

RAVEN'S APPRENTICE by D. Robert Hardy

EXCERPT

I awoke in a dream to a crackling fire. Pockets of pitch burst from the heat and split the dried fir boughs. It was dark. Was I still asleep? As my vision adjusted to the light, something caught my eye on the sandstone wall, a... dancing owl man? It had been a long day behind the wheel and perhaps too much sun. My eyes drifted back to the fire. It was soothing and familiar, but I was drawn back to the sandstone wall.

Then I saw it. An aboriginal petroglyph carved into the sandstone canvas. It was an owl with a big head, buggy eyes and stick-like legs. It appeared to be dancing as if the beach fire was burning its toes. I watched it hotfoot around for some time then noticed another carving a little farther along the wall, a horned figure beckoning me to come closer.

Another petroglyph came to life, a sun-like sketch with a tunnel. Suddenly the sea creature beside it came to life. It was a crude drawing of a monstrous six-gill shark. I had read that they lived off the southern tip of Hornby. A little farther along, round moon faces peered out of the rock as they danced and blinked off and on. It was so magical and captivating. I continued along the wall to see...

A wolf with a round orb on its snout appeared to be baying at the moon. Another figure glowed and stretched out its wings like a magnificent thunderbird. It was looking right at me as if questioning, "Why have I been summoned?" As it faded into the wall, another figure materialized with a huge smile and a crown on its head. It was holding a flat fish and posing like a proud fisherman.

The sandstone faded but I was still in the dream. I was walking through low-lying salal and leafy high-bush huckleberries. The air was arid like it might burst into flames. I made my way through some trees to a clearing. There was a dried-up creek-bed of sandstone that looked like it had been worn down by rushing winter waters.

Perched on a rock pinnacle near the creek-bed was the oversized raven. He sat quietly. I looked down at the creek-bed where a human-like figure was carved into the stone. It was a woman squatting, giving birth in the traditional native way.

I fell back into soft moss as if pushed by a silent hand. The petroglyphs began to dance slowly in my head like a zoetrope parade blending one into the other. They all demanded my attention at once, as if they wanted to be understood as a complete thought, all as one and one as all, but the message was beyond my understanding and their meaning was lost.

I felt the warmth on my face. A bright light was prying its way into my eyes. The sun was just coming up over the trees at Helliwell Park and the cold evening air was losing its edge.

It had all been a dream. I felt “out of sorts” like I was hungover, and it was Sunday morning and I didn’t know where I was and where for ... I sat up against the log and slowly gathered my thoughts on the smouldering embers of the fire. I looked at the sandstone wall for evidence of the dream. There was none. I went closer. The morning sun streaked along the length of the rock face. There were faint markings, but the light wasn’t right. I moved back from the wall. Shadows filled the ancient markings and they became visible. One appeared, then another. They were all there, the owl man, the horned figure; the sun tunnel ... smiling crowned face. The only thing missing was the petroglyph of the woman giving birth. I am sure if I explored the island, I would find it, but I had to continue north.