

CRYPTOSPORIDIA

There were three things that Cryptosporidia didn't 'get' about the Intelligent Life force which, by all accounts, was her Master, and friend. First, why was it that her Provider, and Protector didn't appreciate the value of a good dump, or as was called above her whenever she stopped to tried to take it, 'shit'? Second, why did the most Intelligent species consider what came out of her back so offensive, and filled with the kind of bacteria that didn't come out of 'His' ass? Third, why was she named 'Cryptosporidia', a beautiful name for a bug that probably looked very attractive under the microscope but did so many ugly things to people, and horses? Finally, why and Who decided that her Master could get to capitalize the letters that described everything about Him, and him? And why was the mare who was smarter than any other horse in any herd she found herself in named 'Cryptosporidia'?

She was a 'good girl' when she obeyed his will, a 'bitch' or worse when she didn't, 'old girl' when she was tired of feeling her real biological age. But there was a higher hand than the Master on her back, or rather a Higher Hoof's will that Leonard, her 'master' was the one who was the boss and she, as his favorite mare, was his servant. Maybe it had something to do with the number of flexible digits on his hands, the only one left for her being the third finger which when she walked kept her supported, giving a special 'salute' to any asshole or idiot behind her.

But maybe her legal owner and master Leonard, or as he now called himself, "Larry", or in the Viking season of winter 'Lars' was the one to be taken care of, and she was his provider, and caretaker. It was, as Cryptosporidia calculated it, around thirty winters since he jumped on her then young back and high-tailed it to the High Country of British Columbia, Canada, from the high-plains pastures of Washington State, U.S. of A. She was a filly barely 5 months weaned from her mama, and Leonard was a long-haired young adventurer fleeing from his homeland. She remembered that ride back in 1971, ten of the hardest and most magnificent miles they ever ran together, making sharp turns to avoid the blue and white cars with the sirens on them, running hell-bent-for-leather from the green trucks with the men in the uniforms.

But she and Leonard made it, staking out a claim in the bush where no one could find them. He made a few deals selling the kind of plants that she wasn't allowed to eat, and she gave him, and herself, 4 babies that grew up to become a herd, growing season after season in a place without electric wires, without stinky air, and without any other voice within range except that of REAL people. No voices coming from those boxes the humans called radios in Washington.

No small images on the bigger boxes she remembered as television, Leonard referring to it as 'the idiot box'.

It was strange having only one human to look after. Leonard kept away from strangers, and never told people he met his real name. He wrote his own books and often asked 'Crypto' for her opinion. He liked writing about many things, but the one he wrote about most was War, particularly the one in Vietnam, a place he swore he would not fight in, and a place where, he said, there was lots of killing, lies and oil, and no horses. Crypto couldn't imagine a forest where there were no horses, but maybe that was because it was a jungle. A place where the strong kill the weak, the clever mutilate the wise. A place like, according to Leonard, the US of A had become.

One day, Leonard, whose hair was still long, but a little thinner and a lot whiter than thirty winters ago, was riding in the woods looking for the yellow pebble and flakes prospected from the stream that sometimes was a river and sometimes a slew that he could trade in town for bread, rice, hay and any OLD books. Those yellow pebbles were most abundance after a big rain, and thunder clouds on the other side of the mountain had made big explosions that seemed to reshape the mountain on both sides of it. The creek seemed to change direction on this day, and Leonard, calling himself Lars this week as he was starting a book about Vikings who fought their way to the Pyramids in Egypt and talked to men from other planets, stopped to look at where he was. He took off his Viking helmet made from an old drinking bowl he found last Christmas with horns from a ram who got eaten by the coyotes in the Spring and listened to the wind with his ears, taking off his boots to hear the earth with his feet.

Any direction was 'Open' and his to take, except South or any direction that could lead to town, even a Canadian one. Crypto munched on some grass while she watched 'Lars' take a chunk of yellow pebble in his hand, chewing on it. He looked downstream and his eyes opened. "The yellow brick road!" he proclaimed, jumping on Crypto's back, prodding her downstream at a lope, though all she felt safe doing on the rocky riverbank was a trot. "We're off to see, and buy, the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Id!" he sang in a voice that hurt Crypto's ears. Maybe it didn't hurt Leonard's ears because there was something in the mushrooms two waterholes and three dumps back that could make him sing so badly and not hurt his own ears or rip open his own throat.

The creek seemed to go in all directions, the sun darting in and out of the clouds, making East seem like West, and North like South. The latter was confirmed when Crypto noticed a strange, rectangular thing in the woods, a place where nothing had straight or 'right' angles in it. She

jolted her head at the sign on the tree saying 'Entering the U.S', lifting her feet up at the overgrown patch of grass that seemed to have been cut close to the ground a season ago, some kind of 'buzz' coming up from the ground below it. But Lars was on a Mission, and the yellow brick road kept getting brighter in the stream that he was determined to follow. Crypto obeyed, and respected, Leonard's commands. It had been a long ride since they left home that morning and, today at least, he was younger than she was. Maybe smarter. 'It could happen,' she thought. And the rule that Leonard said was true everywhere, 'he who has the gold makes the rules'.

The rest of the stream seemed easier to ride over. The hard rocks turned into small pebbles, hoof-cushioning sand under them instead of hard dirt. And the grass seemed taller, and greener. The water tasted better too. Maybe it had something to do with the bottles floating on it, but each gulp of what she knew, and remembered, as 'Yankee water' was sweeter than the streams in Canada. She recognized one of the bottles. Coke, the kind she was given as a filly when she was a very good girl, with the kind of label she hadn't seen in thirty years.

She watched Leonard put his Viking helmet into the water, sifting out the yellow pebbles with the goat horns from its side. This time he was singing something else, in a Viking accent or course. "Oh Canada, my home and Native land...which we discovered in Newfoundland four hundred years before Columbus."

Crypto didn't know why, but when Leonard was happy, she found herself smiling too. It didn't have anything to do with the fact that when he was happiest, the rations of grain were a fistful bigger and often delivered by hand. There was something else. What other horse or human had known each other for more than thirty winters? Leonard seemed to like the gait of Fidel and Mahatma, two of Crypto's foals, now fully grown geldings, more than hers. They were faster than her, and certainly had better endurance, but Leonard rode her more than the other horses in the herd. As she watched the "Master Race" human singing "Oh Canada" while mistakenly on American soil, she imagined what it would be like to have a baby with him, the human who spoke about the US as a place to fear, for others and himself. The place where he said innocent horses are turned into dogmeat, and people who refuse to go to War are put in jail, or into uniforms and sent to places where they get shot at, or worse, have to shoot others. She then pulled back when she imagined what the baby would look like with a six-inch long beard and eyes that seemed to look in both directions, each independent of each other. Better that they remain 'Platonic' lovers.

It was one of those moments of magnificence where, as the ex-New Yorker said, 'life is good'. Leonard dreamed about buying that printing press and maybe even a computer instead of a typewriter. Crypto was thinking about the better brands of feed her children, ungrateful and loving brats they had become, could munch on for the next winter. But just as the green of summer grass gives way to brown fall pastures, and dry hay by the third snow, the magical moment was interrupted by a loud sound from the woods.

Leonard grabbed his gun, a well-crafted single-shot Hawking rifle which he used to scare away wolves, or when he had to, kill cougars. Or bears who developed a taste for horse meat. But this wasn't a wolf, or a bear. It was a creature even worse than that, according to Leonard. It approached at rapid speed, giving Leonard barely enough time to line himself up for what he hoped would be a clear shot between its eyes, which were bright, shiny and penetrating. Leonard put himself in harms way, protecting his beloved Cryptosporidia with every ounce of courage he could muster through trembling lips, the Viking Helmet squarely on his head, making him appear to be half man, half beast and all-powerful.

"Halten, dar, schnellink!" he screamed out in 'Viking', as Crypto recognized it. "Halten du azer!"

The creature stopped, its lights and roar from under its belly coming to a halt. Crypto looked at it, and remembered it as something familiar, from her youth. A 'VW' on its head, roundish body, and three familiar creatures emerging from its side.

"Hey man! Know where the Gathering is?" the human with a beard and top hair almost as long as Leonard asked with a wide all is well and getting even better smiled.

"We got lost," his friend said, wearing a fringed buckskin jacket with beads around his moccasins, that inverted Y inside a circle painted on his forehead.

Leonard was confused. He clenched his one-shot rifle and looked at the sign on the side of the creek. "Bellingham State Park, Site of Historical Battle between the Nez Perse and General Crook in..." he read, figuring out where he was. His fears seemed confirmed when another person came out of the van, wearing a green jacket and Army boots, walking with a firm step, hair cropped down to the scalp.

Leonard backed his way to Crypto, both of his eyes looking at the beast, working with the business end of the Hawkin rifle as to where the single shot could cripple it easiest. He was good at aiming without looking into the sites, something which saved Crypto, her children and even himself from countless predators, even humans. Just as she was about to get off a shot to immobilize the van, and a second later lay his boots into Cryptosporidia's flank that would take them back home to safety, yet again, the Green Coated, Boot-wearing, hair cropped 'boss' of the human entourage turned around.

"Peace, man," came from the lips, and the eyes, and the heart of a woman who looked very familiar to Leonard, her fingers flashing the directive-index finger and the 'Bronx salute' third digit in a 'V' sign which conveyed hopes and commitment to the highest form of Victory, a world where there are no victors or victims. Had it not been for her wrinkleless face, her multi-length hair long in the front and shaved in the back, and her non-arthritic fingers she could have been Laurie, the woman, and life Leonard left behind in Seattle. The woman who believed in Leonard's fight against the Vietnam War, but who still said he was running away from his responsibilities. And the woman whose cowardice or sensibility kept her South of the 49th parallel, sending Christmas cards with horse cookies to 'General Delivery, Westwold BC' that reached Leonard for the first few winters, but stopped soon afterwards.

Crypto saw the same spirit in this young woman as in Laurie, as she came up to her with a dancelike stride, petting her neck with a touch that was tender and assuring, both at the same time. The old mare missed Laurie, and felt that somehow she was back. Maybe, she imagined, this was Laurie's daughter. She seemed so, by the way she looked at Leonard with the kind of respect an seasoned horse deserved from a young one. The reunion Crypto saw in Leonard's eyes, and even in the half-bald Army Coat Hippie, whose name happened to be 'Laury, with a Y' seemed to last forever.

But 'forever' only lasted for the brief time after Leonard lower his hand-crafted, usually-accurate rifle and looked at his watch. "What year is this?" he asked Laury with a Y.

"It's...like, now!" she smiled, asking if she could get on Crypto. To ensure that Leonard would say yes, the Old Mare nuzzled the twenty-something 'ghost', or daughter of the real thing, snorting and nodding her head 'yes' in the manner she saw humans do it.

Crypto felt like she was thirty years younger with the youngster on her back, tail lifted up in the air, trotting out like she was a proud virgin mare showing off to the stallions. And indeed, the

two legged stallions were looking at 'the girls' with very open eyes. The mare gave her left ear to Laury, her right to eaves drop into what the 'men', or 'boys' were saying.

The one in the buckskin fringe jacket and Indian beats introduced himself to Leonard as 'Jackson', the other one as 'Taylor'. Leonard introduced himself by his first name, inviting them to do the same, but Jackson and Taylor said that those were their first names. Leonard stroked his sunbaked chin through his white beard wondering what had happened to names in his absence from home country, and other things like why someone with such pretty hair as Laury would shave it down to the scalp from the neck to to top of the crown, a chunk of breast-length multicolored mane just above the forehead reminding the viewer of the wonderous lockes that once were. "It's her saying who she is," Taylor smiled, taking off his hat, revealing a crew cut which Leonard feared could be done on himself if he said 'yes' to his country's call to 'duty' back in 71.

Leonard did that 'nod', which over the years, he did more and more often. That nod which said "I'm old, maybe wise, and a wise man accepts the will of Mother Nature, and the expressions of those who She makes in her image, even if I don't understand them. Like why there are mosquitoes and wasps. And why there are also horses, dogs and people. And why I have to write up in the woods because SOMEday the world will have the heart, mind, ears and courage to listen to..."

In mid rant-between the ears, Leonard's gaze froze at what he saw inside the van. Anti-War signs. "Make Love Not War", "No More Blood for Oil", "One Planet, One World", "Think Global, Act Local" and finally the one which made the tears behind Leonard's touched heart open up and stream down his face, framing a smile of Victory and Renewal. "Dollars at home NOT worth dead children's lives abroad".

"You okay, man?" straggly-long haired Jackson asked Leonard, keeping his distance.

"Yeah," short-cropped Taylor added, feeling the need, impulse to lay his outstretched hand on Leonard's shoulders. "Are you---"

"The War, which you left!" Leonard cried, noticing a 'Veterans Against the War' button on his jacket, worn like a medal. "You had the courage to leave, from the INSIDE."

"I...enlisted," Taylor related with shame, and regret. "I should have known better, but...then when I got there,"

Leonard embraced Taylor, young and old Warriors against War telling each other their innermost stories without saying a single word, Jackson looking on wanting to help, but not knowing if he could, or should. "It's alright...We'll end this War!" Leonard assured Taylor. "All of us!" he proclaimed from a face that hadn't shed a tear since the Christmas of 1973, when he stopped getting cards from Laurie and cut off all radio, television and newspaper contact with the world in protest and defiance of what it had become. He made his own confession, in words even Crypto didn't hear, at least until now.

"I thought that by making a new world up here, without having anything to do with the old one down there, something mystical would happen," the sometimes 18 and sometimes 80 year old Leonard confessed to the lads, and everyone else in his imaginations and memory. "Beethoven went deaf to the world, and that was why he wrote the kind of music that no one ever wrote before. Music we need now, and music that I tried to, maybe did, put into...words."

"Which need to be heard," came from behind the old man, and the back of the mare who was his closest friend, by necessity first, then choice later. "You seem to, ya know, know a lot,' Laury said with a smiling voice that felt real, one of Leonard's latest books-in-progress retrieved from his saddlebag. "This stuff is..."

"Real?" he asked, placing all his bets and prayers on the table.

"Cool, I think," she said as she dismounted with the leap of a dancer. "What I can read and understand of it, anyway."

Leonard smiled with delight, and victory. He yelped out a Viking scream of victory louder than any Crypto ever remembered. Even the time when he and her 'reached an agreement' and went on their first lope together, a controlled gallop that lasted four pastures worth. But Leonard was now on the ground, and Crypto's legs couldn't go much further. That bout of laminitis three seasons ago and the tendon injury last spring were taking their toll. But she knew that there would be a last ride some day. Like the one Brunhilde took on her horse Graine

as she charged the walls of Valhalla destroying the gods who had kept mankind subservient, ignorant and living within their self-created limitations. Of course, in Wagner's opera, what survived the final clash was only the music. And humanity. And horseanity. A world without War and with Passion of the Heart was worth fighting and dying for, even for the sake of her own equine children. Military assholes are also industrial pigs, who destroy pastureland to put up shopping malls and suburbs, leaving the horses left to spend 23 and a half hours a day in a 6 by 6 foot stall so their spoiled brat kids can have safe pony rides or show off how you can hurt a horse going over a jump to their father's clients. Or, if the horses were lucky, to go to the butcher's block, only good enough to be eaten by the dog, or the French or Japanese. No, what was brewing behind Leonard's eyes had to be done and done now.

Confirmation of such was heard from the other side of the hill. A gathering of cars, then trucks, then what seemed like louder trucks. Tanks, according to the memory Crypto had of television in the days when Leonard would keep it on inside his cabin with the window open to the pasture on hot summer nights.

"Let's do it!" Leonard proclaimed, putting on his Viking Helmet, placing a Peace Sign in the middle of it, grabbing his gun. He assertively inserted his foot into Crypto's stirrup, swinging his aged yet revitalized body into the saddle. "We gonna get arrested?" he asked, as he heard sirens from the other side of the mountain.

"That's the idea," Taylor said. "The Wildlife Preserve is supposed to be for ducks, not oil rigs, strip mining, or Army maneuvers."

The 'A' word rang terror into Leonard's heart. He remembered the stories about jail for those who 'faced the music' from New York Pacifists sent to Texas jails. And put in with Rednecks who would beat them until they either became 'men' and fought back, became corpses or turned into self-destructive bitches for any yahoo who wanted a piece of tail. Those that survived on the inside seldom made it more than a year or two on the outside without killing themselves or winding up in a loony bin.

A fleet of Army choppers flew above, low and very 'artistically'. Crypto spooked. Taylor and Jackson mooned them. Laury looked at Leonard, relating the obvious to him. "No one here or in Vietnam or anywhere else will hear us till we go to them." Indeed she was her mother's daughter, or idealistic progeny, though Leonard never asked for biological verification of such.. Time enough for that after the War to End the War was over.

“Down Below” was someplace mountain Mench Leonard swore he’d never return to. Cryptosporidia welcomed it when she remembered the hard ground, soul-shattering noise and horrible smells in her youth. But winter didn’t last as long ‘down below’ and the grass was, between the garbage around it, sweeter. It also had so many people in it. ‘Down Below’ was a busy place indeed, particularly when the VW Van, she and her ‘human child’ Leonard arrived into the Anti-War Camp. It felt like thirty years ago, every face that could grow a beard seeming to have one, and no one with hair that looked ‘normal’. Indeed, nothing was normal here. There were even some Indian kids who rode their horses into the Camp, one of them a stud who, maybe if she winked the right way with her ass, would be interested in conceiving another foal. Yes, she was tired, and yes, even on a good year there was barely enough hay and grain to make it through the winter, but just one more foal. That would be...magnificent, and lovely.

But before magnificent or lovely could happen for anyone who walked on two or four legs, there was ‘challenge’. The Anti-War people, who also seemed to be for saving the Earth and animals on it, gathered up in a line, someone in the middle of the crowd ahead organizing them. It was a black-skinned man, not too many white hairs on his face or head, but even though he was barely grey, he seemed wise. Or at least caring. He had this nervous look in his eye that only Crypto could see. Like a rider who wants all the people around him to think he knows his way around a horse but who barely knows the head from the ass, and who knows that his ass will be on the ground as soon as the horse moves.

Crypto and her children always took care of such men, and women, by walking slower, trotting more smoothly and never breaking out into a lope until there was soft ground and a slight incline up a hill to absorb the rider’s bouncing. But this Black Man, who everyone called Afro American for reasons she couldn’t understand, panicked after the first line of Police and then Soldiers moved in on the pasture that had been a party-town, announcing with loudspeakers that they had to disperse.

Everyone held their ground, as did the Black Man. The animal-loving humans looked at him, telling HIM what to do. They all nodded a lot, then he turned around and put up his hand in a fist. It made the Police mad, though the Soldiers seemed to accept it, laughing at him, calling him a ‘dumb Nigger’. But though he may have been dumb, he wasn’t dumb-Souled. When the White Faced Army people imitated his fist gesture with a ‘Nigger Dance’, the Cops got nervous, particularly the ones who weren’t White. The “Afro Amercian” leader of the Army against Armies held up his fist even higher, then opened it, one finger of it actually.

The 'third digit salute' to the Police and the Soldiers made most of them mad, particularly as humans on the animal-caring side of the line joined in. Crypto felt Leonard smile as he joined in and saw him smile even more when Leonard saw Laury do a dance in front of the men with the loaded cannons and thunder-sticks, giving the soldiers the finger and putting flowers into the barrels of their guns. Some of the soldiers looked at flowers with anger, some at her breasts with not so generous thoughts, and some, the ones who were in the cleanest uniforms with the spy glasses, said something else with their faces. One of them looked at his watch, another nodded, and they sent signals to each other. A soldier from the back of the ranks, whose face Crypto couldn't see because of his helmet, broke through the ranks and grabbed Laury, throwing her basket of flowers on the ground, then spitting on them, then, as Crypto and Leonard alone saw it, ripping off the buttons on her blouse. She turned around, surprised that he was bare chested.

She was grabbed by two other soldiers, then she started to scream. "What are you doing?!!!" Get your hands off me!" All the good humans wanted to help. They moved forward but then stopped when a loud sound penetrated the mountain air. The chirping of the birds stopped as a tree trunk filled with them fell to the ground.

"That's a warning shot, folks," the Head Cop said over a very loud loudspeaker in his hand, taking orders from a few head Soldiers. "You are on Federal Land. In violation of Federal Law. Disperse now, peacefully---"

"---and forever live in shame, and dishonor". Crytosporidia heard Leonard proclaim, her ears ignoring the rest of what the Cop said. It was all 'homoshit' as far as she and Leonard was concerned.

Crypto felt two firm legs on her trunk, lifted her head up, and bolted out according to the command of her friend, and ally. Together, they charged through the line of garbage left by the Pro-Environment Protesters, the fleeing crowds of the 'good' humans who seemed to well dressed to be real, the barricades of wooden sawhorses put in place by the Cops, and the over the fences of advancing barbed wire that now separated Laury from her people. Together they dodged and ignored bullets shot at their feet. Together they raced to the truck whose door opened quickly so it could take the 'exhibitionist anarchist' away without incident or without allowing her to tell HER story to the press and her comrades. Together they jumped across the barricades of modern machinery which Leonard was determined would not be used against any

Vietnamese men, women or, most importantly, children. Together they snatched Laury from the Soldiers with visors around their faces. Crypto reared up to scare off the arresting goons, Leonard firing the one and only 'warning shot' from the ornamental Hawkin rifle that the Cops and Soldiers initially thought was real, but now knew as anything but. Together, they carried Laury back toward the safe side of the line, where the 'good' people marched forward, arm in arm, toward the Cops, who then fled, then the Soldiers, who dispersed after a call came in to their Commander 'allowing' them to do so. Together, they tended to Laury's wounds in the woods, away from the Protesters inspired by Leonard's courage, and the Reporters who wanted to find out who the Hippie-Mountainman-kamakasi-Warrior who escaped being killed by skill or Divine intervention really was.

"Who are you?" Laury asked Leonard as he cleaned her wounds, ignoring his own, putting his kindled desire for a lost love into an even deeper place within his lonely heart. "Why did you, like, ya know, do that?" .

"Your mother would understand, or at least I hope she doesn't, now," Leonard's reply.

"I don't...like....get it, or you."

Leonard smiled, allowing the deepest part of his wisdom to speak the loudest. Seeing that all was well with Laury, and the world about to bring her back, he looked into Crypto's eyes, apologizing to her for the superficial cuts on her legs, thankful to Whoever that the legs under the lacerated skin were still sound and solid.

With that, Leonard rode Crypto back into the woods, back North of the 49th parallel and back home. They didn't speak to each other, each lamenting missed opportunities, Cryptosporidia still dreaming about feeling like a young mare with the doink of that hot Indian Arab-Appy stallion inside of her. But a Higher Wisdom said that it was time to go home, and forge new frontiers of the Soul beyond politics. Leonard did ask one question of the mare. "Crypto, think we should get a re-do?"

The Mare pondered the music coming out the 'sound box' in 1973, just as disco was becoming king, and gave the matter the most serious of considerations. "No" she said with her head and a snort she thought only understood by other horses but, apparently, by at least one human.

Leonard smiled at the Crypto's answer. "I agree," he replied somberly, taking five seconds to relish in his latest victory 'down below', thankful for the freedom he still had and that whoever was in charge of Canada still wasn't sending American draft dodgers down South. Such was the good news. The not so good news...another set of musical novels about the innermost human condition which, would be acted out, inevitably, on Crypto's back from the multi-voice, tone deaf "Lenny".