V.O.)
But that painted room in
Thunderbolt Temple did make me
rethink some things. At first, I
thought that ghost light was
probably just some local
superstition or at the most,
something that could be studied, in
a historian's perspective, as
something that people in the past
had believed in. However, the very
presence of the ghost light room in
Thunderbolt Temple points to the
fact that people, in the present,
still find that ghost light is
relevant.

INT. THE LOCAL PUTHYME BOOKSTORE - DAY

Monty enters one of the bookstores in the major shopping
center in Puthyme. He heads straight toward Puthyme's
equivalent of the "spiritualism" section.

Monty flips through several books which have the words
"ghost light" in English written on them.

MONTY (V.O.)
We're back in Puthyme and the crew
is preparing for a more arduous
portion of the trip. We'll be
heading into one of the more remote
regions in Bodoanta. However, I'm
here at this local bookstore to try
to get a grip on what people today
think of ghost light.

MONTY
Well, there's all of this
literature. As you can see, I've
naturally gravitated towards the
English section, but I've seen all
of these types of books
before. They're all written by
westerners.

(CONTINUED)

Monty shoves the books he had been flipping through back on the shelf.

MONTY

What I really want to see is what people here are reading. Let's go wander over there where all the Bodoantan books are shelved.

He heads over to the other side of the bookstore where there are many Bodoantan books.

MONTY

So where are the books on ghost light?

ABU

They're over here on this shelf.

MONTY

Ah. Are these the type of books that people around here read about ghost light?

ABU

(shrugging)

I think so. But most people know about ghost light because it is knowledge passed down to them from their parents and grandparents.

MONTY

These books are written by modern authors?

ABU

No. These books are written a very long time ago.

MONTY

(picking up one of the books)

What about this one here?

ABU

(peering at the title)

That one looks like "Ghost Light Messages". That's the rough translation of the title. It was written by a philosopher named Ranu who lived maybe three or four hundred years ago.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Wow. Really, that long? And all of these books are like that? Oh, here's someone now who looks like they're here to get a book on ghost light. Excuse me miss, would you mind telling me what drew you to this section?

BOOK BROWSER #1

(in Bodoantan)

Oh. Um. I'm actually a student at the local university. I'm studying folklore and I was trying to find a copy of a book to study for a class I'm taking.

MONTY

Oh. Well, good luck with finding the book for your class.

BOOK BROWSER #1

(in Bodoantan)

Thanks.

MONTY

Excuse me sir. I was wondering why you're here in this particular section of the bookstore.

BOOK BROWSER #2

(in Bodoantan)

Ah! Hello there. I didn't see you there. What were you saying?

MONTY

I was wondering why you're looking at books on ghost light.

BOOK BROWSER #2

(in Bodoantan)

I'm very interested in these books as classics. I'm not interested in ghost light per se. I'm just interested in reading the old authors. I'm working on all the fifteenth century authors like Kali, Biton, and Harad. I'm looking for a particular volume by Vongpa where he discusses the philosophy of ghost light. Have you seen it by chance.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

I'm afraid not. But good luck in your book browsing.

BOOK BROWSER #2

(in Bodoantan)

Thank you!

MONTY

(to the camera)

Well, drat. No one here seems to be looking at these books to glean actual information. But then again, this is the city. I suppose I'll have to look for more answers where we're headed next.

EXT. HACHUCK PROVINCE, COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Monty is riding in another van. With him is the driver, the film crew, and the fixer/translator, Abu. They are driving over bumpy, unpaved roads over a series of mountain gorges.

Monty is nodding off as the countryside passes by.

MONTY (V.O.)

We started on our journey approximately five in the morning. Not getting any breakfast was the least of my worries. I had been up all night helping the filming crew do some last minute research and packing up. As a result, we're all a little sleep deprived.

The camera pans to the seats behind Monty to reveal the head cameraman, the producer, and the director, sprawled in their seats snoring.

MONTY (V.O.)

Fortunately for us, Abu and our driver Mr. Bumthar had a full eight hours rest beforehand and were navigating these treacherous roads with a full awareness.

The van curves around a precarious turn on the side of the mountain. There are no guard rails, but the driver appears unconcerned with this lack of safety.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

As the crew and I snoozed our way through the trip, we blithely ignored the spectacular landscape that passed our van's windows. We were heading into Hachuck Province, even deeper into the mountains than Sarbang. Most of the Bodoantan population lives in the cities like Puthyme. Out here, there are only a sparse scattering of villages, all of them isolated from each other by these gorges and mountains. This road that we were traveling on branched away from Puthyme's main highway several hours ago and Abu has assured us that it goes straight into the heart of Hachuck Province to pass by several of the main villages along its route.

EXT. PHEUN, HACHUCK PROVINCE - DAY

The van enters a village of a cluster of ancient buildings surrounding a weather beaten square paved with rough stones. The van momentarily stops at a crosswalk to allow a flock of goats to cross.

MONTY

Where are we now?

ABU

This village is called Pheun. There are probably about two hundred people living here. We're stopping here for lunch before we continue again.

MONTY

(rubbing his hands)

Great! Do you hear that, guys? We're getting lunch. I'm starving for one.

The groans of the producer can be heard in the background, off-camera.

MONTY (V.O.)

Pheun seems like a quaint village. It's a very stereotypical version of what westerners think of

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
what Bodoanta is like. There are all these ancient buildings that probably have been built several hundred years ago with nothing but mud, brick, and wood. You can see all of the traditional decor painted along the walls and doors of these buildings. And the villagers here live a seemingly idyllic pastoral lifestyle. Abu had found for us the local cafe for lunch.

EXT. LOCAL CAFE IN PHEUN - DAY

Monty and Abu sit at a rough hewn wood table that had been placed just outside the local cafe in Pheun--which looks exactly like all of the other buildings in the village. A village girl arrives to put glasses of water in front of the men.

MONTY
So, what have we ordered today?

ABU
We've ordered two dishes. One is roasted yak meat with yak cheese.

MONTY
Yes, of course. I've had that many times so far while I'm here. It's a wonder how many ways the Bodoantans can cook the stuff. It's good though. And what's the other dish?

ABU
It's called zow shongo. It's a mix, sort of like a stir-fry.

MONTY
I like stir-frys.

ABU
It's basically rice with a mix of vegetables. I'm sure the vegetables they're using for this dish will be locally grown.

The same village girl, serving as the waitress, arrives with the plates of food. On the plate is the roasted yak meat along with the zow shongo.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Ah, here it is. It smells rather wonderful. Although I'm not sure how much of that is due to me being starving. I haven't had any breakfast, you know!

ABU

(laughing)

No breakfast? Really? Breakfast is an essential part of the day! We'll be doing some hiking in the near future, so you'd better start eating right.

MONTY

You're correct as usual Abu. I will have to try to get in the morning meal the next chance I get.

Monty and Abu takes up the chopsticks. Abu immediately digs in as Monty is a little bit more unsure as he tries to grapple with the utensils.

MONTY

(picking up some vegetables with the chopsticks)

Here we go.

Monty eats the vegetables. Chews and swallows.

MONTY

It's rather good! There's a certain taste to it. It has a kind of sauce that is both sweet and sour to it. I haven't tasted this before.

ABU

I believe they've added a couple different vegetables to the mix. There are some carrots and beats and some of the local cabbage which we call Bodoantan leaves. Some people steam them, too. And these things that look like little balls...

MONTY

They look a little like brussel sprouts to me.

Monty eats a sprout and makes a surprised exclamation.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

But they don't taste bitter at all! In fact, they're a little bit tangy.

ABU

It's called mountain fern.

MONTY

Hm.

ABU

The sauce isn't used very much in restaurants in the city because it's an acquired taste for foreigners. But it is very traditional. It's called hema and it is made from the sweet sap of the mountain lilac tree and the fermented sauce of the mountain fern.

MONTY

Well, I like it. Any of the other foreigners who decide to take a pass on it are missing out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROADS, HACHUCK PROVINCE - DAY

Monty and the crew are on the road again. The mountain roads have turned treacherous. The driver is going very slowly along the snaking turns high in the mountains. The rest of the crew are swaying with the rocking of the van.

MONTY (V.O.)

After our brief pit stop at the village of Pheun, we're back on the road. We're hoping to get to our next destination by nightfall. But it's beginning to look questionable as our driver slows down to navigate the roads.

ABU

(pointing out the van window)
Whoa! Look down there. A landslide at the bottom of that ravine.

MONTY

My God. That looks rather horrendous. All of those trees ripped up.

(CONTINUED)

ABU

I suppose we should be glad that the landslide didn't happen on the road, huh?

MONTY

Yes. Very thankful.

MONTY (V.O.)

Landslides are a very common occurrence in the mountainous provinces of Bodoanta, especially after heavy rains during the summer monsoon season. Landslides often do cover roads which could take many days to clear. And they could also take lives, for the unwary traveler.

ABU

Look, the road straightens out in the next turn.

MR. BUMTHAR

(in Bodoantan)

That's just a brief respite. There will be another series of turns a mile after that.

THE PRODUCER

(off screen)

I think I'm going to be sick.

THE DIRECTOR

(off screen)

Oh for God's sake.

MONTY

You look a bit green, chap. Maybe you need a doggie bag?

THE DIRECTOR

(off screen)

I think I have one right here...

The producer retches violently off screen. The director curses loudly.

MR. BUMTHAR

(in Bodoantan)

And now where's going into a turn.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

Needless to say, the last bit of the drive to our next destination wasn't as pleasant as it was in the beginning. Apparently our producer caught some sort of stomach bug.

EXT. SHOLING, HACHUCK PROVINCE - EVENING

The van with the crew pull up to a village in the mountains. Most of the houses cluster near the base of the mountain where a stream runs. But some houses dot the sides of the mountain. At the highest point is a monastery composed of a complex of buildings with gilded roofs.

Mr. Bumthar drives the van to one of the larger buildings which has three stories and balconied windows. Above the front door are the words "Sholing Inn" written in Bodoantan.

The crew get out of the van and start hauling their luggage inside.

MONTY (V.O.)

Well, here we are at the village of Sholing, at the southern tip of Hachuck Province. It is high in the mountains, at about twenty-five hundred meters. It's the evening and we made the unanimous decision to check into the local inn and turn in for the night. Riding through mountain passes is more exhausting than you might think and we figured that after a good night's sleep, we would be well rested for the activities the next day.

INT. SHOLING INN, MONTY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A rooster climbs up onto the sill of a window and crows. Monty jerks upward and falls out of bed.

MONTY (V.O.)

Morning in the village of Sholing starts very early. Probably because the animals are up early. I, for one, wasn't particularly keen on getting up at four thirty, but it was impossible to get back to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

Monty finally untangles himself from his blankets and shoos the bird away. But when he turns his back, the rooster flies back up on the sill and crows again.

MONTY (V.O.)

Especially when your alarm clock
refuses to shut up.

There is a knock on the door as Monty retreats to the adjacent bathroom.

ABU

(through the door)

Mr. Salo? It's time to rise and
shine! We have an early morning
ahead of us, we don't want to miss
"the risers".

MONTY

I'll be right down, Abu.

INT. SHOLING INN, BREAKFAST ROOM - MORNING

Monty clatters down the stairs, dressed in traveling clothes and hat, and arrives at a breakfast table that is already set with tea cups. Abu, Mr. Bumthar, and the director is already at the table drinking tea and chatting.

MONTY

Well, it looks like I'm not the
last one down.

THE DIRECTOR

Barry is still...well, let's say
"still recovering."

MONTY

Oh dear.

ABU

I don't think we should worry too
much about it. Travelers get the
stomach bug all the
time. Especially if they're not
used to the food.

MR. BUMTHAR

(in Bodoantan)

Which is too bad, because the food
is quite good.

(CONTINUED)

ABU

Well, I think we should start breakfast at any rate, right Mr. Smith?

THE DIRECTOR

I suppose so. Barry will be down at any moment. Hopefully. And if he misses breakfast, it would only be to our benefit if he gets sick again on our way up to "the risers".

An old lady, one of the owners of the inn, comes to their table with two trays filled with bowls of rice porridge, yak meat jerky, and yak butter.

MONTY (V.O.)

Even without our producer, our breakfast was a hearty one. It was a traditional one composed of rice porridge, yak jerky, and yak butter for the crispy unleavened bread that our hostess, Mrs. Utar, provided for us.

Mrs. Utar comes by again with a basket filled with the unleavened bread which looks like stiff pancakes. The men at the table thank her and she bows before retreating to the kitchen.

MONTY (V.O.)

This traditional breakfast is one that the peoples of Hachuck Province have eaten for thousands of years. It provides one with the necessary calories to work up in these altitudes. And considering our ensuing exertions for later this morning, these would be much needed calories.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF SHOLING INN - MORNING

Mr. Bumthar calls to two teenage boys in Bodoantan to help him jack up the back of the van to attach some chains. The rest of the crew stands back, making last minute checks to their gear.

MONTY (V.O.)

Even at this time of year, there is some snow that exists at this

(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
 altitude. That is why our driver
 is attaching chains to the
 van. However, we won't be able to
 make the entire way just by
 driving. At the last leg of our
 journey, we will have to hike.

Mr. Bumthar and the boys finish putting on the chains and
 the crew piles into to the van and set off, with some of the
 villagers coming out of their houses to see them off.

EXT. A MOUNTAIN JUST OUTSIDE OF SHOLING - MORNING

The van heads up a steep, rutted path up a mountain adjacent
 to the one that holds the monastery.

MONTY (V.O.)
 The scenery here is breathtaking in
 the early morning. The sun is just
 barely over the horizon and the
 entire valley of Sholing appears to
 be covered in a blanket of
 shimmering fog making the village
 itself appear ghost-like.

The van bumps around a particularly steep bend. Mr. Bumthar
 floors the accelerator.

ABU
 (in Bodoantan)
 We're not going to make it!

MR. BUMTHAR
 (in Bodoantan)
 Hold your knickers. We'll make it
 past this bump.

ABU
 (in Bodoantan)
 I'm not wearing any knickers.

MR. BUMTHAR
 (giving Abu a strange look and
 speaking in Bodoantan)
 That is too much information.

The motor of the van revs up again and the van finally makes
 it over that small rutted bump in the
 mountain. Instinctively, Monty grabs his hat as the van
 bounces upward.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

It's a hard drive up this mountain. A premonition of the last bit of walking. But despite the bumps and jolts, the trip is almost magical, as if we are rising through the misty clouds like ghosts ourselves.

The van reaches the end of the road and the crew gets out to do the last bit of hiking. The climb up the rocks on a faint footpath littered with black stones and lichen. A ram with an enormous pair of horns watches the travelers from a higher perch.

EXT. THE RISERS ON THE MOUNTAIN - MORNING

MONTY

(breathing hard)

Hah! Well, here we are.

The crew reaches a wide flat outcrop with a series of cairns and monoliths perched precariously on the edge.

MONTY (V.O.)

At first sight, it appears that we have just arrived at the side of the mountain where there happens to be a pile of rocks. Not terribly unusual. But upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that these stones are not here by chance.

The camera pans towards the cairns to show that the rocks have been piled systematically around larger rock monoliths that are carved stone blocks standing upright.

MONTY (V.O.)

Archaeologists have been up here and have dated these stone structures back to one thousand B.C. The ancient people here have put these rocks here for a purpose. It has been speculated that this used to be an ancient temple to the sun. Every morning, the sunlight glints over these rocks and fog like luminescent magic.

The camera takes a longer view, showing the sunlight cresting over the next mountain ridge.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

But these aren't just archaeological curiosities. Today, these stones are called "The Risers." People still come up here to send prayers to their gods. If you look closely, you can see the remaining prayer flags and prayer papers which have been placed here so that the prayers could be delivered by the winds to some higher power above.

One of the prayer papers finally flies free from a rock that had been holding it down and it flies through the wind to disappear into the dissipating morning fog. Something in the distance glints green.

ABU

(pointing)

Look!

MONTY

What is it?

ABU

Morning light.

MONTY

I know it's morning light. The sunlight is all around us.

ABU

That's not what I meant.

The green flashes in the distance again, the light seemingly floating above the fog. Monty looks startled when he sees it this time.

ABU

Morning light. In Bodoantan, it has a slightly different intonation than the word for sunlight. It is our word for ghost light in the morning.

MONTY

Really? That was ghost light? I thought it only appeared during the night.

(CONTINUED)

ABU

Sometimes it appears in the morning.

MONTY

I haven't read about that anywhere...

ABU

That's strange. Everyone here understands that ghost light can appear either during the night or the day. It's just easier to see during the night.

MONTY (V.O.)

Of course, that upended all of my previous conceptions about what I was looking for. Was it true, then, that it could also be seen during the day? Whatever the case, I saw something. Some kind of green light. And up there in the mountains with the play of fog and sunlight and the thin air, anything could happen. A trick of the light.

EXT. A MOUNTAIN JUST OUTSIDE OF SHOLING - MORNING

The crew have hiked back down to the van and are traveling slowly down the mountain.

MONTY (V.O.)

The skeptical part of me, of course, is already dismissing this as an optical illusion. However, the very notion that this ghost light could be seen during the day is opening up new possibilities.

THE DIRECTOR

Oh my God. Look, there!

The camera pans from the front of the van to the side. Along the mountain, a snaking form of green light slides along the disappearing fog.

MONTY (V.O.)

At that moment, I was speechless. This was certainly the ghost light in the day. It snaked

(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
along with the movement of the van
like a bright neon ribbon. The
rest of the crew, however, was in
pandemonium. It was a testament to
our driver's nerve that he kept
going.

ABU
Goodness gracious, I've never seen
something that vivid! It has to be
an omen!

THE DIRECTOR
I hope you're getting all of this
on camera, Bob.

BOB THE CAMERAMAN
I am, I am. Thank goodness I just
popped in a fresh tape before we
got back to the van.

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Someone's ancestors must really
want to communicate with us if we
can all see it...

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
You're right, this means we'll have
to see a real oracle. I wonder if
we can find one in the village.

THE DIRECTOR
What is he saying?

THE PRODUCER
(leaning forward with a doggie
bag to his lips)
I think I'm going to be sick. Can't
we drive slower?

THE DIRECTOR
Good God, Barry. You haven't even
had breakfast.

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Due to these roads, it would be
impossible for me to drive very
fast.

(CONTINUED)

THE DIRECTOR

What is he saying?

ABU

(shouting)

Mr. Bumthar is driving as slowly as
he can!

The producer leans over again and loudly dry heaves into the
doggy bag.

MONTY

Oh my, it's disappeared. Like the
fog.

BOB THE CAMERAMAN

I got it all on tape.

MONTY (V.O.)

But despite all the hoopla in the
van and poor Barry, our producer,
getting ill again, Abu suggested
that we visit a local oracle soon
in order to get an interpretation
of the ghost light that we
saw. Fortunately for us, we had
already scheduled a meeting with
the monks in Sholing Mountain
Temple later today.

INT. SHOLING MOUNTAIN TEMPLE - AFTERNOON

Monty is ushered in by a monk in colorful robes to an
austere office with a simple wood desk and one shelf filled
with Siddharta books in Bodoantan. An old man with a long
beard and dark blue robes sits on the other side of the low
desk on a simple straw mat.

The abbot of Sholing Mountain Temple motions for Monty to
sit across from him on another straw mat. Monty sits
cross-legged, with some difficulty.

ABBOT TY

Welcome to Sholing Mountain Temple,
Mr. Salo. I hope your travel here
went well.

MONTY

We had no trouble finding the
temple, Abbot Ty.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

Abbot Ty is the head of the Sholing Mountain Temple. Before becoming abbot, he had been an English teacher in Puthyme University. After his retirement, he became a monk at the Central Temple and quickly rose up the ranks and was eventually assigned here.

ABBOT TY

How may I help you, Mr. Salo.

MONTY

The crew and I had a remarkable experience while up on the mountain seeing "the risers." I'm not sure whether to believe it or not.

ABBOT TY

What do you think you should do?

MONTY

Perhaps I should tell you a little of what we witnessed. I saw a bit of green light out in the morning fog. It seemed to follow us when we descended the mountain. And then it disappeared with the fog. Our guide, Abu, thinks that it's ghost light and that we should have an oracle to interpret it.

ABBOT TY

And what do you think it is?

MONTY

To be honest, I thought it was probably just an optical illusion created by the morning sunlight. Besides, I've always heard that ghost light was seen during the night.

ABBOT TY

There are tales that ghost light can also be seen during the day. But thinking you're seeing it and actually believing that you're seeing it are two different things. You should push aside your doubts and look inside your heart

(MORE)

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ABBOT TY (cont'd)
to see into the truth of the
matter.

MONTY
That's a very zen thing to say,
Abbot Ty. But let's say that I do
believe that what I just saw was
ghost light. Do you think we
should get it interpreted by an
oracle?

ABBOT TY
True oracles are few and far
between. But from what you've told
me, an oracle might interpret it as
the ancestors looking favorably on
your journey. But that is just a
very rough interpretation. I am no
oracle, just an ordinary abbot.

MONTY
Well, that's good, isn't it? That
the ancestors approve of our
journey?

ABBOT TY
I want to stress that that is just
one interpretation. There could be
a variety of minute details that
could make the interpretation be
the complete opposite.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF SHOLING

Monty has hiked up a small hill just outside of Sholing
where he has a view of the village and a bit of the
surrounding forest.

MONTY (V.O.)
Frankly, I'm not sure what to
think. Abbot Ty said to look into
my heart to see what is true. To
be honest, I normally look into my
brain and reason to see what is
true. The abbot's advice is more
in line with faith. Standing
up here on this hill, I feel an
intense communion with nature, but
I don't think it's faith. I'm the
sort of man who likes to see proof.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

(turning to the camera)

Under reasonable circumstances, I would believe what I would see with my own two eyes. But even science has explanations for optical illusions. So before I even think about throwing all reason to the wind, I should probably contact a scientist rather than an oracle in order to figure any of this out.

EXT. MONGARI OBSERVATORY - DAY

Monty gets out of the van in front of the Mongari Observatory, a large white domed building on top of a plateau and surrounded by a few scraggly pines. He heads towards the entrance.

MONTY (V.O.)

I've come to Mongari Observatory, located about thirty kilometers northwest of Puthyme on the Mongari Plateau. The observatory is about three thousand meters above sea level. And out here, away from the city, the telescopes at the observatory can have a clear view of the night sky to detect celestial objects, and other things.

Monty walks up some metal stairs and knocks on a door. A bald man with glasses and a checkered shirt answers the door.

MONTY

Dr. Tongse?

DR. TONGSE

Yes! That's me. You must be Mr. Salo from Albion Broadcasting. Come in! Come in!

INT. MONGARI OBSERVATORY, CONTROL ROOM

Monty and Dr. Tongse enter the control room of Mongari Observatory which is filled with panels of buttons, levers, and monitors. Beyond a group of panels at the far end of the room is a glass wall. On the other side of the glass wall is the main telescope.

(CONTINUED)

Monty and Dr. Tongse take their seats next to one of the monitors where a stream of data is being projected.

MONTY (V.O.)

I'm at the Mongari Observatory to meet the head astronomer here, Dr. Damachandran Tongse of Puthyme University. He has been in charge of the observatory for over two decades now. He and his team of researchers have examined the skies over Bodoanta for evidence of distant galaxies, extrasolar planets, and black holes. I'm here to ask him about his expertise on phenomena that is closer to earth.

MONTY

So, Dr. Tongse. Wow. This is the largest observatory in Bodoanta and perhaps this entire region?

DR. TONGSE

Yes, it is. It even rivals the observatory in Kilawai in the Pacific. Originally, it was built in the fifties by the Albion military for security purposes, but after Albion withdrew from the region after the colonial uprisings, it fell into disuse. However, the previous and current kings of Bodoanta have declared science to be an essential area for advancement in Bodoanta. So in the past couple of decades, there has been enough funding for us to upgrade our facilities.

MONTY

It certainly looks magnificent. Do you spend most of your time here, looking up at the stars?

DR. TONGSE

(laughing)

I'm usually here during the summers when I'm not teaching. Otherwise, the rest of my research team is here collecting data. We don't directly observe the skies any more since the new telescopes now

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DR. TONGSE (cont'd)
transmit data to all of these computers for us to analyze. Which is a shame, really. But that's the advancement of technology for you. However, we do still have some of the older telescopes around that we use for demonstration and educational purposes. If you'd like, we can see them tonight.

MONTY

I would. It would definitely be interesting to look at the skies out here. But the reason I'm here isn't to ask questions about everything in outer space. My question is more closer to home. I'm trying to find out more about ghost light.

DR. TONGSE

Ah.

MONTY

All of the textbooks nowadays, of course, say that ghost light is nothing but another name for the aurora borealis. Which seems believable for the most part. But then people have told me that ghost light could also be seen in the daylight, too. I saw some sort of strange green light on the mountain in Sholing and I can't explain it other than maybe some thought that it might be an optical illusion.

DR. TONGSE

Well, an optical illusion could very well be an explanation. The phenomenon of mirages, for instance, is a well documented scientific phenomenon on the curious properties of light.

MONTY

So you're saying it might be a mirage?

DR. TONGSE

That's one possibility. Another possibility is geological.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Geological?

DR. TONGSE

(laughing)

I'm no geologist, but from what I understand, processes taking place on the moving plates beneath our feet result in some really interesting phenomena. Like volcanoes erupting of gases spewing out from the interior of the earth.

MONTY

I see.

DR. TONGSE

And because gases and particulate matter get into the atmosphere, they result in some strange things in the skies. For us at the observatory, mostly we worry only worry about it if some volcano erupts and the debris blacks out the sky.

MONTY

Well, there aren't any volcanoes nearby, are there?

DR. TONGSE

There are actually quite a few in Bodoanta since our country is actually right on the edge of two tectonic plates. But as far as we know, these are dormant. For now.

After the interview, Monty says good-bye and heads out of the observatory. The sky has darkened into the early evening and he looks up to see the stars appearing in the firmament. The camera pans to a scene where the moon is rising through the trees.

MONTY (V.O.)

Dr. Tongse further told me that he had seen several aurora borealis during his stint at the observatory, but that he had never noticed anything unusual about them. When I had asked him about whether there was something about aurora borealis that could be predicted, he gave me this long

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
explanation about
stochasticity. In short, the
patterns that the aurora borealis
made in the sky were basically
random. But this was just the
night. What about the day? I
think for that, I may have to ask a
different expert.

EXT. MONGARI GORGE ROAD - DAY

Monty and the crew are driving along Mongari Gorge Road, a winding highway through some deep valleys just north of Puthyme. Mongari Observatory can be seen in the distance, on top of a high hill.

MONTY (V.O.)
Dr. Tongse referred me to a
geologist friend of his who works
at the nearby geological
station. Dr. Lin Hyat studies how
the plate tectonics affect the
growth of the mountains in and
around Bodoanta. Hopefully, he
will have the answers to my
questions about ghost light during
the day.

EXT. MONGARI GEOLOGICAL STATION - DAY

The van with the crew pull up to the Mongari Geological Station which is a large log cabin built in a clearing just off an exit lane from the highway. Monty gets out of the van to shake hands with a man in a ranger uniform.

MONTY
Hello! Dr. Hyat, I presume?

DR. HYAT
Yes. And please call me Lin! Dama told me that you would be over here today with some questions.

MONTY
Right. I have many questions. The primary one is, what is ghost light? But in the course of my investigations, Dr. Tongse told me that one possibility for seeing ghost light during the day is that

(MORE)

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MONTY (cont'd)
there may be some sort of
geological process going on that
might be altering what we might be
seeing above ground.

DR. HYAT
Hm. Well come follow me. I have
something to show you.

Monty follows Dr. Hyat past the geological station as they
head down a narrow trail that snakes close to the gorge.

DR. HYAT
Bodoanta is known for many of its
natural beauties, not the least,
some of the highest mountains in
the world, like that of Mount
Himaragat. You can see the peak
from here.

Dr. Hyat points out snow capped vista of Mount Himaragat
which looms in the distance.

DR. HYAT
Quite a few mountain climbing
tourists come to Bodoanta for that
alone. Unfortunately, about one in
ten people who climb Mount
Himaragat actually make it to the
summit. Another two in ten, of the
ones who don't make it, actually
die in the attempt.

MONTY
Dreary statistics, indeed. Good
thing I'm not going to be
attempting to scale some mountain
during my time here. Or I hope not.

The producer says something off camera.

MONTY
(to the camera)
Let me put it another way. I might
be amendable to a helicopter, but I
refuse to climb that mountain, even
if it means the answers to all my
questions are at the top.

DR. HYAT
(chuckling)
Oh, I don't think you have to go to
such extremes.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Thank God. So what are you going to show me?

DR. HYAT

Another geological wonder in Bodoanta that isn't as well known. It may also help explain why you thought you saw ghost light during the day.

MONTY

Great.

DR. HYAT

There are numerous fields of methane that run along seams in the earth where the tectonic plates have cracked. We geologists call it the Great Crackling.

MONTY

Wow. What a great name. The Great Crackling sounds like a name for a cereal. Or a gigantic wad of bubble wrap. And what's with the methane?

DR. HYAT

The methane is created from chemical processes deep within the earth. The gases eventually trickly up to the surface and escape through the cracks here. Ah! Here we are.

Monty and Dr. Hyat emerge from a stand of trees to a clearing filled with rough earth that gleams blue-green in the sunlight.

MONTY

I can see how it can be described as the Great Crackling. This place looks like peanut brittle that's been hacked to bits.

DR. HYAT

Exactly.

Dr. Hyat crouches down to grab a handful of earth and shows it to Monty who peers at it with interest.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

I thought this was just regular dirt.

DR. HYAT

But as you can see, there's more than just dust and soil here. This is a great deposit for a mineral called apatite, a mineral that is also formed deep underground as well as from biological processes. It's very abundant here.

MONTY

Yes, I can see that. It gives the ground a really strange blue-green sheen. But what does it have to do with anything?

DR. HYAT

Everything. Come over here. You see this? It's one of the more obvious methane vents in this field. See what will happen when we light a match.

Dr. Hyat reaches into a pocket and pulls out a small box of matches. He strikes a match and drops it into the methane vent. A large jet of green flame suddenly flares up for approximately five seconds.

Both of the men jump back from the flames.

MONTY

Whoa!

DR. HYAT

Intense, isn't it?

MONTY

(laughing)

Yes. And the colors even look the same as the ghost light that I saw near Sholing Mountain. So what happened?

DR. HYAT

There's a scientific explanation for it, of course. Methane is highly flammable. But that, in itself, isn't what caused the color. Methane itself burns with a

(MORE)

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DR. HYAT (cont'd)
yellowish-orange flame. What made it look green was the apatite in the environment.

MONTY
The apatite?

DR. HYAT
Apatite contains phosphorous which causes the green color. When the apatite burns, the extra energy introduced into the system excites the phosphorous atoms. The electrons in the atoms, because they're excited, emit a photon of light which corresponds to the green wavelength.

MONTY
So it is the phosphorous in the minerals surrounding this field of methane vents that are causing the fire to burn green.

DR. HYAT
Exactly. If this field had been littered with minerals containing strontium or calcium, it would have burned red. Likewise, if the minerals in this area were copper-rich, it would burn blue, or purple if it was potassium.

MONTY
Hm. So one possible explanation for what I saw would be that Sholing Mountain had some methane and some minerals that would burn green. But what would cause it to spark in the first place?

DR. HYAT
Bodoanta, because it is located in the mountains, is a very dry region most of the time. I wouldn't be surprised if some dry plant matter simply ignited under the hot sun.

Dr. Hyat and Monty try lighting another methane vent to see the green flames again.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

But despite Dr. Hyat's admittedly satisfyingly sounding scientific explanation, there was something nagging in the back of my mind. It's plausible that what Dr. Hyat said could have happened. But it seemed unlikely, especially once I realized that when we saw the ghost light on the mountain, it had been the morning, in the mist. The sun had just come out and it had been damp, not dry.

The two men succeed at the next methane vent. Maybe a little too well. Monty's sleeve catches fire.

MONTY

(jumping and waving)

Ah! Fire! Hot! Hot! Hot! Anyone have a fire extinguisher?

THE DIRECTOR

(in the background)

Here's one!

One of the crew, from behind the camera, throws a pail of water on Monty, drenching him. Fortunately, the fire goes out.

EXT. LARAN VILLAGE, HACHUCK PROVINCE - DAY

Monty is walking in a small, but densely packed main street in the center of Laran Village. The store fronts are open to the streets and there are many open baskets filled with merchandise. The street cobblestones are covered with dirt.

MONTY (V.O.)

Well, I've finally let Abu convince me to see a real, authentic oracle. I doubt that the oracle will be able to tell me anything other than some vague prophecies that could come true to anyone.

MONTY

(to the camera)

We're here in Laran Village, not far from Sholing. Our translator and fixer, Abu, tells me that the most famous oracle in this region lives here. If anyone can tell me

(MORE)

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MONTY (cont'd)
about the ghost light that we saw
on Sholing Mountain, said Abu, this
oracle will have the answer.

Monty stops at one of the shop fronts and eyes a tank filled
with live lobsters.

MONTY
Now this is unusual. I thought
Bodoanta was a land-locked country.

Monty eventually passes the bustle of the main street and
turns to a narrow and dingy alleyway. There is one door at
the end of the alleyway with chipped green paint.

MONTY
(to the camera)
Well, here's the oracle's shop. It
looks a bit prepossessing, doesn't
it? There's no sign saying that
this is the oracle's office at all.

Monty knocks on the door.

MONTY
(to the camera)
The oracle's name is Rin. I'm not
sure if that's his first name or
last name. Everyone in the region
just calls him Rin.

The door opens, revealing a teenaged girl with her hair in
braids. She is wearing jeans and a t-shirt with the name of
the latest famous Bodoantan boy band. Her feet are bare.

MONTY
I'm Monty Salo from Albion
Broadcasting. I'm here looking for
Rin?

The girl nods and gestures for him to come inside.

INT. RIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Monty steps through the threshold and takes off his shoes
near the door where there are several other shoes and
sandals. The interior is kept meticulously clean.

They are in what looks like a kitchen. The girl motions for
Monty to take a seat at the rough kitchen table. An older
woman, the girl's mother, pours him tea as the girl takes
another seat at the table.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Thank you. This is very gracious
of you. I'm looking for Rin.

The girl gestures to herself.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

I'm Rin.

MONTY

Oh. I see.

MONTY (V.O.)

At this point, I'm rather
speechless. From what
everyone--from Abu to our driver
and other people in the Hachuck
region--had told me, as well as my
previous experience with the other
oracles in the country, I had
expected a wizened old man to greet
me at the oracle's house. But
instead, it was this girl.

MONTY

Hello Rin.

RIN

(nodding, in Bodoantan)

You have questions you want
answered.

MONTY

Yes. It concerns ghost light.

Monty explains about ghost light as Rin continues to nod at
his descriptions of his experience.

MONTY (V.O.)

Rin is sixteen years old and lives
with her mother in this little
alleyway in Laran Village. From
what I've understood, she had been
an oracle already for ten years,
ever since she began to talk. The
people around here are a bit in awe
of her, despite the fact that she
is so young. Probably because,
from what I've talked to everyone,
all of her predictions come
true. This, of course, enables her
to command top price for her

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
consultations--about a thousand
rues which is the equivalent to ten
pounds. The money she brings in
from her oracle appointments are
used to pay for household expenses
and for her mother's
medicines--since her mother is a
diabetic. Any extra money is being
saved for her college fund. She
says she wants to go to Puthyme
University and become a chemist. A
strange occupation to aspire to,
especially for an oracle.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

So you think you have ruled out all
possible scientific explanations
for your observations, Mr. Salo?

MONTY

I think it's always possible that
there's a scientific
explanation. But currently, I
don't have an explanation. I was
hoping you might.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

I can't guarantee the accuracy of
any of my predictions.

MONTY

They say that you are always right.

RIN

(smiling, in Bodoantan)

I've been very lucky in my short
life, Mr. Salo. I cannot depend on
my luck all the time.

MONTY

That's a very wise thing to
say. And I guess that's why you
want to become a chemist.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

That's right. My gift or my luck
could go away at any moment. It is
better to have some kind of plan to
fall back on. So tell me, what did
this ghost light look like to you?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

It was racing down the mountain while we were driving down, back to Sholing proper. And then it disappeared with the morning mist.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

While people have seen ghost light during the day, it is very rare. In my interpretation, the ancestor spirits of the mountain know that you are seeking the answers to ghost light.

MONTY

That's good, right?

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

Not necessarily. If the ancestor spirits don't approve, they may try to obstruct your progress through various means.

MONTY

Various means?

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

That could mean anything from bad luck to strange occurrences that you might not be able to explain.

MONTY

That sounds a bit ominous.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

But even if the ancestors approve of your quest to find out exactly what ghost light means, it may not be an easy journey for you. Ghost light is a mysterious phenomenon. I am only able to interpret it under certain circumstances--and sometimes, it may be because of luck itself.

MONTY

All right. So what do you suggest that I do about this?

(CONTINUED)

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

I would say, proceed with caution. The ancestor spirits can be a fickle lot. If the ancestor spirits truly approve of your quest to find out more about ghost light, then take your research step by step. At each step, reassess on whether or not you should continue.

MONTY

And what do you think my next step should be?

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

You would best know what your next step would be.

MONTY

But what would you do if you were in my shoes?

RIN

(hesitating, in Bodoantan)

I would seek the Spirit Hunter. He is difficult to find, though. I have only met him once.

MONTY

Ah. And I suppose if the ancestors don't approve, then I should just abandon my quest.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

That's correct.

Monty and Rin continue to discuss ghost light.

MONTY (V.O.)

For a kid of sixteen, Rin seems wise beyond her years. Perhaps it's because she's been an oracle since she has been very young. Or maybe it's because she has more important things to worry about rather than whether or not there are any ghost light to interpret. Like her family. And, strangely enough, she also seems to have doubt in her own abilities

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
 which only makes her seem all the more authentic. The other oracles were very confident--which made me think that perhaps they weren't so different from the fortune telling charlatans we have in the west.

Monty and Rin shake hands and he leaves the oracle's home the same way that he arrived.

EXT. ALLEYWAY OUTSIDE OF RIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Monty stops in the alleyway to look at the camera.

MONTY
 (to the camera)
 Well, it all sort of seems like a wild goose chase, doesn't it? I'm still not quite sure what the ghost light that we saw on the Sholing mountain meant or whether it was even what the locals said was ghost light. It could have very well been some sort of optical illusion or mirage, as Dr. Tongse suggested. However, Rin has given me an idea for the "next step" as she said. Since we saw ghost light during the day, we should try to find some ghost light during the night. Rin had suggested that the best way to go about that was to find this man that she calls the Spirit Hunter who has the knack of finding real ghost light. This Spirit Hunter person is notoriously difficult to track down. Fortunately, though, Rin has agreed to help us find him.

INT. LARAN VILLAGE PUB - EVENING

Inside a crowded cafe on the main street of Laran Village, Monty sits alone at a table, sipping a cup of coffee.

MONTY (V.O.)
 We're meeting Rin and her mother here at a local Laran Village cafe. She said she would be taking us to the Spirit Hunter who only
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
 prefers sending notes to the locals
 and would probably avoid us
 foreigners if we were to attempt to
 find him ourselves. Which is fine
 with me. With an appellation like
 "Spirit Hunter", I'm not sure what
 to think. Although I have a
 feeling that he's no city
 accountant.

Rin and her mother arrive at the cafe. They are both
 dressed in dark coats and black hats.

RIN
 Good evening, Mr. Salo.

MONTY
 Hello, Rin. So we're going to see
 this Spirit Hunter?

RIN
 (in Bodoantan)
 Yes. He will be wary of the film
 crew, but I think that maybe he
 will agree to take you on a hunt if
 I ask him.

MONTY
 Great. Please lead the way.

Monty gets up to follow Rin and her mother out of the cafe.

EXT. LARAN VILLAGE, MAIN STREET - EVENING

Monty and Rin walk down the main street of Laran
 Village. It is still relatively crowded with locals as they
 barter at the night market for supper.

MONTY
 So you say that you've only met the
 Spirit Hunter a couple of
 times. How did you first meet him?

RIN
 (in Bodoantan)
 The Spirit Hunter is a very strange
 man. He wanders around the
 Bodoantan wilderness by himself,
 chasing the ghost lights for a
 purpose that only he knows. I
 first saw him when I was only

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RIN (cont'd)
eleven years old. I had already
started reading as an oracle for a
year.

MONTY
Did he come to you for a reading?

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
Yes. At first, I thought he was
like the rest of the customers who
were not locals. That he was
coming to see this weird girl in
Hachuck Province who thought she
could interpret ghost light.

MONTY
And the locals actually believed
you while the tourists thought that
you were just some sort of sideshow
attraction?

RIN
(laughing bitterly, in
Bodoantan)
Exactly. Although I think the
locals may be guilty of this,
too. Of thinking that I'm some
sort of circus freak.

MONTY
You know you're not dissuading that
notion since you agreed to be
filmed by us.

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
Yes. But there is also the
practical side of things. Isn't
this exposure from your show also
going to be good for my business?

MONTY
Well, since you put it so
obviously...

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
Mr. Salo, there is no point being
subtle about it. Everyone knows
why I'm doing this. If you were in
my shoes, wouldn't you do this,
too?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

I suppose so.

MONTY (V.O.)

At this point, I was in some consternation that some teenager had managed to turn the tables on me. Sure, this was a valid question. What sensible human being wouldn't do what she was doing if they were in her situation? But no matter how interesting that subject was, it was not why I was there, walking in a village street in the middle of the night. So I had to change the subject of the conversation, no matter how clumsily it was done.

MONTY

So about this Spirit Hunter character. What did he do when you first met him?

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

I did the usual reading for him for some ghost light that he had seen during his travels. But then, that, he told me something unusual. He told me that I had a gift and that I should try my hardest not to abuse it. Then he gave me something.

MONTY

As payment for the reading you gave him?

RIN

(shaking her head, in Bodoantan)

It was something extra. It was this.

Rin reached into a pocket of her coat and withdraws a blue stone pendant.

MONTY (V.O.)

Rin shows me this pendant that the Spirit Hunter gave her. It looked like a rough blue stone of some sort, pierced through so that a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
piece of thread could be looped through it. It didn't look very unusual, but Rin explained to me that it acted as a locator, helping her locate things she was trying to find. These locator stones, apparently, are common charms in Hachuck Province. The small shops in the province, as well as those back in the large cities like Puthyme, sell such things. I had my doubts that it would work or not, but there wasn't any question that the locals here believed in these folklore notions.

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
It's a strange thing. But no more or less strange than the Spirit Hunter himself.

MONTY
So the Spirit Hunter didn't say anything else to you?

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
No. The next few times that he visited me, it was the same. The Spirit Hunter is a puzzling and enigmatic person.

MONTY (V.O.)
That certainly didn't bode well for my own understanding about the thing. However, I was already committed to this and was determined to see it through.

Rin and Monty walk to down main street and turn down an alleyway which leads to the edge of town. The buildings end and they find themselves in a dark clearing with nothing but a couple of flashlights.

MONTY (V.O.)
At this point, my insecurities and doubt flare up. What exactly am I doing in the dark?

RIN
(whispering in Bodoantan)
The Spirit Hunter travels and so is
not always around Laran. However,
we are in luck.

MONTY
(whispering)
We are?

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
The Spirit Hunter's rounds are
predictable. Around this time of
the year, he is also in the
area. I had sent a message to him
earlier about a possible meeting
and he has agreed.

MONTY
He isn't a ghost himself, is he?

RIN
(glaring at Monty)
Of course not. The Spirit Hunter
has flesh, just like you and me.

There is a rustling in the underbrush and Rin puts a finger
to her lips to indicate that they be quiet. She creeps up
toward one of the largest trees at the edge of the
clearing. Monty follows.

MONTY (V.O.)
If this isn't just like a horror
film, I don't know what is. At
this point, I'm scared out of my
wits. But for some reason, I keep
following Rin closer to the edge.

As they near the tree, the rustling in the underbrush grows
louder and a dark figure suddenly appears. It leans against
the tree, waiting for Rin and Monty to come closer. As they
walk closer, the figure resolves into a young man dressed in
black robes. He is wearing yak-skin boots and a necklace
made of ivory beads. He also holds a thick staff, taller
than he is.

RIN
(in Bodoantan)
Spirit Master. Thank you for
responding to my request.

Rin bows to the Spirit Master. Monty does the same although
he is clearly confused.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.)

The Bodoantans keep surprising me. I had thought that someone called the Spirit Master would be someone who looked older and more experienced. Not this young man.

SPIRIT MASTER

(to Rin in Bodoantan)

You are welcome, little one. It is rare that you request anything of me.

Rin shakes her head at the Spirit Master's comment.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

It is nothing, Spirit Master. This is Mr. Monty Salo.

MONTY

Hello. Do I call you Spirit Master?

SPIRIT MASTER

It is not necessary. It is a title that people around here have bestowed upon me. My name is Dal.

MONTY

You speak English. And very good English it is, too.

SPIRIT MASTER

Well, I learned English from a man who was an ex-pat from Albion.

MONTY

Rin has told me that you are named the Spirit Master because you go around the country tracking down ghost light.

SPIRIT MASTER

That is true, in a way. What do you wish to know about ghost light?

MONTY

(laughing)

I think I want to know everything. But perhaps I should start out with some simple questions. Is ghost light really

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (cont'd)
communication with the ancestors'
spirits?

SPIRIT MASTER
That depends on how you define
"ancestors' spirits".

MONTY
That sounds mysterious.

SPIRIT MASTER
Many times, it is. Sometimes even
I am quite clueless to what is
what. That is why I sometimes come
into one of the towns and talk to
oracles like Rin.

MONTY
Ah.

The Spirit Master gestures for Monty and Rin to step aside for a moment. He then brings out a lantern which he lights and puts on the ground. Then the Spirit Master motions for Monty to sit down. They all sit down on the ground around the lantern.

SPIRIT MASTER
Perhaps this is a better
analogy. Most of the time, the
ghost light I see can be explained
like this lantern--scientifically.

MONTY
You mean the northern lights or
aurora borealis.

SPIRIT MASTER
(nodding)
Yes. In those cases, I pay little
attention to it. But then there
are the times when ghost light is
ghost light.

The Spirit Master opens the door to the lantern and a small flame leaps from the lantern to his hand to dance along his fingertips. Rin gasps at the magical flame.

MONTY
How did you do that?

(CONTINUED)

SPIRIT MASTER

It is just an illusory trick.

The Spirit master snaps his fingers and the flame disappears.

SPIRIT MASTER

It is just a metaphor for ghost light that cannot be adequately explained by science.

MONTY

Hm. Like the ghost light I saw during the day.

SPIRIT MASTER

During the day? Well, that is rare indeed.

MONTY

Rin told me that depending on little things around the sighting, it could mean that either the ancestor spirits approve or disapprove of my quest to find out more about ghost light.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

I did.

SPIRIT MASTER

(murmuring in Bodoantan)

Ancestor spirits communicating during the day can be problematic.

MONTY

Excuse me?

SPIRIT MASTER

Seeing ghost light during the day can, indeed, mean almost anything. And it can also be a problem. You will probably have to proceed cautiously with your quest.

MONTY

Well...I was hoping that you could help me with that.

The Spirit Master crosses his legs into a lotus position and begins to hum a strange melody as he stares into the lantern.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY
(whispering to Rin)
What is he doing?

RIN
(whispering)
It is best to not disturb him.

MONTY (V.O.)
Actually, I wasn't sure if even Rin knew what the Spirit Master was doing at this point. Perhaps he was actually a charlatan who was just putting on a show for our cameras. But soon enough, he came out of his trance and told us that he had decided to allow me and the rest of the camera crew to tag along on his next ghost light hunting expedition.

INT. LARAN VILLAGE PUB - EVENING

Monty and the crew, minus Rin, are at the Laran Village Pub. The director and the producer are sitting with Monty at a table and drinking tea.

MONTY (V.O.)
Well, we were at the local pub again the next night. The Spirit Master said to meet him here before we began the expedition. I have no idea what to expect. Nor does any of the crew.

The Spirit Master arrives and greets Monty and the crew with a nod of his head.

SPIRIT MASTER
Are you ready for the expedition?

MONTY
I suppose we're as ready as we're ever going to be. Are we going off to the edge of the village?

SPIRIT MASTER
It will be a little further than that. We will have to drive out on the main road for a few kilometers south.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Great. Let's go, guys.

The Spirit Master, Monty, and the crew exit the pub.

EXT. 5 KILOMETERS SOUTH OF LARAN VILLAGE - EVENING

The Spirit Master, Monty, and the crew are riding in a van down the main road, south of Laran Village. The only light illuminating the surrounding countryside are the van headlights and the overhead moon.

MONTY (V.O.)

At this point, I'm somewhat questioning myself about going out in the middle of nowhere, in the night, with no one but some guide who thinks he can hunt ghosts and the hapless film crew. Little did I know, this was only going to be the beginning of our little adventure out in the boondocks of Bodoanta.

MONTY

(to the Spirit Master)

So exactly where are we going again?

The Spirit Master mumbles something as he stares out of the van window.

MONTY

(to Abu)

What did he say?

ABU

He said that we were going to a special place.

MONTY

Does Mr. Bumthar know where we're going since he's the one driving?

Abu confers with the driver, but Mr. Bumthar only shakes his head.

ABU

Sorry, Monty, but apparently Mr. Bumthar has no idea either. He's just following the Spirit Master's directions.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Great.

THE PRODUCER

Hey, look on the bright side. It would be an adventure.

MONTY

Looks like a rather dubious adventure to me.

THE PRODUCER

You should be excited. This is like the first time that something really interesting could be filmed.

MONTY

With our luck, we could be on our way to look at a rock.

THE PRODUCER

Maybe it would be a mystical rock.

MONTY

Did you eat something weird for dinner?

THE DIRECTOR

Hey, hey, hey. Knock it off. He's just looking on the bright side. And Monty, if we decide this whole outing is a bust, we can edit this out later.

MONTY

Is that a deal.

THE DIRECTOR

Uh, sure.

MONTY (V.O.)

Needless to say, we ended up not editing this segment out.

The van suddenly stops when Mr. Bumthar slams on the breaks.

MONTY

What the hell?

THE PRODUCER

Are we there yet?

(CONTINUED)

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
Are we there yet?

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Holy cow!

THE SPIRIT MASTER
(in Bodoantan)
Why have we stopped?

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
There's a cow in the road. Really.
I'm not kidding.

Mr. Bumthar hits the car horn which blares loudly. The producer and director cover their ears as Monty and Abu curse loudly, in English and Bodoantan respectively. The Spirit Master rolls his eyes and gets out of the van.

MONTY
Hey, what's he doing?

ABU
I don't know.

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Maybe he's going to go commune with
the cow.

The driver makes the car horn sound again.

THE DIRECTOR
Stop that! Abu, tell Mr. Bumthar to
stop that.

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
You should stop honking the horn.

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Why? The cow's not going to go away
if I don't keep on sounding the
horn.

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
What do you mean? The horn is not
doing a damn thing to get the cow
off the road.

(CONTINUED)

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
Well, I guess not.

Monty finally gets out of the van to see what the Spirit Master is doing. He is already a couple of yards down the road.

MONTY
Hey! Where are you going? I thought you were going to get the cow off this road.

THE SPIRIT MASTER
That would be pointless. The cow is in the road for a reason. It means that we have to make the rest of the journey on foot.

MONTY
Oh great. Hey you guys, we have to make the rest of the trek on foot.

As the rest of the filming crew groan at this inconvenience, Monty snatches a hiking pack and a flashlight from the back of the van and hurries to catch up with the Spirit Master.

The rest of the road in the Bodoantan countryside is unpaved dirt that scratches underneath their footsteps. There is no sound except that of the wind.

MONTY
So exactly where are we going? I didn't catch what you said back there.

THE SPIRIT MASTER
The place we're going doesn't have a name, exactly. But it is where we can find some ghost light, if we're lucky.

MONTY (V.O.)
At that moment, I wasn't even questioning why a cow would be out there in the wilderness, blocking the path of the van. I guess I was just assuming that there was a farm out here somewhere and that one of the cows had broken from the herd and had wandered out here. But afterwards, the crew made a few inquiries and we found out that

(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
there were no farms out here in the countryside. And that no one had any missing cows. So the cow that blocked our van remained a mystery.

THE DIRECTOR
Is it going to be long hike to our destination?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
It won't be long.

MONTY (V.O.)
Of course, despite the complaints from the crew, this hike in the darkness was like an example of sensory deprivation. If someone wasn't talking, there wasn't any noise except for the toneless wind. And the air was chilly, almost numbing. Aside from our flashlights, there was no light. Apparently, it was so cloudy that even the moon was covered up. It was kind of spooky, to say the least.

THE SPIRIT MASTER
(in Bodoantan)
It's ahead. I can sense it.

MONTY (V.O.)
It was only afterwards, of course, that I realized that the aurora borealis could only be seen if the sky had been clear.

MONTY
What was that?

ABU
The Spirit Master said that he could see something up ahead.

MONTY
Well, he has better eyesight than me, then. I can hardly see anything even with this flashlight.

EXT. THE OUTCROP - NIGHT

The Spirit Master finally stops walking. From the flashlights, the rest of the film crew discovers that they have reached an outcrop jutting out from a tall cliff that rises above their heads. The outcrop looks over a ravine, but in the dark, they cannot see how far below it drops.

THE SPIRIT MASTER

We will wait here.

MONTY

Here? It's a bit chilly. How long do we have to wait?

THE SPIRIT MASTER

As long as it takes. We have to think like hunters.

MONTY

Okay. So we have to think like hunters. I guess trying to track down ghost light is sort of like tracking prey. Maybe. Does ghost light lay down a trail that you could follow.

THE SPIRIT MASTER

It doesn't work that way. Most of it is trial and error. One finds places where one can observe ghost light. But one can never catch it.

MONTY (V.O.)

We wait at the outcrop for quite a while. It seems like hours and it's cold. I feel my face, hands, and feet go numb. The rest of the crew don't even complain and that kind of puts a damper on things. It's when I'm about to fall asleep when someone spots something.

ABU

Something's there out in the darkness!

The rest of the crew look toward where Abu is pointing. Something faint flickers in the distance.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY
(whispering)
Is that ghost light?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
Hm.

MONTY
What is that supposed to mean?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
Be a little patient.

MONTY (V.O.)
So we waited a bit longer. The bit of wispy blue light that we saw in the distance lingered for a couple more minutes and then disappeared. I wondered if we had just seen a bit of the aurora borealis or some other kind of optical trick. Finally, the director decided that maybe we should just turn off our flashlights to both conserve battery power and to better see anything out there. If there was anything out there. It was then, in that darkness, that I actually took a nap.

A little later, the Spirit Master shakes Monty awake and points to the edge of the outcrop.

MONTY
Huh?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
That is ghost light, Mr. Salo.

Monty looks over to the edge of the outcrop and it appears as if the entire ravine is covered in green light, swirling and bubbling as if it was a stew.

MONTY
Oh my God.

MONTY (V.O.)
This was something that I was not expecting. At all. After my experience on the mountain just outside of Sholing, I thought I knew what to look for, but this was
(MORE)

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MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
not it. At first, I even thought I was dreaming, but after numerous attempts at pinching myself and even getting the producer to pinch me, I was pretty convinced that I wasn't dreaming.

THE PRODUCER
Holy moly.

THE DIRECTOR
Are you getting all of this on camera?

MONTY (V.O.)
It was as the entire ravine beneath our feet had turned into a roiling neon green cauldron of ghostly soup. If there was a scientific explanation for it, my brain couldn't come up with it at that moment. I was just awed. Amazed.

MR. BUMTHAR
(whispering in Bodoantan)
What does it mean?

MONTY
This is the ghost light that you usually see?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
It's typical of this area.

MONTY
Are you sure it isn't just some kind of gas seep that's been set on fire?

THE SPIRIT MASTER
No! None of us are carrying matches. I'm not. Are you?

MONTY
No, but any kind of spark could ignite a gas line. Like dry vegetation or static electricity.

THE SPIRIT MASTER
I can prove it to you that it is not fire.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Wait, where are you going?

The Spirit Master begins to climb over the outcrop and into the ravine. He descends into the glowing green ghost light. It surrounds him like a mist, but he is not burning at all.

ABU

The Spirit Master is a brave man. I'm just shaking in my shoes just looking at the stuff.

MONTY (V.O.)

To be honest, I was too. But in the next moment, the Spirit Master came back out of the pool of ghost light.

MONTY

This wasn't what I was expecting at all. What does all of this ghost light mean?

THE SPIRIT MASTER

It doesn't mean anything in particular.

MONTY

What do you mean it doesn't mean anything in particular?

THE SPIRIT MASTER

This ravine is a low part of the country. It attracts any extra ghost light which collects into what you see now. You see that it's just resting here. It's not delivering any messages right now.

MONTY

Okay. So this ghost light stuff is just lying there. But what is it?

THE SPIRIT MASTER

It is difficult to describe. For me, it is like touching another world. You could try it yourself.

MONTY

Me? It isn't dangerous, isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

THE SPIRIT MASTER

In this resting state, no. You saw me down there, didn't you? It didn't do anything to me.

MONTY (V.O.)

Well, he did have a point there. So on the spur of the moment, I decided to climb down the outcrop. The head cameraman also volunteered to come down with me to see what it was about.

Monty climbs down the outcrop and emerges himself into the green ghost light.

MONTY

It's like light. I don't feel anything in particular. When I breathe, it's the same as if I was still on the outcrop. Yet there's all of this thing that I cannot explain, drifting by, sort of like a light show. It seems a bit mystical and yet also a bit artificial, too.

Monty reaches out to touch the ghost light.

MONTY

I feel nothing. I'm not sure what to think...

Suddenly, the camera jerks and Monty yells out in surprise.

MONTY

It's got you! We probably should get out of here.

THE SPIRIT MASTER

(calling from the outcrop)

You had better get out of there. The ghost light is getting agitated.

Monty and the cameraman struggle up the cliff and finally get back to the outcrop, breathing heavily.

MONTY (V.O.)

That was one scary moment. The ghost light, although feeling of nothing, had somehow interacted with us, particularly with the head

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
cameraman. It had jerked him about
a bit, but we had managed to get
out of there before the real
fireworks began.

THE DIRECTOR
Oh God, look at that! It's
magnificent.

The rest of the crew look up and see that the ghost light
that had been resting in the ravine rising out past the
outcrop. It streams outward like a fountain toward the sky.

THE PRODUCER
Wow.

THE SPIRIT MASTER
(in Bodoantan)
See, I told you.

MONTY (V.O.)
Finally, this is what we've come to
Bodoanta to see. Ghost light at
night in the Bodoantan mountain
wilderness. When you're there,
watching the green lights dance in
the sky, you have to feel a sense
of awe, whether this phenomenon is
some kind of natural mirage or
something else
altogether. Standing there on the
outcrop, you feel like a very small
being in the cosmos as the lights
dance above your head like a large,
sinuous serpent.

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
It's beautiful. I've never seen
anything like it.

MR. BUMTHAR
(in Bodoantan)
You don't suppose that there's
something to it?

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
What do you mean?

(CONTINUED)

MR. BUMTHAR

(in Bodoantan)

If it is the ancestors
communicating from beyond, exactly
what are they trying to say with
this light dance?

MONTY

What did Mr. Bumthar say?

ABU

He is wondering what the ancestors
may be saying from beyond.

MONTY

Do you suppose we need an oracle
here with us to interpret this to
us?

THE SPIRIT MASTER

There is no need for any intricate
interpretation for this particular
instance. The ghost light here
dance like that all the time.

The light flickers above their heads for a few more minutes
before dissapating into the air.

ABU

(in Bodoantan)

It's gone.

MR. BUMTHAR

(in Bodoantan)

Yeah.

THE SPIRIT MASTER

(in Bodoantan)

Only for tonight. If you wish, you
can see again tomorrow, if the
clouds hold.

MONTY (V.O.)

After the lights vanish, a
depressed mood settles upon the
crew. The ghost light, whether it
actually meant anything or not, had
been beautiful to behold.

MONTY

So I guess the ancestors aren't
against my quest to discover what
ghost light is if it's dancing like
that as it always was.

(CONTINUED)

THE SPIRIT MASTER

Well, I don't know about that, Mr. Salo. Sometimes the ghost light can be more subtle than what you or I might easily conceive.

MONTY (V.O.)

And with that vague pronouncement from the Spirit Master, we headed back to Laran Village, contemplative.

EXT. LARAN VILLAGE, MAIN STREET - MORNING

Monty orders a small powdered pastry and a coffee at one of the open cafes on Laran Village Main Street and sits at a plastic table with a tattered umbrella.

MONTY

I'm not sure what to think, to be honest. I've realized that the entire evening had been overcast so I can blame what I saw to the existence of the aurora borealis. But then again, I can't rule out the possibility that it is just another natural phenomena that has yet to be explained. Perhaps we should have been prepared and taken a scientist with us.

Monty takes a bite of the powdered pastry as a couple of kids run by, playing street football.

MONTY

Maybe it wouldn't have mattered, no matter how many experts we took with us. It was a strange experience. Our producer aptly described it as an acid trip, except without the drugs. This afternoon, we're going to visit Rin one more time and ask her what she thinks of this.

After finishing off his pastry and drinking his coffee, Monty walks off down the street.

INT. RIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Rin and Monty are sitting at the kitchen table again. Rin is wearing a t-shirt featuring another Bodoantan boy band. She is fingering a black stone as she listens to Monty recount the crew's experience with the Spirit Master's latest expedition.

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

The Spirit Master is right, you know. It is hard to tell. I would interpret it as ambiguity. If the ancestors truly did not want you to proceed with your quest, they would have stated it with no uncertain terms. I would suggest that you be cautious in your next steps.

MONTY

(laughing)

That's the curious thing. I'm not sure what the next steps would be. This is, after all, what we came here to film. If you can't tell me what ghost light is and the Spirit Master can't either, what am I supposed to do?

RIN

(in Bodoantan)

Sometimes finding the meaning of anything isn't obvious. Sometimes things aren't as objective as you'd like it to be. You have to find out what it means to you.

Monty gets out of his chair and bows to Rin, thanking her for her time. Then he lets himself out of the oracle's house.

EXT. 5 KILOMETERS NORTH OF LARAN VILLAGE - DAY

Monty is sitting in one of the back passenger seats of the crew van, looking out into the misty mountain landscape in a morose manner.

MONTY (V.O.)

Well, we're traveling again, heading north from Laran Village to an even smaller hamlet called Gada Zong up in the mountains. I'm in a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
strange mood during the trip,
contemplating what we had seen on
that outcrop just outside of
Laran. Was it real or just a
dream?

The van bumps along the road. At a particularly large pothole, the driver and the rest of the crew exclaim in surprise.

MONTY (V.O.)
Even Bodoantan's wonderful scenery
isn't enough to distract me. Or
the crew's complaints about the
treacherous roads. It's as if my
mind is in another dimension. Is
this what Rin the oracle had
alluded to? That I was supposed to
find my own meaning to what ghost
light was? Was my only problem in
traveling in the first place? Was
the solution merely staring me in
the face--that I should just stay
in one place, and just think?

The van winds around a mountain pass. The long winding road stretches out for many more kilometers into the mist.

EXT. GADA ZONG - EVENING

The van comes down a rutted road to a small hamlet that is composed of only a couple of houses built onto a nearby mountain side. Even from the dim light of the setting sun, large painted symbols for the evil eye gleam on the sides of the white-washed dwellings.

The van stops in front of one of the houses. The crew climbs out of the van. The master of the house comes out to greet the crew.

MONTY (V.O.)
This is the hamlet of Gada Zong,
some two hundred and fifty
kilometers north of Laran. The
population here is fifty, all of
them farmers or goat herders in
this mountainous country. We're
staying in Sarif Eda's house here
in Gada Zong proper. Eda is a
farmer and the mayor of the town
and has graciously offered to put

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
us up in the few days we will be
staying here.

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
Is that everyone and is that all of
the luggage that everyone is
bringing?

ABU
(in Bodoantan)
Yes, Mr. Eda. It's just the film
crew.

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
Good. The sun is fading fast. It
is probably a good thing to get
inside as quickly as possible.

The crew follows Sarif Eda up the fifty stairs to his house
on the side of the mountain.

INT. SARIF EDA'S HOUSE, MAIN ROOM - EVENING

Sarif Eda's wife has laid down a large colorful rug in the
middle of the living area. Many food dishes have been
placed on a squat wood table in the center of the rug and
everyone, the film crew and Eda's family, are seated around
the food. Everyone has a bowl of rice and the rest of the
dishes are served family style.

The curtains to all of the windows are drawn.

MONTY (V.O.)
Sarif Eda had graciously invited us
to dinner in his home. Eda's wife
Saru had prepared a traditional
mountain dinner for us. There is
rice, mountain greens steamed in a
sweet fermented sauce called nati,
goat stew with potatoes, and goat
cheese.

MONTY
(to Mr. Eda)
Do you not have yak up here?

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
There is yak up here in the
mountains, but they are wild yak
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SARIF EDA (cont'd)
and hard to catch. For our
village, our tradition is taking
the food that we ourselves have
raised. Thus the vegetables and
the goat stew.

MONTY
Ah, I understand now. This dinner
is absolutely
fabulous. Compliments to Mrs. Eda
on her culinary efforts.

MRS. EDA
(in Bodoantan)
Thank you!

While the crew is eating, a wolf howls in the distance. The
Eda family automatically make a strange gesture that is
remnescent of crossing themselves for the evil eye.

MONTY
What was that for?

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
To ward off the evil spirits. We
have some, uh, how do you call it?

Eda and Abu confer with each other for a moment in
translations.

ABU
Mr. Eda is talking about the local
folklore and superstition.

MONTY
Ah!

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
It is our custom to ward off evil
spirits with this gesture whenever
a wolf howls. Out in the night,
there are some strange things out
there. That is why we must ward
ourselves.

MONTY (V.O.)
The mountain villagers of Gada Zong
are far more superstitious than
their southern brethren. They
refuse to go out into the night for
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
any reason at all. However, it is not surprising that they do this. The mountains are indeed very dangerous. Aside from wolves, there are leopards that may prey on humans if the opportunity arises. And, of course, any number of imaginary boogeymen.

MONTY
What about ghost light? Does anyone here go out during the night to look at that?

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
That is in the past.

MONTY
What do you mean?

SARIF EDA
(in Bodoantan)
In the past, there used to be a monastery here, mostly devoted to communing with the ancestor spirits in the mountain. But then not too long afterwards, they abandoned it. Probably because there were too many evil mountain spirits.

MONTY (V.O.)
That, of course, piqued my interest. There was an abandoned monastery in the mountains? I would have to see that. But it would have to wait until the morning.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF GADA ZONG - DAY

Monty is hiking up a steep incline on a hill not far from the center of Gada Zong. Upon closer inspection, the incline is in fact a flight of stone stairs, worn down and overgrown with moss.

MONTY (V.O.)
The next day, Mr. Eda pointed me in the direction of the abandoned monastery nearby. I was sure that it was probably in ruins after being abandoned. But one does have
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (V.O.) (cont'd)
to wonder why it was abandoned in
the first place. Monasteries all
over the world have been
established successfully in remote
place. Particularly because it is
remote.

Monty arrives in front of the monastery which is a direct
building jutting out the side of the mountain. The roof
with a little of its golden paint and ornaments, however,
can still be seen, deteriorating from their former glory.

Faint writing can be seen on the entrance pillars.

MONTY
You can hardly make this writing
out. But it says, "Welcome to Gada
Zong Monastery." Well, maybe I'm
welcome, but it seems a little
spooky with no one else here.

INT. ABANDONED MONASTERY AT GADA ZONG - DAY

Monty walks through the entrance hall which is empty and
abandoned except for a bit of detritus that has blown in
from the winds.

From the entrance hall is a longer hallway that leads off
into several meditation rooms. Although empty, there are
still paintings of the Siddharta on the walls.

MONTY (V.O.)
Walking through the empty
monastery, aside from the obvious
signs of neglect, one could almost
imagine that the monks have just
gone on vacation and will be back
in a few days. I feel as if I'm
intruding.

At the end of the hall is the last room. The wooden door
closing the room off from the hall still exists. Monty
tries the door and it swings upon with a cloud of
dust. Monty coughs and then steps over the threshold. The
roof has caved in, revealing the bright sky above.

The room is a ghost light room. The background of the
remaining walls is painted black with the characteristic
swirl of green ghost light.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

(whispering)

It is obvious that the monks who lived here also saw ghost light. I wonder what all of these swirls and dips of the light that they depicted mean. Were they good omens? Or predictors to the abandonment that we see now?

Past the ghost light room, Monty steps out onto the balcony to survey the countryside below. Off to one side are the small cluster of houses that comprise Gada Zong. On the other side, there is a hill that is guarding a long valley filled with trees and a river.

Monty looks out and holds onto his hat to prevent it from blowing off into the wind.

MONTY

(to the camera)

I'm not sure what to think. And that is probably the real result of this entire trip. What is ghost light? Sometimes I think I know what it is. Other times, I'm not so sure. Perhaps it is all about personal interpretation. But all I know is, it's something both subtle and fundamental that pervades through Bodoantan life. Maybe as a Westerner, I may never understand it. But I can certainly try.

THE END