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## **The Death of Tecumseh**

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This is the truth: Tecumseh's death is a mystery.

Story One: There are many works of art in the United States Capitol Complex. A black marble bust of Martin Luther King Jr. is the result of a national competition, and is the only African-American effigy to have the honour of existing in the airy complex. "The Columbus Doors" are 20 000 pounds of bronze. They rarely open, because they are so heavy. In the "The Baptism of Pocahontas" a grown woman kneels before a priest, the surrounding colonists look down upon her and glow with white light.

Another work, a frieze, entitled "The Death of Tecumseh" is not unlike the rest of the art. Most of the Indians are kneeling or lying upon the bronze grass. Tecumseh is one of them. He lies dying in the arms of another Indian while Colonel Johnson points his pistol down at them from upon his bleeding horse, a young tree trampled below its body.

Story Two: The Prophet looked down upon his brother only for a moment. He and another lifted Tecumseh, now cut down from life, and began to walk. The journey along the river was long, and Tecumseh was heavy, like wood. Yet the Prophet did not feel the length of the journey, nor the weight of his brother's body.

He was elsewhere. He thought of other battles, fought and lost. Prophet's Town was bloody. Despite his assurance to his warriors that the white men's bullets would not cut their skin, they did not believe strongly enough in his powers, did not hear the voice of the Master of Life as he did, and died accordingly. Such was the destitution of his people, he thought; not the encroaching whiteness, but the inability for them to fully realize the powers that he had bestowed upon them.

Tecumseh too had walked away from the spirit. What is confederacy when there is no soul to bind its limbs and fill its mouth with voice? If he had not been in the south recruiting other tribes to fortify his silly alliance, Harrison's troops would have simply passed by, and Prophet's Town would not have been burned into the sky. The Prophet felt an uneasiness at this thought. Jealousy, like smoke, comes from a fire. He knew this feeling well and had ways of stopping it from entering his mind. He refused to believe that Tecumseh was anything but misled by white men, greed, and naivety. The uneasiness dissipated into the air.

However, The Prophet and Tecumseh were not so divergent in their goals. They both wanted to unite the Indian nation; that much was clear. But Tecumseh's path steered him away from the voice of the Master of Life. He embraced too much the ways of the white man. The farms, the alcohol, the guns. His oration was exquisite, and this also made The Prophet wary. That he talked like white men, and that he could convince them to trade or negotiate peaceful passage through their lands was beyond The Prophet. His inability to comprehend Tecumseh's method led only to distrust.



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It was this same distrust that made The Prophet disregard Tecumseh's warning to leave Harrison's army in peace. The Prophet had a vision that told him otherwise. It was as though he could see through the night, and there he envisioned his men, unscathed by colonial weapons, pointed in the attack, a total defeat. And so he sent them out into the dark morning to surprise the Americans and conquer them without the use of Tecumseh's infantile tactics; talk and the like. It was to be The Prophet's shining moment, and a confirmation of the power of the Master of Life, the infallibility of the spirit.

But his warriors were cut down. Harrison trampled them like horses do saplings, and came down the hill, into the village, where The Prophet had just fled in visionary anticipation of impending fire and smoke. And with this defeat all hope of uniting the nation faded: the loss was irreparable. Tecumseh returned to find the village a blackened, charred landscape, and The Prophet was nowhere to be found. It was the beginning of the decline of their Shawnee.

And now this: The Prophet, carrying his dead brother along the river.

Story Three: Along the Thames river, where the final battle took place, white light scoured the forest floor, as though there were no trees to shadow the bodies. All was massacre, and it had been too long already. Rapid changes in little time. Like the sea had risen and washed up these corpses, mangled, like they had been chewed by the rocks and cast out. There were arms twisted like driftwood, faces bleached as beach sand.

Except for one. He lay face up. He was naked of all garments. His right thigh bled and was only partially dry. There were strips taken from the flesh: razor strap souvenirs to sharpen American blades. The blood dried in streaks down the thick, outer side of the thigh, creating the illusion that it were still bleeding, changing. Other than the tears from his bottom half and the bullet hole in his shoulder, he was statuesque. Bronze, intact, and completely silent. Of course death had quieted him, but his silence was beyond his body. Like a man in thought, he stared into the sky, eyes fully lit by the sun. The blood had not left his complexion despite the earth's insistence that it return to the ground.

Story Four: Whitley was too old to be on the battlefield but was allowed to come on as a volunteer because of his voracious thirst for hunting Indians and his bravery (which bordered on madness). He was shot. He collapsed face down, now a heap, lying beside his pistol. It was a fine pistol, so fine in fact that it made many of the other American mercenaries in his company jealous. It was the kind of pistol that few could afford, and, if a soldier could not afford one, owning one came only with the fulfillment of duty, for which there were other, higher costs. Whitley himself was a victor in no less than 17 battles, during most of which his pistol was the instrument of death for countless Indians. Each Indian stood for one notch that he would etch into the barrel handle with a sharp rock or a kitchen knife. That is, if he could remember how many he had shot that day. He did not count colonists, out of respect.

King, Whitley's comrade, was hiding behind a tree. A mercenary more fearless than brave, he had imagined that his name entitled him to a certain station in life; unfortunately this thought had never proven true. Up to that point he had trudged through life as a farm labourer and faced many difficult



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times at the hands of poverty and vicious farm owners. Thus, conscription came to his door like a gift. War was opportunity, and nothing else seemed to matter once it had opened itself to him. He abandoned the farm, and the mercenaries gave him a gun. Although he knew very little of the reasons his presence was required, being away from the farm owner's fist and from hunger were reasons enough to stay. He was aware that his body was being used for a cause, and took enjoyment in shooting Indians, but was confused by Colonel Johnston's rallying speeches, about why the British abandoned the Indians (a lucky coincidence, he thought), and about why they were fighting by a muddy river in the dense forest. Fields are more conducive to death, he thought. He was comfortable in fields.

King saw Whitley die. Whitley, although decorated and extremely lucky, was not known for his intelligence, and his recklessness put him in the line of what looked like four and more bullets: they peppered his body, and King did not even flinch when he dropped dead weight onto the moss. King stared at his corpse. He thought about flesh. It was everywhere, and blood, too. Whitley and another Indian laying only 2 feet away from his right side were the most horribly maimed in King's field of vision. They hardly resembled humans, let alone the corpses that he had seen at funerals of dead aunts and second cousins (who largely died of small pox), or even in other battles. This battle, in the place they called Upper Canada, was different. Fixated upon the dead soldier and the Indian, a thought crossed his mind. It does not matter for whose side one fights. Dead is dead, and they carry you away just the same.

This thought was broken by a ricochet off the huge oak behind which he hid. They had spotted him, and his gun was jammed with powder.

There was no remedy available to him in his present situation. The only solution, which was ridiculous, was to shimmy down, go around the less-watched side of the tree, crawl to Whitley's corpse, and steal his gun. The aim of the Indian was fiercely accurate; they would be down upon him in a minute if he were grazed by a bullet or even if he tripped. That is of course, if the pistol balls did not kill him instantly, like they did Whitley. All things come around, he thought. With this in mind, he crouched, and sprang. All the while a rain of balls whipped by him. He felt protected by God; a feeling he had never had before.

Now safer again behind the tree, he hastily examined the pistol. It was already loaded. He was comforted by its beauty. He lifted it, took aim, and shot an Indian through the collar bone. "One," King said in a whisper. The Indian, decorated like a chief, was also hiding behind an enormous oak; he was waiting to attack, and was caught off guard. He fell slowly backwards, face up, reaching out to the trunk of the tree on his way towards the soft ground.

Story Five: It is said that Tecumseh had a vision of his own death. In it, he stood in front of a white structure. It was Romanesque in its construction and enormous in size. Its face was lined with columns that stood at the top of a long set of stairs. The cornice was perfectly round, and in it were windows punctured into the marble that resembled eyes. It was as big as a mountain and as white as the sun.

The doors were huge bronze walls, and they were open. He climbed the stairs and entered, and his bare



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feet made no noise. There was a deafness about the place, an impenetrable thickness of silence that was so profound that he, despite the overwhelming enormity of his surroundings, took notice of it. The inside of the building was expansive, and the conical ceiling was almost too high to see.

He continued to walk. The space was empty, and seemingly endless. It was as though he was walking upon the barren sea floor. He went on this way for quite sometime until something in the distance appeared to him. The approach was slow, but he gained on his eyesight.

As the journey continued he saw a sapling standing no higher than his knee. Once close enough, he could see that it was growing from the ground, but there was no soil, and the ground was marble. He examined the moistness of the leaves, the veins that ran through them, the sinew wrapped around its spine. Somehow, these disparate organs came together as a whole, a prepossessing figure, light but proportioned to withstand the war that the world waged upon it.

Just when Tecumseh was beginning to comprehend the sapling, it began to speak. But it did not speak in one voice, but many voices, and its tender body shook as they came rolling out. More and more, they flew in every direction. They spoke of ridiculous things: stories were told backwards, and they often made little sense. Tecumseh sat and listened, and most of all, he laughed at the echoes as they reflected from walls he could no longer see.