

What Secrets Those Eyes Conceal

by Alan Scott

The sky over Denali National Park was so clear this mid-March night that Mark felt he could see every planet in the solar system, every star in the Milky Way. On such a moonless night, the landscape should be shrouded in darkness but it only enhanced the stars' brilliance. Though dimly lit, the surrounding landscape had a beautiful if not other-worldly look to it. The mountains around him rose up like guardian angels, standing in silent vigil.

Mark lay on his back with hands clasped behind his head and gazed upward. Large patches of snow still dotted the riverbed. The cold kept most hikers far away this time of year. Only muted sounds of insects gave any indication that other life besides him existed in this lonely spot. Occasionally, the wind whispered through the brush around the area where he arrived to set up camp for the night. Mark took off the wool cap he always wore when hiking during winter, in spite of the chill. He chose to let the northern breeze rustle his short coal-black hair.

Hiking into the park for this type of solitude was relaxing to the point of being therapeutic for a man with a psionic-enabled mind. There were no other people around to interfere or confound his clairvoyance or telepathy. This blissful isolation from the din of large cities such as Juneau, Anchorage or Fairbanks allowed Mark to recharge and rejuvenate his mental prowess. It also allowed him to exercise his tall, muscular body, which he kept in top physical shape.

He snapped out of his reveries, remembering he needed to eat something before settling in for the night. A few minutes later, Mark had a small fire going to heat some food and drink for a fast meal. He quickly cooked and ate, taking care to clean up by placing the remains of his meal in the required sealed container to discourage bears from foraging through campsites, a requirement of Denali National Park and a life-preserving act as well. Mark stood and surveyed the riverbed while calmly sipping an almost palatable cup of instant coffee; the low fire softly illuminated the snow.

He sucked in his breath, gasping in surprise as a pair of golden eyes stared back at him from fifty yards away. Then just as quickly, they were gone. Mark realized he had been holding his breath and exhaled slowly.

A wolf? Certainly not a bear, he thought, alarmed.

The fact that a creature could get so close to him, especially an efficient hunting machine like the wolf was disturbing. Animals, most notably untamed wildlife, could rarely be detected by psionic abilities such as telepathy or empathy. Mother Nature kept her creatures mentally inaccessible in a maternally, protective maneuver.

On the other hand, Mark felt that his psionic abilities or heightened senses should have alerted him to the presence of such a nocturnal visitor and a hungry one at that. This late in winter with spring still sometime off, wolves may be getting desperate for food and searching beyond their territory. And wolves never traveled alone.

He sat his coffee cup on the rocky ground and focused on the spot where the golden eyes had appeared. Mark fumbled through his backpack for his flashlight; however its weak beam shed little light beyond the campsite. Frustrated, Mark tried to think of another source that would be bright enough to light up the area further than ten feet.

The small campfire could be enhanced with pyrokinesis, he thought, but that is my weakest ability, and therefore my least practiced. Still, I have to see what's out there.

With every bit of his pyrokinetic power, he punched the small fire. With a muffled 'whump', flames shot ten feet in the air in a huge fireball, illuminating the surrounding landscape in a flash. Darkness returned in an instant. The exertion caused Mark to feel light-headed, and he put a hand to his head to steady himself. The feeling quickly ebbed. The minor explosion lasted just long enough for Mark to see that nothing was there. Even an animal as swift as a wolf could not have moved that fast to hide behind the nearest bush, far away on the river bank, let alone an entire pack.

As Mark peered into the blackness, the ghostly eyes re-appeared but much further distant as the first time. He knew nothing had been standing there a second ago.

They seem to be calling me, he thought curiously, feeling no fear or danger in them. He stowed his coffee cup, doused the fire and pulled on his wool cap. He set off jogging across the riverbed with an easy gait. His eyes adjusted to the dim light but the jagged and loose rocks of the ground presented the danger of turning an ankle and falling, resulting in further injury. The short boots he wore lent some support but the khaki shorts would do nothing to protect his bare knees in case of a fall. The warm coat and stocking cap kept his upper torso warm but slightly constrained. Shorts even in this cold allowed him more movement and flexibility. His breath formed a small cloud of precipitation in front of him as he ran, strangely lit by the starlight.

To reduce the possibility of injury, Mark attempted a short distance teleport to the relatively smoother and less treacherous river bank. That expenditure of psionic energy would have certainly frightened away any creature with a highly developed nervous system such as a wolf, but apparently the owner of the ghostly yellow eyes was not so easily scared. In fact, they seemed to be urging him faster, now that he demonstrated his capability of covering large distances with ease. From the bank, he saw the eyes peering down at him from a ridge high above. Another teleport to the ridge, and the eyes appeared deeper into the park. Several more jumps and Mark found himself far into the isolated reaches of Denali National Park. Even if it were light enough for him to see landmarks, he knew that he was unfamiliar with this well-hidden area, well out of his comfort zone.

Mark began to feel the impact of the short 'jumps' he had been making. Normally, such exertions would not have affected him so quickly but the use of his pyrokinesis had managed to weaken him, and his teleportation ability.

I don't know how much longer I'll be able to keep up, he thought with a little weariness.

Mark materialized at the top of a mountain ridge, in the midst of a copse of pine trees and searched for the eyes, but they did not reappear this time. He scanned the vicinity slowly to ensure he had not missed them in haste, but the darkness remained solid.

A rifle shot from far away reverberated off the mountainsides, shattering the peaceful silence of the night. A surge of adrenaline pumped its way into Mark's veins as the implications and recognition soaked in. He extended his clairvoyance forward, spreading it out wide, riding on the wave of the adrenaline rush, which dispelled the draining effects of the teleportation. He managed to identify the source and jumped to another ridge a mile away. As he materialized, he scanned the scene below him from his hiding spot in horror. Approximately one hundred yards away in a small valley, a four-wheel drive pickup stood with its headlights blazing into the dark brush surrounding it. Behind it and next to the truck bed, Mark saw three bobbing beams from flashlights, as they played over the blackness not perverted by the vehicle's headlights.

One beam of light was directed into the bed and lit up the cargo. Mark's blood ran cold. The bodies of at least three wolves lay stretched out. The silhouettes cast by the flashlights revealed three men, each armed with a high-powered rifle. While he watched the gruesome scene, a fourth carcass was placed next to the other three, all laid out carefully as though they were objects of art for horrible display.

Poachers! Mark's anger surged at the thought. Barely aware of his actions, he curled back his upper lip, baring his teeth in a wolf-like snarl. With a slight telekinetic nudge from his mind, the truck's headlights shattered, plunging the valley into darkness, except for the inadequate beams from the flashlights. At the sound of breaking glass, the three men whirled about training their lights to the front of the truck.

Even from his distance, Mark could hear them whispering in alarm to each other, demanding to know what happened. They crept slowly forward to the front of the truck, keeping their flashlights focused ahead and rifles ready for any creature lurking nearby. A creature with the ability and intelligence to smash two headlights simultaneously.

Mark emitted a low growl from deep in his throat. His telepathy, a much stronger ability and untouched by the previous expense of paranormal powers was summoned and he thrust his psionic field into each man's mind.

You bastards will see what I want you to see, Mark sneered.

Two yellow eyes appeared in front of the men. Immediately, gun shots rang out, bullets piercing the air where the orbs hovered, and the men shouted in fear. The eyes vanished. The flashlights revealed nothing.

Mark probed their minds again, and the eyes appeared behind the truck, only closer and larger. The men were nearing panic as the yellow orbs turned to gold and approached

them slowly. Gunfire exploded as the men blindly emptied their rifles in a futile effort to eliminate the apparition. Mark pressed his telepathy deeper into the regions of their minds that housed the basest horrors of man, where the ghosts and goblins of the sub-consciousness lurked. Tapping into this resource of nightmares, Mark's psychic abilities released their terror.

The eyes turned red, becoming angry and full of vengeance.

Their raw naked fears, now personified and confronting them, reached an interminable peak and the men fainted away, unable to cope with their dreadful situation. Mark dropped his telepathy and studied the unconscious heap of low-life humanity below him.

I'll see to it that their crimes are discovered by morning, he thought viciously. They will know they have faced my wrath.

Poachers that hunted and killed animals outside the rules of wildlife conservation infuriated Mark and he felt no remorse in the intrusions into the minds of such vermin.

Before he could move toward the men, Mark had a sudden feeling of being watched. Looking around, he saw the silhouette of a wolf – living and breathing, no apparition – watching him from an open area of the ridge a short distance away. The wolf's head was up and ears cocked in his direction. Its eyes glowed yellow-gold, as it studied him. They blinked once. Then the wolf turned and scurried away into the brush.

There's no light in the vicinity that could have been reflected in the wolf's eyes to give that effect, Mark thought. How could they have glowed like that?

He proceeded down into the valley to secure the men, wondering what mental state they would be in once they regained consciousness, recalling the night's horrors in a jail cell, but Mark could not shake his scrutiny by the wolf on the ridge

A realization swept over him slowly.

How arrogant we have been, he wondered, pausing in his task. How elitist we've been in our notion that man is the only creature with the capacity of psionic ability. It would stand to reason that others species have developed some powers, such as telepathy as well. The wolf reached out to me in his own way, to stop the killing of his kind. In doing so, I took on some of the wolf's own characteristics, when I growled and bared my teeth.

Mark stopped and searched the area with every power in his arsenal, but could find no sign of the wolf or any indication of its passing.

How awesome would that be to communicate with another species, he thought excitedly. We could probably understand what life is like for a non-human to co-exist with us.

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For the second time that night, he realized with surprise that his mind had wandered off. With his task finished and he was assured that the poachers would be secure until the Denali rangers arrived, Mark returned to his campsite. He unrolled his sleeping bag and crawled in, but sleep didn't come quickly.

Those eyes, he thought, they will haunt my sleep forever more. I now recognize the sadness in them when they first appeared. We'll have to rethink our perceptions of these creatures we share the earth with, because they seem to have a good grasp on us.