

*Chichén Itzá, Yucatán Peninsula, June 24, 1904*

## ARCHAEOLOGY?

A large wooden derrick and its dredging apparatus are lined up on the lip of the limestone shelf near the sacrificial platform. After several months of dredging, reclaiming various objects and some skeletal materials, U.S. Consul and Peabody Museum Associate Edward Thompson decides to descend into the pool to explore crevices that the dredge could not reach. His diving equipment consists of an unwieldy dry suit, a heavy helmet with a latched face mask, and a hose connected to a hand driven air compressor above, which is being supervised by two Greek sponge fishermen — and several score laborers hired for the project.

Much to the consternation of the Mayan workers, who have a better understanding of the shadows and appetites of the underworld, especially in a place of such great sacred activity, treasure hunter and historical curiositer Thompson descends the ladder and drops off into water that quickly resolves from amber to green and finally to an impenetrable black. Thompson's submarine flashlight is unable to pierce the thick veil of darkness, so he gropes blindly along the floor until he locates a ledge or crevice, then sifts its contents by hand, being careful to avoid the mud wall rocks and tree trunks that, loosened by the relentless dredging, from time to time come plunging down. On this dive Thompson surfaces with a sack full of pottery figurines, an obsidian knife with a carved handle, and the skull of a young boy. He finds artifacts on every dive.

Tossed in hope and awe and wonder in an age whose details were now less accessible than the darkest crevices of the well itself, retrieved as treasure untraceable to the moments of its original meanings, all of the artifacts, like their sacrificers, were silent. They had become shelf pieces, puzzles and curiosities for a museum in Massachusetts, where life has no poetry, death no honor, the night sky is blocked by bedroom ceilings, and all of the predators have handguns.

The *cenote* is approximately 200 feet in diameter, 130 feet deep. Its limestone walls rise sixty-five feet above the surface of the murky green water.

From the air, it looks like a ringed spot.