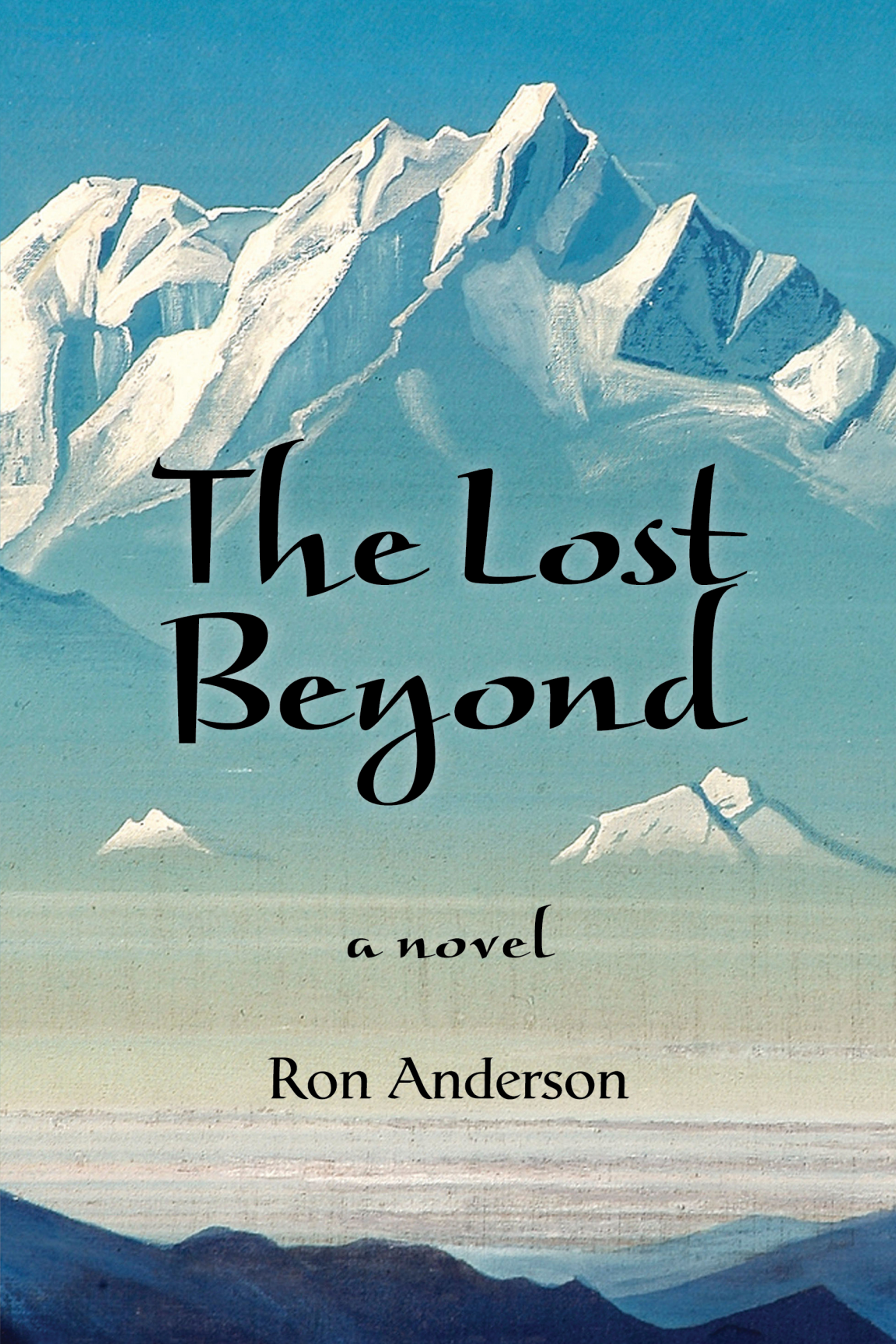




The Lost Beyond

a novel

Ron Anderson

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*This book is dedicated to Susie,
my beautiful soul mate, artist, and wife, who has traveled
alongside me for so long, through so many amazing adventures.*

TIS TRUE without error, certain & most true.

That which is below is like that which is above & that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one only thing.

And as all things have been & arose from one by the mediation of one: so all things have their birth from this one thing by adaptation.

The Sun is its father, the moon its mother, the wind hath carried it in its belly, the earth is its nurse.

The father of all perfection in the whole world is here.

Its force or power is entire if it be converted into earth.

Separate thou the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross sweetly with great industry.

It ascends from the earth to the heaven & again it descends to the earth & receives the force of things superior & inferior.

By this means you shall have the glory of the whole world & thereby all obscurity shall fly from you.

Its force is above all force. For it vanquishes every subtle thing & penetrates every solid thing.

So was the world created.

From this are & do come admirable adaptations whereof the means (or process) is here in this. Hence I am called Hermes Trismegist, having the three parts of the philosophy of the whole world.

That which I have said of the operation of the Sun is accomplished & ended.

The Lost Beyond

Prologue

IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD, there would be nothing left. He wanted it that way. Wanted them to think the secret had died with him. That the treasure was lost forever.

He sat nestled into a large ledge near the top of a remote mountain. His head rested comfortably against the black granite, his legs bent to his chest, and his large, gnarled hands spread across the cold, rough surface on either side.

Long white hair whipped about his face with the gusts of icy wind. Clear blue eyes peered from under bushy eyebrows. His focus was not on the vastness before him but on the past. He was lost in the memory of his life, which he knew would soon end.

He knew his body was failing him, had known it for months now, and knew there wasn't much time left. But it had been a good life, he thought. He was ready to die and had chosen the way he wanted his life to end. Not with his energy slowly ebbing away, lying in a metal bed, drugged, with plastic tubes running through his nostrils, machines blinking coldly as they registered the life that was left in him. No, that was not the way he would go.

His attention returned to his body. He could no longer feel his toes. He stared at his bare hands, turning white in places as frostbite set in. They had no more feeling than the frozen rock they rested on.

He reviewed his plan in detail, as he'd already done a hundred times. He was satisfied. There was nothing else he could do but clear

his mind and focus on what he must do now. He was as prepared as possible, and as he thought about what he had come to recognize as the most incredible adventure of his life, he felt a tremendous surge of excitement. He had risked everything, his entire fortune, and it was worth it. Because he found it—the treasure he had been searching for.

He lost any concept of time. A pale sun, edging toward the horizon, briefly appeared from behind swirls of clouds. But he didn't know if it was setting or rising.

Ice formed on his eyebrows, froze the long hair so it no longer caught the wind, and clung to the stubble of his beard. He was losing feeling in his limbs. But it didn't matter—he was fully aware of the evolution taking place and worked hard to make sure his mind stayed clear.

He felt himself expand—an odd sense of growing too large for the ledge. Then he felt himself starting to fade. The sensation of shrinking and becoming momentarily invisible, then oozing back and shriveling again, was frightening yet strangely calming. He observed the rhythm of the sensation, over which he seemed to have no control, and strange images bounced through his mind. He ignored them, realizing he was witnessing the death cycle of the body, and kept his mind focused on the powerful forces that were guiding him.

A comforting warmth enveloped him, and he felt his consciousness expand. He continued to be aware of the body but now realized he was looking down on it from above.

He thought this must be the end. Then he realized it was only the beginning.

For a moment, he wished there was a way to record his feelings. But no one would believe him anyway. Everyone had called him a lunatic. Pondering that and recalling the truth, he tried to smile.

But by now, it was too late.

His eyes, frozen open, stared across the vast expanses before him and saw absolutely nothing.

John Sebastian Wolf was dead.

Chapter One

Thirty Years Later

CROUCHING INSIDE a giant tree's dark and hollow core, the man grasped for the automatic carbine that should have been there.

Outside his hiding place, a verdant world of enormous trees, vines, elephant-eared leaves, giant ferns, and flora of every kind covered the landscape. Populated with deadly snakes, predators, and insects, it was a land consumed with fear by the ordinary man.

Myriad sounds passed through the tangible thickness of the heat and humidity, casting its pall everywhere, even at this early hour.

Sitting still, he listened and watched for the slightest change that would reveal any unnatural presence.

With nothing unusual detected, his vigilance and awareness of the immediate surroundings relaxed. Attention returned to the growing cramps in his legs, the stickiness of the putrefying wood against his back, and the tickle of a dozen bugs crawling on his body, and he wanted out.

Scraping the bugs away, he stretched his arms and shifted his position to let the blood flow and relieve the pressure.

Knowing he wouldn't have gotten away without being seen, he'd taken every evasive action possible. But he knew they were tracking him. They were the jungle's most expert hunters.

The only option was to follow the tributary south towards its confluence with the Curaray River and then take it to the nearest outpost. The trip would total over forty miles through some of the thickest jungles of Ecuador and Peru. With no pack, food, or medical supplies, he had nothing but what he wore and his knife.

Stepping out of his cave and into the small meadow, he stood still, re-orienting himself, searching for any threats. Nothing seemed unusual or out of place. Then he noticed the birds had quieted down.

There was the awareness of a presence, a slight movement in the corner of his eye, and he turned and dodged as the head of a spear glanced off his left shoulder, tearing the flesh.

A dark body ran out of the foliage with a club held high, ready for the kill. The blow came, but he ducked and used the man's momentum to throw him to the ground. But with no delay, he was back on his feet.

They stood facing each other.

Beneath the thick, oily, ebon hair, black-pooled eyes shone unwavering. The upper part of the face was painted brilliant red. Sweat glistened off the body, naked except for a woven sack for his genitals.

The native moved to his right and swung for the head. Ducking under the blow, his blade swept across the mid-section of the brown belly. The thin line of the cut oozed red.

The warrior stepped back, looked at the superficial wound, and charged with an animal scream.

They tumbled over, slashing and striking, both missing. The knife slipped from his hand as it hit the ground. Getting to his feet, he kicked and smashed the club away.

Backing off, searching for his weapon, he spotted the short spear in the grass and ran for it. As he turned back around, the native came up with his club.

The spear flew from his hand toward the broad chest, and the man moved, but it wasn't enough. His free hand was pinned to the tree next to him.

Seeing the shine of his blade, he grabbed it and ran into the dripping green forest.