"Schrodinger's Childs vs. Schrodinger's MacReady: Quantum Superposition in John Carpenter's THE THING"

by Michael H. Hanson ©2018

Two men sit on the freezing ground of Antarctica at night, exhausted, facing each other, wary of each other, the last two survivors of a great massacre, the attack of an unrelenting, savage, merciless, shape-shifting alien life form.

Events of the past day have ended in a scenario where one of them may or may not be an alien duplicate.

The manner in which they distrust one another tells us that both may be human, or just one may be human. If both were Things, they would know it, and so there would be no lack of trust between them.

When all is said and done, we see mere moments of existence left for both Childs and MacReady, as the intense cold is quickly draining their lives away and neither will see the sun rise.

With all that has happened up to this moment (as witnessed by the movie audience) the odds appear to be roughly 50/50, an equal probability that either both are human, or just one is human.

For these precious seconds that they share, without one of them betraying a non-human bearing, it might be said they are in their own quantum superstates of existence.

For a few glorious moments we have the indeterminacy that Childs and MacReady are both 'Human' and 'Thing' at the same time.

It is not until one either does or does not betray himself as alien, that this reality changes. Until we the audience 'observe' this potential betrayal, both men become an arcane psi-function of quantum physics. Both Human and Thing.

They are each, Chimera.

For long stretching minutes they recline in this weird box of existential uncertainty as they drink alcohol, their fading breaths frosting in the air, fires playing about them and slowly dying. The sunrise seems so very distant....

Unseen spectral stopwatches tick silently in their minds...