

# The Mist

By Jean Baptiste Leclercq

Once upon a time, there was a village next to the Mist. It was long after the Nuclear War, long after the borders were abolished, and long after humanity was nearly extinct. At that time, there was no real country any more, and men struggled to survive amongst the ruins of what already started to look like an old and lost civilization.

In that village lived Idaho. He was called that because his family, apparently, was from there. Idaho had no idea where his namesake actually was. Even his folks would have been hard pressed to tell him. But he didn't care, because his name sounded like an old and forgotten tale, and he liked it.

Next to the village was the Mist. It was a layer of fog so wide that no one had ever found its limits. But everyone agreed that it was surely the size of a whole country. So thick was the fog, that if one stretched out their arm, one wouldn't even see one's elbow. It was so monstrous that it had been given a name, the Mist. The Mist had been there for centuries, since the War, and in the village, stories were told about its origins.

One was about a graveyard at that place, a huge graveyard for the dead of some old war, and when the radioactive fallout happened, mist escaped from the tombs, as if it was the corpses that had been vaporized into an eternal fog. Another one was about a factory, doing whatever it was doing, which blew up one day, creating the fog. Or, some plants of a new kind, mutant ones, were producing the mist to hide themselves. Nobody really knew what it was, but there was a certainty: there were people in the Mist.

Many times, screams had been heard from the Mist. Shouting in an unknown language, fearsome and guttural, like gurgling. Villagers stood there listening, helpless and terrified, until they were gone. There was no doubt about it, there were demons in the fog.

Many people had been swallowed by the Mist. Idaho himself used to know a young woman who had gone too far gathering plants, and had never come home. Kids too, men, even dogs. Sometimes you could hear them calling from afar, like lost in a nightmare. The whole village would come together and shout to try and guide the lost souls back. But they never managed to find their way. And, when you would stop hearing them, when they stopped yelling, that indeed was the worst moment.

Of course, one could think that it had nothing to do with the Mist (the things from the Mist), but often, not so long after someone had been lost in the fog, the wind would bring some music, so creepy and distorted it made the village shudder as one. It sounded like horns, or brass, in which the Mist would blow, certainly to celebrate their new prey. That was sinister.

In those moments, when the Fog Horns reverberated in the night, or that a Mister had come yelling too close from the village, people would gather next to the mist, shaking with fear, bringing their war drums, and they would hit them, altogether, to ward off bad luck and repel the Mist and their terrifying music.

One night, a night like the others, Idaho was wandering in the streets, along with other villagers. He liked to gaze at the Mist, dreamily. When she was like that, steady and quiet, she was less frightening.

Suddenly, he saw a light silhouette stir in the fog. Something was getting closer, something small and low.

Other people had seen it too. It created instant panic. Some men ran home, looking for their rifle or their pike, women called their children home in a hurry. Idaho stood alone, watching the silhouette getting darker, more precise. It was an animal, walking towards the village. Its pace was slow and painful.

A dog eventually emerged from the foggy layers. A regular dog, except for its extreme exhaustion. It had a large and hanging out tongue, and pointed ears. Men ran to him, making a wall of their pikes, terrified, and tried to repel him by shouting.

- It's a Misters dogs. Screamed someone. Don't let him bite ya!
- He's comin' for our kids!
- Don't come any closer!

The dog watched them with a sad and tired eyes. He squealed slightly, and Idaho felt his heart sink. It was skinny and shaking with exhaustion. Its tongue was hanging out under its nose, as if it was dead. He tried to say something, like "This dog is not dangerous", that he too had probably lost himself in the Mist, and that he had managed to go back. But no one heard the thin voice leaving his throat. Men would keep screaming their fear at the dog, threatening and shaking.

The dog sat in front of them, and looked at them with its golden eyes, full of a strange melancholy. Really? He seemed to say. You would kill me, a lonely and starving dog, me who just come looking for your love and protection? A man, gathering all his courage, pierced him with his pike. The dog died with a howling of pain, and Idaho turned his eyes away.

Quick, with poles, the dog was repelled in the fog. Idaho watched its limp and lifeless corpse slowly disappear behind the steam curtain. Nothing that comes out of The Mist is good, not even a weak and starving dog.

People were already gathering their drums next to the fog. One Misters' dog had attempted to get into their village, and they needed to expiate their fear. When they were all ready, they started to hit the drums, all on the same rhythm, and Idaho listened to their sound, full of sorrow. He would have liked to have a dog.

On the other side of The Mist, Laura watched out with anxiety. It had already been three days that Snout, her dog, got lost there, and even if everyone told her to stop hoping, she just couldn't stop looking at the very last place where she had seen him. After all, he had always had a very good sense of smell, he could find his way back.

He had left, just like that, one morning, following a trail, as if he had forgot about the danger. She had been calling him, she had been crying, so many times. He never came back.

And then the Fog Drums started resonating in the Mist, and she knew, with an extreme sadness, that Stout would not be back. So she sat on a stone, and began to cry. Behind her, the whole village was gathering, ready to blow in their horns, to repel the scary music of the Mist People.