

The Hollow

Most of us prefer life among these mountains. It goes on pretty much as it always has. Our isolation from the stream of events outside doesn't concern us much. These mountains have always offered us clearly defined horizons. Of what real consequence is it to us if some evil is lurking on the other side? As long as we remain ignorant of it, there is no cause for alarm. What, if not the security of these mountains, gives the serenity which is an inescapable part of our entire way of life? That is why we shun all foreigners, those who—driven by some universal faith we find unfathomable—would tear down these mountains and expose us to the brutal forces of change, forces that have the power to destroy our very existence.

If they could, these outsiders would crush our beloved mountains into insignificant sand-heaps, to be blown away by the wind, leaving only an occasional dune where once a sturdy barrier had stood. This is what frightens our simple-minded folk the most, and it is this which causes us to regard the hollow in which we live—our *abyss* if you will—as vulnerable. That's the harsh fact, seldom openly acknowledged, which inspires us at times to adopt a defensive spirit. We have our truths. Our faith cannot be compromised. To us skepticism is even worse than outright denial.

It is the very presence of those infidels who infrequently find their way into our humble community that shakes the foundations of our beliefs and thus prompts all of our inquisitions and lynchings. As they hang, we hear confirmation of their infidelity whispered on their dying breaths: "Those who propagate the most lies have the greatest need to believe they are true." For what is truth if not that which preserves and gives us comfort, something as immutable and unchanging as the very mountains which surround us? Our truths and our mountains are a parapet within which we are safe.

And truly, not many of our young people run away to the cities, as most people from the outside think—blindly assuming the superiority of their own way of life to ours. Few parents here worry about the futures of their sons and daughters. There is little fear that they will ever leave this valley. They will die here just as their ancestors did.

No, we all stick pretty much together, like a happy herd of mountain goats, growing round and fat as we get older, huddled safely together with the mountains to protect us. The few who do leave—and they are very few indeed—are mostly claustrophobics who long for a place where the only limitation to the power of their sight is the strength of their vision. But for us, we are content to look forever at these mountains, for we know that when they tumble and die, so shall we.