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**A CALL FROM THE PAST**

When a man keeps running head-on into the Great Spirit of Native American lore, he has to wonder if there’s more to it than meets the eye. Until he finds out.

by D. J. Herda

## A Bridge to the Past

Nineteen seventy-eight. A rusting chain-link fence is the only thing standing between an undeveloped plot of land and the spirits watching over it. The sun-drenched waves of Lake Mendota wash up against the University of Wisconsin-Madison and some of the most expensive real estate in the Midwest. It is this land near the lake over which a construction development company petitioned county administrators for permission to create a new upper-middle-income residential development. There is a market for homes in affluent Dane County, and there is money to be made here--*lots* of money. But the area has been designated an Indian burial ground for years, a sacred plot immune from development.

The construction company that has bid on this swollen mound of Mother Earth filed a motion with the city for a review to release the land from protection. The county executive contacted the Winnebago Nation and asked for formal clarification, and the Deputy Chief dispatched a Medicine Man to examine the grounds.

The Medicine Man, named Running Wolf, arrives at precisely 1:02 p.m. on Thursday, October 2, and begins walking through the brown-ochre and alizarin-red leaves that have begun falling from the oak and maple and hickory canopy overhead. The clouds roll in on a blanket of sticky mist. The dew--the humidity or dampness or light drizzle so faint it is barely perceptible--filters its way down to earth.

Stretched out before Running Wolf, large rolling hills dot the grounds, and before long, the Medicine Man walks to the edge of one of the earthen swells and stops. He closes his eyes and lowers his head, mumbling something incoherent to a young journalist who received word of the investigation and rushed out to witness the event. I know all this to be true because I am the young journalist. Nick Nolte here. No relation. But thanks for asking.

Running Wolf raises his head, opens his eyes, and looks to his left before taking several steps in that direction and stopping suddenly at the edge of another rolling mound.

"Burial mound," he says softly, so softly that I have to ask him to repeat the words. Running Wolf complies, takes several more steps, stopping intermittently and stooping down to brush aside the musty leaves from the tall grass underfoot. He pauses once more, draws upon his thoughts, glances skyward, and peers back down at the earth. He reaches beneath his jacket and extracts a pouch of Prince Albert tobacco and a booklet of rolling papers from his shirt pocket. He begins to roll a cigarette. He offers the tobacco and papers to me, which I decline politely before thinking better of it. I take the pouch, wave off the papers, and pull a spent pipe from my slicker before I fill the instrument to the brim and hand the tobacco back to him. I know well the