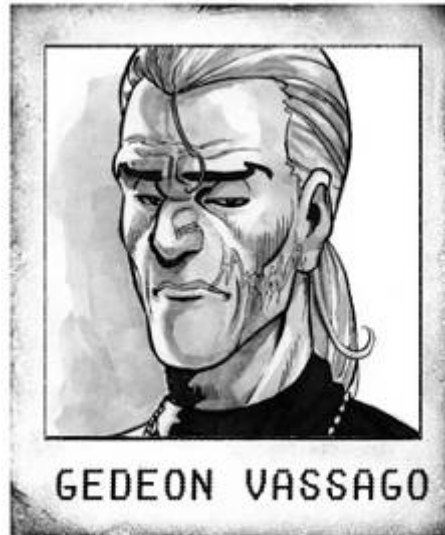


Sons of Nowhere Tales: “Leviathan”

By Nicholas Almand

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“Mr. Vassago?”

[Gedeon Vassago](#) was still trying to find his sea legs aboard the *Ramiel*. [The Ophion Foundation](#) had agreed to cover his California trip to investigate local reports of a sea monster, but he'd expected more than a sport fishing vessel.

“Mr. Vassago? D-do you have time for an autograph?”

Gedeon grunted. Seventeen years prior, he had been the star of a documentary television series called *Monster Killer*. For 6 years, he had journeyed to remote locations across the globe to personally verify reports of legendary creatures. In the end, he debunked the cryptozoological merit of most of his targets, hence the show's title. From the North American Sasquatch to the □living dinosaur□ in the Congo basin, nothing was held sacred. The show had quite a following in its day, but it had been almost two decades since then.

He was surprised that his shipmate, who looked to be all of 22 years old, knew who he was at all.

“Is now a bad time?” The nervous boy hastily backed away and returned to the boat's controls. The youth's name was Ashton Clark, the son of a wealthy businessman back on [Acis Island](#). Someone at Ophion must have owed the old man a favor, because they negotiated a handsome fee to let Ashton escort him to the city of San Figaro. Naturally, the *Ramiel* was Mr. Clark's personal fishing boat.

Gedeon considered him through weary eyes and pulled a cigarette from the pack in his jacket pocket. The kid hadn't stopped asking for an autograph since they left Acis Island. Gedeon half suspected that the boy only wanted one because old celebrities had a tendency to drop dead.

"Yeah, now's a bad time," Gedeon said, lighting his cigarette in a single fluid motion.

"That's okay. Uh, we should be getting close to San Figaro now," Ashton said.

Gedeon grunted in response. The coastline was a vague mass of color on the horizon. His eyesight hadn't been the same since he'd turned 60, but he was still too proud to wear prescription glasses in public. They made him look too much like a professor.

"So, what are we out here looking for?" Ashton scratched the back of his head. Based on how often he did so, Gedeon suspected it was a nervous tick. He obviously hadn't known about the Leviathan. The kid had been told everything except the most important details. Typical good old boy bullshit.

"Long story short, some old lady freaked out on Ophion's cryptozoology department, calling every ten minutes about how the demon Leviathan was flaunting its sin in the ocean."

Gedeon took a drag from his cigarette and exhaled. He ignored Ashton's attempts to suppress a cough. "We didn't pay any attention to her until the videos started showing up online."

Ashton looked puzzled, but continued to steer the boat.

"That's kind of our motto these days. 'Pics or it didn't happen.' Ophion isn't gonna send me out to investigate every time some kid screams about a monster under his bed."

"Wait, so we're looking for a demon?" Ashton raised an eyebrow.

"No. But it is a sea creature nobody can identify," Gedeon blew smoke into the cabin's ceiling as he stood up to leave. "We know it exists, we just don't know what it is. That's why I'm here."

"Well, they couldn't have picked a better guy for a cryptozoology director," Ashton grinned through the smoke as he followed Gedeon to the stern. Gedeon took hold

of the ladder just outside the cabin and climbed to the flybridge above. He frowned. A familiar weight was tugging at his abdomen. Gedeon kept a .45 Colt Pistol above his hip ever since one of his crewmen had a fatal encounter with a pair of wild chimpanzees in Guinea.

“Here, hang on to this,” He unholstered the gun and handed it to Ashton. “I’m gonna keep watch from up here, and I’ll need you to be sharp.”

“What’s this going to do against a sea monster?” Ashton held the weapon gingerly with both hands. “It probably wouldn’t even feel it!”

“Don’t be stupid,” Gedeon said. “I don’t want you to shoot the damn thing! I just don’t need it throwing off my balance up here. Now stash it in the cabin and get back to the cockpit before you hurt yourself.”

Ashton gave a quizzical look, but said nothing as he did what he was told. Gedeon had just turned his attention back to the ocean when the entire vessel lurched forward.

“Holy crap! We hit something!” Ashton shouted from below. Gedeon gripped the flybridge’s support beams, searching the water in all directions. Nothing.

It was then that he heard Ashton scream.

The water on the boat’s starboard side was rising rapidly, forming a bloated hump that already towered past Ashton’s cockpit inside the cabin. Something massive was about to breach the surface, and Gedeon’s blood went cold. It had just occurred to him that the *Ramiel* was the only boat on the water.

Gedeon could not get a clear look at the beast the first time it burst forth from the depths. The creature was almost three times the length of the *Ramiel*, and more than twice as wide. A rubbery, spade-shaped head and a spine covered with bone-like plates were all he could make out through his blurred vision. The waves crashed into the boat, drowning out the boy’s cries and nearly jerking Gedeon from the flybridge. Gedeon’s arms burned as he struggled to hold on.

“Give me a damn break!” he kept his footing, annoyed that Ashton was still screaming in the cockpit. There was always one guy in every expedition who was prone to freak-outs. It was just his luck for this kid to be one.

The creature swam ahead of the *Ramiel*, twisting its body back and forth in a surprisingly violent manner. With a second look at its bulk, Gedeon noted that many of

the bony plates had been torn off of its back. The skin beneath was shredded, pouring dark liquid from the fresh wounds. He recognized the injury patterns instantly. The creature had collided with a large seafaring craft, possibly a cruise ship or a commercial fishing vessel. Its tail rose from the water as it dove. Almost half the size of the Ramiel, the tail was composed of three slick protrusions in a rough trident-shape.

“You all right down there?” Gedeon said. The beast out of sight now, leaving behind a massive wake that rocked the boat. Ashton did not reply for a few moments.

“I-I’m okay,” Ashton said. “I just threw up, that’s all.”

The boat lunged to the side.

“What is that? *What is that!?*” the boy’s voice cracked. Gedeon froze. For all the world, it looked like five massive, frog-like fingers were gripping the port side of the Ramiel. In an instant, the boat was dragged to the left with such force that Gedeon feared it would capsize. Water rushed onto the deck, and Ashton was screaming again. Gedeon noted grimly that five monstrous fingers were now clutching the starboard side of the boat, too.

Gedeon barely had time to leap down to the deck before the giant fingers were joined by that damnable rubber spade that dwarfed the entire boat. Its colossal skull fell upon the bow and splintered the flybridge against the roof of the cabin. In a single clumsy motion, the beast nearly sank the Ramiel. The cabin was half-flooded as the deck slipped just below the surface. Gedeon’s heart resumed beating when the deck bobbed back above water, but the oppressive weight and putrid stench of the Leviathan left him paralyzed.

The enormous creature grasped the ship tightly, but it did not fall below the surface of the water again. Gedeon could not see its face beyond the interior of the cabin, but its actions had begun to remind him of a child playing with a bath toy. Its shovel-shaped protrusion rested on the entire cabin like a gruesome canvas, and loud, rhythmic breathing assaulted Gedeon’s ears from above. With each ghastly exhalation, a fresh spray of seawater fell on his head. He realized that he could not hear Ashton’s voice anymore.

“Kid?” Gedeon whispered. No answer came from inside the cabin.

“Kid, are you all right?”

Gedeon rose to his feet cautiously. If the Leviathan noticed him, it gave no indication. It continued to stare, unblinking, into the cabin. Gedeon shook his head. His eyesight was worse than he had thought. He could barely make out any details of the creature's face other than its damnably human-looking eyes. The mere sight of them filled the man with such dread that he could not describe it even to himself. He felt somehow compelled to keep his eyes on his feet, as though his very life depended on it. For a moment, the child in Gedeon Vassago felt a thrill. It was just like Perseus approaching Medusa.

"Dammit kid, answer me," Gedeon said, slowly approaching the cockpit. Ashton was slumped over the wheel. Gedeon's thigh brushed something heavy on the cushions; his pistol. He picked it up and gently placed a hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Don't tell me you fainted," Gedeon sucked in his breath. Ashton Clark was dead. There were no visible injuries he could identify, but the poor lad's face was twisted in the remains of a primal scream. Looking upon his grisly expression, Gedeon swore he could still hear the boy's desperate cries. His stomach twisted up in knots as the reality began to set in. Gedeon felt like vomiting. All the kid had wanted was a goddamn autograph from a washed-up old man, but he couldn't even have been bothered to--

He made the decision almost in a trance. Gedeon disengaged the safety from the pistol and fired three shots into each of the creature's enormous eyeballs. Glass broke and gallons of black fluid spilled into the cabin. The monster released its grip on the boat immediately and dove back into the water, rocking the entire vessel as its spade-shaped head slid from the roof of the cabin.

Gedeon watched as the monster fumbled blindly in the water, surfacing and diving as though it had no idea which way was up. He closed Ashton's eyes and set his jaw, placing the body on the floor of the cabin as he took hold of the wheel.

He followed the Leviathan's confused, lumbering path through the ocean from a safe distance, eyes fixed on its position like a seasoned hunter. It surfaced briefly, exposing its wounded back to him. Gedeon took a shot with his pistol, watching with no small amount of satisfaction as it shuddered and veered sharply to the right. He fired again, this time striking its right side. The creature swam abruptly to the left. Gedeon smiled bitterly.

Each time it surfaced, Gedeon fired a pair of bullets into the soft, injured flesh of its back. He had to use both of the spare clips he kept in his jacket, but Gedeon was able to herd the creature into San Figaro Beach.

The shallow water did the rest.

The Leviathan struggled on the beach for two hours before it finally died of blood loss. Gedeon Vassago made it a point to study every moment of its agony. When Animal Control attempted to rescue it, it became clear that Gedeon's poor eyesight had most likely saved his life.

For most human beings, looking directly upon the creature's face resulted in violent, potentially lethal panic attacks. Those who did not suffer from irrational horror reported an overpowering, suffocating compulsion to despair. Only the bespectacled workers felt less debilitating effects once their glasses were removed. Several layers of industrial tarp were placed over the Leviathan's face in order to spare passers-by the danger of casual exposure.

Just as intriguing, however, was the effect the creature's carcass had on local wildlife. Animals seemed to instinctively avoid the creature. Seagulls refused to feed upon its flesh, and there were no fish in the beach's shallow waters. More distressingly, the enormous mass had not begun to rot, even after hours had passed. Tooth analysis identified the creature as a sperm whale, but Gedeon was hardly convinced of that.

In the end, the city of San Figaro decided to saw the Leviathan into smaller, more manageable pieces and distribute them to research laboratories across the United States. It was a fate too good for it, of that Gedeon was sure. He was interviewed by *Cryptid Hunters Weekly*, but per Ophion policy only gave them the most basic facts.

Ashton Clark's death would be handled discreetly, but the way the Ophion Foundation tended to 'handle' such things made Gedeon sick. Ashton had been a good kid, and Gedeon wanted more than anything to give the boy his due as part of the operation. As it was, everything related to Ashton's death would be considered Top Secret until the organization had a chance to conduct an investigation. It was funny how those investigations always absolved the Ophion Foundation of any wrongdoing.

As the Ophion helicopter approached to bring him back to Acis Island, Gedeon sighed. He folded a piece of paper, signed it, and addressed it, “To my biggest fan, Ashton Clark.”

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