

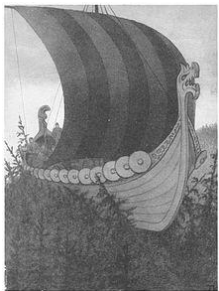
ON THE NAMES AND CHARACTERS

Sergei Askeladden.

'Askeladden' is not a common name. One searching on [Ancestry](#) for it will come up empty handed. A [Wikipedia](#) search, however, reveals the Norwegian folklore of 'The Ash Lad' who is a little like Cinderella:

In many folk tales, the Ash Lad is portrayed as the youngest of three brothers. Early in a typical tale, the older brothers appear to have much greater chances of success in life. For example, one brother might be extremely well read, whereas another might be extremely competent in another area. In contrast, the Ash Lad is looked down upon as a seemingly drowsy ne'er do well, perhaps even as a loner or misunderstood eccentric, who spends too much time sitting by the fireplace lost in thought as he is poking the ashes.

As the typical story unfolds, the oldest brothers try first to heroically overcome some major crisis or problem. As an example, one tale involves rescuing a princess held captive in a land East of the Sun and West of the Moon. The two older brothers, who are tied to conventional thinking, typically fall flat on their faces. In contrast, it is the Ash Lad who comes up with creative solutions. He is smarter, more tactical, more receptive and more aware of the needs of others. He outwits trolls, dodges charging unicorns or gets a magic Viking ship to transport him where he ultimately saves the princess.



The "heroic" trait of the character is probably most prominent in the stories told by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. The tales they collected present the "classical" Ash Lad. In other stories, collected by others, the character and his brothers are presented as mere scoundrels, even thieves. Those stories present the youngest brother as the one with the wits about him, and thus, he gets away with the loot. They always steal from the wealthy farmers or even the king. Those stories are documented from Vest-Agder, in their time the poorest parts of Norway, where suppression was common.

Sergei Askeladden is described by others as "curious" and "absorbed". Kendall Murphrey (Muffins before he has acquired his alias), with whom Sergei has history 'back in the world', declares: "I don't know about you sometimes -- you like to listen to people—they confide in you—show you their absurdity and you don't answer—you don't give feedback...." Askeladden appears eager to learn about and share in lived experiences conditioned by the particular time and place in which he and those around him are embedded, certainly more than the pidgin and slang can tell him, and more about



persons than their nicknames convey; but he is also dissatisfied with how time and place have been constructed and given meaning. Wonder, which he wants to share with others, is just one of the varieties of paralytic experiences Sergei has had. His *aporia* is shaped by embodied experiences in his past life 'in the world': by the relatively rare Guillain Barré syndrome and by his ongoing experiences of sleep paralysis, a much more common condition sometimes considered a *forme fruste* of narcolepsy.

[The Nightmare](#) by Henry Fuseli (1781) is thought to be a depiction of sleep paralysis perceived as a demonic visitation.

The Cellarman

Hollis Selurman is known to almost everyone in the compound, except Askeladden, as 'The Cellarman.'

A cellarman is a person who is in charge of the alcoholic-beverage supply of a hotel or restaurant.

Historical Examples (apropos [Catamaran](#)) given in [Dictionary.com](#) include:

"Use, ask for, take from my larder what you like; I appoint you cellarman." From: [The Captiv\[i\]](#) and [The Mostellaria](#) by Plautus

"The second night we had a third cellarman, leader of one of the outlying huts now being abandoned every day." From: [Notes of a Camp-Follower on the Western Front](#) by E. W. Hornung

The Cellarman's dwelling place which he is willing to share with Sergei Askeladden (but not Sergei's companion Chad Emry aka 'Noid') is referred to as the 'heroin hootch'. 'Hootch' or 'hooch' in the argot of the time is a hut or simple dwelling, either military or civilian. Hooch also refers to bootleg alcoholic concoctions.

Hollis Selurman seems to have volunteered for back to back tours affording himself more time for immersion in his fantasy of Vietnam on the one hand and in heroin dealing (which he has only recently repudiated) on the other. He conveys the impression of a past rich in scholarly studies and experiences in teaching. He is drawn to myths, folk motifs especially from lands north and west of the moon which he attempts to impose interpretatively upon his experiences south and east of the sun. He refers for example to *oskorei*.

Wikipedia:

The Wild Hunt is a European folk myth involving a ghostly or supernatural group of huntsmen passing in wild pursuit. The hunters may be either elves or fairies or the dead or an unidentified lost soul or spirit either male or female.

Seeing the Wild Hunt was thought to presage some catastrophe such as war or plague, or at best the death of the one who witnessed it.... People encountering the Hunt might also be abducted to the underworld or the fairy kingdom.... In some instances, it was also believed that people's spirits could be pulled away during their sleep to join the cavalcade....

Not unlike Casaubon with respect to world religions and mythologies in George Eliot's [Middlemarch](#), the Cellarman believes there to be a common, golden thread in the warp and woof of all folk motifs, but has deferred indefinitely his dream of unraveling it as he himself becomes unraveled and frayed. What bare threads he has left at his disposal he would use to bind someone he deems worthy to himself under vaguely articulated conditions of apprenticeship or indentured servitude to his idiosyncratic 'amor fati'. The Cellarman does not believe in coincidences. He believes the same synchronicity he finds in his literary encounters operates, as well, between his own and the lived experiences of the worthier humans who come his way. Of late Cellarman has been dabbling in arcane rituals intended to refine his synchronous attunements and to exert control over an apparently uncertain universe with esoteric knowledge of its true rhythms. In part, he may be motivated to engage in the rituals because of his dismal failure to control the Vietnamese woman with whom he has cohabited, impregnated and professes to love. She has fled the Cellarman in the company of other refugees who are evacuating Huê

because of rumors of yet another military action there. In her flight, she has miscarried and buried the products of her miscarriage in the forest, marking the site with a cairn. The Cellarman also counts among his failures his attempt to groom Muffins who, in an early scene, relates his discovery of a small cairn while on patrol. However, The Cellarman has wearied of his efforts with Muffins who has enthralled himself instead to heroin. Sergei's arrival gives the Cellarman renewed hope. He intuits Sergei's paralytic wonder and generates a charisma to which Sergei is highly susceptible.

Chung Xi

'Chung Xi' is not the name given by his parents to the homeless boy who has attached himself to the American soldiers and who runs various errands for them between compounds and in the ville. In fact, 'Chung' is not listed among common Vietnamese boy names. It is never clear who exactly has given him the name, perhaps he himself has, for he seems to like it. In Vietnamese, 'Chung' means 'General or a commander in the army'. Xi is likely a corruption of 'chia' in Vietnamese which may be used as a verb for divide (or deal). Chung Xi is further corrupted by some of the soldiers to 'Chauncey' (which may be associated in some of their minds with a stereotype of a savvy butler) to which they append 'san'.

The Catamaran

I am indebted to Erin Greer for years of close readings and compelling literary analyses of Virginia Woolf and her patient guidance of my own 'johnny come lately' excursions into Orlando, To the Lighthouse and The Waves by that author. Greer's creative explorations set forth in the Journal of Modern Literature 40 (3):1-16 "**A Many-Sided Substance**": *The Philosophy of Conversation in Woolf, Russell and Kant* in particular have been helpful in opening my eyes to the catamaran as synecdoche for the development and dissolution of a *sensu communis* involving the principal characters. The irony of the title of her essay in association with this forty-five-year retrospective of mine on Catamaran which depicts heroin use has not been lost upon me.

Muffins

Kendall Murphrey (aka 'Muffins') will be the sole survivor of the *sensu communis* that arises among the principal characters. Although his current duties are obscure, he has clearly gone beyond 'the boonies' to 'hump the bush' which credentials him sufficiently to be begrudged a place among the GI's addicted to heroin, mythically (albeit contemptuously) reduced to 'the huldre folk' in the estimation (mirroring more general attitudes towards heroin addicts at the time) of The Cellarman.

Wikipedia:

A tale recounts how a woman had washed only half of her children when God came to her cottage; ashamed of the dirty ones, she hid them. God decreed that those she had hidden from him would be hidden from humanity; they became the huldres.

A hulder is a seductive forest creature found in Scandinavian folklore. (Her name derives from a root meaning "covered" or "secret") In Norwegian folklore, she is known as huldre ("the [archetypal] hulder", though folklore presupposes that there is an entire Hulder race and not just a single individual). The word hulder is only used of a female; a "male hulder" is called a huldrekall and also appears in Norwegian folklore. This being is closely related to other underground dwellers.... Whereas the female hulder is almost invariably described as incredibly, seductively beautiful, the males of the same race are often said to be hideous, with grotesquely long noses.

While they are not to be dehumanized and dismissed in the way The Cellarman would have them, there are those who, arguably, are aptly referred to as 'hidden people' because they seek to avoid detection by the military authorities. The military authorities conduct 'musters' from time to time in which all personnel are mandated to assemble outside (like in a fire drill) while MP's search the dwelling places for unauthorized persons and contraband.

As he is chasing his high and contending with his withdrawals, Muffins is described by one of the hidden people as "more antsy everyday". Before his resort to heroin, at least according to the Cellarman, Muffins "wanted to spill [his] blood on an Asian shore—simply to reproach those who were most in harmony with [his] chronic disaffection." In their civilian lives, Kendall Murphrey was instrumental in helping Sergei during his paralysis. Muffins sometimes talks to his hand.

Hutch ('Doc') and Chad Emry ('Noid')

Hutch is not the empath that Sergei is, but he has a matter of fact approach and a moral voice based upon his developing ethic of personal responsibility. His nickname 'Doc' is considered to be an honorific reserved by the GI's for those medics who have proven their worth. Those medics in 'the rear echelon', as in medical detachments and semi mobile evacuation hospitals are more likely to be called 'corpsmen'. The respect he is accorded from his peers does not prevent Hutch from keeping close company with Chad who is perfecting his transactional approach to career and life when he is not subject to his fears.