

The cover features a dark, atmospheric illustration. In the foreground, a man with dark hair and a serious expression wears large, round, metallic goggles. He is wearing a light blue collared shirt and a thick, textured, reddish-brown necklace. Behind him, a large, grotesque, multi-eyed alien creature with a fiery, orange-red glow emanates from its face. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a cave or a deep-sea environment. A small green triangle is positioned between the man's head and the alien creature's head.

DELTA GREEN

ALIEN INTELLIGENCE

AS A TRAINING TEXT FOR
YOUNG MUTANTS, I CANNOT
ENDORSE IT TOO HIGHLY.

— *LUCIUS SHEPARD*

**CTHULHU MYTHOS STORIES
OF MODERN HORROR
AND CONSPIRACY**

**BRUCE BAUGH • DENNIS DETWILLER
ADAM SCOTT GLANCY • BOB KRUGER
BLAIR REYNOLDS • GREG STOLZE
JOHN TYNES • RAY WINNINGER**

**EDITED BY BOB KRUGER
& JOHN TYNES**

RECOMMENDED FOR MATURE READERS

YOU ARE NOT CLEARED FOR THIS BOOK

THESE EIGHT TALES OF
COSMIC HORROR AND
PERSONAL APOCALYPSE
WERE NOT WRITTEN TO
MAKE YOU FEEL SECURE
ABOUT YOUR PLACE IN
THE UNIVERSE. THEY ARE
HERE TO UNSETTLE YOU,
TO HORRIFY YOU, AND TO
CHALLENGE YOUR MIS-
GUIDED NOTIONS OF HIS-
TORY, HUMANITY, AND
MORALITY. ENJOY.

**ARMITAGE
HOUSE**

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
WWW.TCCORP.COM

*Born of the federal govern-
ment's 1928 raid on the degen-
erate coastal town of Innsmouth,
Massachusetts, the covert agency
known as Delta Green spent four
decades opposing the forces of
darkness with honor, but without
glory. Stripped of sanction after
a disastrous 1969 operation in
Cambodia, Delta Green's leaders
made a secret pact: to continue
their work without authority,
without support, and without
fear. Delta Green agents slip
through the system, manipulat-
ing the federal bureaucracy
while pushing the darkness back
for another day—but often at a
shattering personal cost.*

ISBN 1-887797-09-2



9 781887 797092

51195



Major General Reginald Fairfield,
U.S. Army (Ret.)
Final Report 2/25/94

It's been twenty-four years, a month, and two days since the bastards brought us down.

In that time we've come back strong, doing things they couldn't conceive of. They think they understand us, those who know we're still around. They think we're cowboys, meddlers . . . They think we're just too pig-headed and selfish and old to let go of what we once were.

They know nothing.

They think they're better than us. Stronger than us. And worst of all, they just plain think they're right. They sit in their offices and debate the Accord with the skinny little fucks from space. They sell out the American dream in exchange for stealth technology and sonic weapons. They betray our highest ideals, our loftiest principles. They've lost sight of whom they serve—the people who vote them and their kind into power. They've forgotten why they're in power.

They know nothing.

Every night my teeth rest in a glass and every morning I have a bowel movement and I couldn't even begin to get it up these days. My eyes are hollow and bloodshot and my wife left me fifteen years ago. My children are callow monsters who laugh at me and the ideals I cherish and vote fools into office because they saw them on MTV.

They know nothing.

My generation supposedly saved the world from the forces of darkness. Now everyone thinks that evil died in 1945—or was it 1989? They think that things will never be that bad again. They think the Apocalypse, the end of all we hold dear, just isn't going to happen. They abandon the Lord and don't go to church and teach sex in the schools and put filth on the television.

They know nothing.

Evil never dies. Darkness never retreats. In the cracks and the crevices of our society there are monsters undreamed of by the rank and file of humanity. I've been there. I've seen them. They exist in the spaces between things, in the folds of existence where we can't find them. Sometimes they cross over, sometimes they manifest, and all Hell breaks loose. Only this is not Hell, nor Heaven. This is like

nothing anyone has ever understood. This is pure evil, pure destruction. This is the Apocalypse, and I've been fighting it tooth and nail since 1961. They made me retire in 1970 when Cambodia blew up in their faces and they blamed us, but I didn't stop then and I'm not stopping now. They think I gave it all up that day in the Pentagon when they told me the choice—the only choice—I would be allowed. I took it, and then, like most of us, I made the decision to continue the fight. They thought we were washed up.

They know nothing.

But they know enough. They know how we started—a little slice of the OSS, investigating the Nazis' interest in the occult. They know what we found—how the supernatural was realer than real and more powerful than the A-bomb. They know what we accomplished—three decades spent fighting the monsters wherever they cropped up, three decades that kept the world a saner place. They know what we want—to abolish the Accord and send those ET fucks back to wherever they came from. Among other things.

They know nothing.

Things are different today. There's a whole new generation coming into the ranks, men—and women, for Christ's sake—who are smarter and slicker and tougher than I ever was. We've got it down to a science. Something crops up, phone calls are made, operatives are re-assigned, paperwork is filed, and the darkness gets pushed back for another day. When it's over everyone goes back to their routine and no official records exist to reveal the truth. We travel light, we probe deep, and we strike hard. We're Delta Green, and we may be outlaws and cowboys and fools, but we've kept this green ball of shit safe and sound for longer than most people have been alive. They think we're idiots.

They know nothing. But they know enough.

The Majestic group made the deal. They signed over the constitution to the Greys, those bastards from space—or so they claim—in exchange for technology and information. Majestic thumbs their nose at the executive branch and has more security clearances than brains. They call the shots when it comes to the Accord with the Greys, and they dispense the technology breakthroughs and they cover their tracks and they let the aliens do whatever they like to God-fearing U.S. citizens. They're fools. I've seen the Greys for what they really are, and they sure as hell aren't refugees fleeing a sun gone nova. The things that lie behind the Greys are no different from the things I've been fighting on the edges of reality



since '61. I couldn't begin to guess what they're really up to, but Majestic couldn't care less. They just want to make deals and cover their asses.

They know nothing. But they know enough.

They know what I've been up to. Finally, after fourteen years, a month, and two days, they've figured it out. The news reached me fifteen minutes ago through six connections and two satellite bounces—the news that they were coming for me. I could give a shit. I've lived life true and full and rich and I've never betrayed my country. I've done my duty and ten times more and I regret nothing. Nothing.

I have, perhaps, another ten minutes before they arrive. They'll come tromping through the snow and put a bullet in my brain. My communications have been "out of order" for hours, all except for the line I laid myself three years ago after hoarding the equipment for twice that time. That's my escape route. A digital relay that will take this letter and the accompanying files and put them in the hands of my successors. A line that our slimy twin DELTA, the Majestic networks boys, know nothing of. I've used it five times since I set it up, and it, at least, is secure. It's enough to get this information into the hands of Delta Green. It may be enough to save this planet a few times more.

That's it. My power just died, except for the backup generator I installed in the basement for this room. They're upstairs, tripping my internal alarms. In minutes they'll come through the hidden passage and spread my insides across the wall.

Before they do, they'll have a fight on their hands. I may be eighty, but I'm the toughest goddamn son of a bitch these assholes will ever meet. I'm Delta Green, and I'm not dying alone.

But first, I'm going to hit Send and put this information into the hands of a few people who will carry on the fight. People who will crush the Accord and—when the time comes—who will tell the public about all the lies our government has been force-feeding them since the Roswell saucer crash in 1947. They'll carry on and they'll fight hard and true and maybe they'll leave a better world for their children than the one I'm leaving behind.

Entry One has been breached. Time to get this show on the road. They have no idea the kind of Hell I've prepared for them. May God have mercy on my soul.

(signed) Major General Reginald Fairfield, U.S. Army (Ret.)
::transmitted 1323 EST 2/25/94::PGP encoding enabled:: <EOF>

▲ ▲ ▲

EDITED BY

BOB KRUGER

&

JOHN TYNES

STORIES BY

BRUCE BAUGH

DENNIS DETWILLER

ADAM SCOTT GLANCY

BOB KRUGER

BLAIR REYNOLDS

GREG STOLZE

JOHN TYNES

&

RAY WINNINGER

**DELTA
GREEN**

**ALIEN
INTELLIGENCE**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bob Kruger would like to thank Adam Scott Glancy for creating the character of Jean Qualls and permitting her use; Dennis Detwiller for conceiving of the rivalry between factions of ghouls; and H.P. Lovecraft for creating the Dreamlands.

Blair Reynolds would like to note that "Operation LOOKING GLASS" is dedicated: "For Allison, my dark and dangerous muse."

"Introduction" ©1997 Bob Kruger. "Climbing the South Mountain: Final Thoughts of Bai Beishi" ©1997 Bruce Baugh. "Drowning in Sand" ©1997 Dennis Detwiller. "An Item of Mutual Interest" ©1997 Adam Scott Glancy. "Identity Crisis" ©1997 Bob Kruger. "Operation LOOKING GLASS" ©1997 Blair Reynolds. "Potential Recruit" ©1997 Greg Stolze. "The Dark Above" and "A Word Of Explanation" ©1997 John Tynes. "Pnomus" ©1997 Ray Winner. Published by arrangement with The Delta Green Partnership. The intellectual property known as *Delta Green* is TM and © The Delta Green Partnership, who has licensed its usage in these stories. Quotations from other sources are © by the respective authors. All rights reserved worldwide. *Alien Intelligence* was previously published as a 100-copy limited-edition chapbook.



Published March, 1998, by Armitage House
5536 25th Ave. NE ▲ Seattle, WA 98105-2415
rev@tccorp.com ▲ www.tccorp.com

First Trade Printing
ISBN 1-887797-09-2

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BOB KRUGER *viii*

A WORD OF EXPLANATION JOHN TYNES *xii*



THE DARK ABOVE JOHN TYNES 2

DROWNING IN SAND DENNIS DETWILLER 24

PNOMUS RAY WINNINGER 34

CLIMBING THE SOUTH MOUNTAIN BRUCE BAUGH 48

POTENTIAL RECRUIT GREG STOLZE 64

AN ITEM OF MUTUAL INTEREST ADAM SCOTT GLANCY 94

IDENTITY CRISIS BOB KRUGER 106

OPERATION LOOKING GLASS BLAIR REYNOLDS 158

INTRODUCTION

BOB KRUGER

It was at the 1994 GenCon game fair in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that I stumbled on the Delta Green conspiracy. After helping my employer at the time, Wizards of the Coast, set up its displays, I wandered about the convention hall and spied John Tynes at a distant table with someone I didn't recognize, erecting the pentagrammy-looking logo poster of the Pagan Publishing imprint on the back wall of a booth. I went over to see what was going on and John introduced me to his cohort, Pagan's art director Dennis Detwiller.

At this point I didn't know much about Pagan Publishing. John worked at Wizards, too—and was managing Pagan's booth part-time during the convention by special dispensation—but I'd just heard passing comments on the company. Dennis showed me the professional-quality, full-color-cover products they had produced, and then, while John attended to other business, walked me through his portfolio of illustrations to be used in pending books, among which was a whopper by the name of *Delta Green*.

I had been a fan of Mythos fiction and Lovecraft in particular since high school, and in college I had gotten my girlfriend (now my wife) Karen to go halvesies with me on a copy of the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game, along with the *Cthulhu* by *Gaslight* sourcebook, telling her that they would be (ahem) great reference for historical periods she was interested in. In short, Dennis found me a receptive audience.

Our conversation took us out of the convention hall and to the streets of downtown Milwaukee, where we ended up at the Safe House bar, the perfect watering hole for continuing our discussion. In a dark loft, Dennis regaled me with stories from the upcoming *Delta Green* sourcebook as we sipped a high-powered grog called the Spy's Demise: stories of the Karotechia, insane Nazi sorcerers working to bring about the Fourth Reich from their base in Central America, of a criminal syndicate in league with Mythos entities, of *Delta Green*'s genesis in an OSS security clearance for a file that dates back to the government's Raid on Innsmouth in the late Twenties.

I kept up my end of the conversation pretty well: "Gee. . . . Wow. . . . Cool. . . ." And I hadn't even touched my drink yet.

So what is *Delta Green*? Often I hear people in the know comparing the *Delta Green* concept to various TV shows about paranormal investigation when explaining it to new recruits, which is maybe not a bad place to start to grasp it: government people are going around investigating strange events. However, that's about as far as the analogy holds. The paranormal phenomena of *Delta Green*—from UFOs, to ghosts, to coastal communities interbreeding with ichthyoid monsters—are coherently linked to the Cthulhu Mythos, horror writer H.P. Lovecraft's pantheon of alien deities and their monstrous servitors, who are the once and future masters of the world, indifferent or downright hostile to humanity.

For millenia, the weird deities of the Mythos have either turned their attention to places far removed from the earth or been imprisoned by others of their kind in remote sites on it—at the bottom of the ocean, under the polar icecaps, etc.—but in time, they will come back. Human science, which is but the cusp of a magical physics ultimately unfathomable and even hostile to the human mind, will be ineffectual against them. (Boy, you read enough Lovecraft and you start to sound like him.)

Delta Green deals with a government conspiracy to study, defeat, and cover up Mythos activity. John Tynes first discussed the concept in issue seven of Pagan Publishing's magazine, *The Unspeakable Oath*, about nine months before *The X-Files* TV show first aired. Basically the story goes as follows:

The government received its first confirmation of the paranormal with the Raid on Innsmouth, Massachusetts, in 1928, where the Office of Naval Intelligence in cooperation with the Treasury Department cleaned up a nest of evil cultists interbreeding with a fishmen servitor race called the Deep Ones. The discoveries of that raid led to the Navy's creating the highly classified P4 Division (P for Parapsychology, Paranormal, and Psychic Phenomena), which began the work of correlating Cthulhu Mythos

data from sources ranging from espionage intelligence to blasphemous old books. What was P4 Division's goal? Find out What Man Was Not Meant to Know, and cover it the hell up. In 1942, the Division, under pretense of waging psychological warfare against the superstitious Axis, garnered the sponsorship of the OSS under Colonel William Donovan, who gave the division the security clearance Delta Green.

Though stripped of official sanction after a disaster in Cambodia in 1970, Delta Green is secretly kept alive today by maverick operatives: hardcore, terror-haunted SOBs misappropriating your tax dollars to fight the Cthulhu Mythos from a wide spectrum of government agencies.

And that's the shot.

The superiority of the *Delta Green* concept to that of current horror-conspiracy TV shows seemed clear to me early on. Typically these shows lean heavily on coincidence to explain how the heroes are introduced to paranormal situations: What's the reason a lone reporter, say, or some agents from the FBI, and only the FBI, stumble upon a huge number of disparate, unrelated paranormal situations? Usually no good reason.

Delta Green posits an extensive, cross-agency government conspiracy with considerable resources, a vast network for catching hints of paranormal activity. Delta Green agents are investigating phenomena that are ultimately linked, so one investigation often leads to another in a logical way. And best of all, *Delta Green* is set on the firm foundation of an ingenious horror cosmology with a long, respected tradition.

I became keenly interested in Pagan after that meeting with Dennis Detwiller, but I really didn't get another dose until four months later, when John Tynes invited me to come to a mutual friend's place to play a scenario from *The Oath*. In the course of that and subsequent sessions of *Call of Cthulhu*, I learned about the detailed workings of John's company and the progress of *Delta Green*, and John and I became good friends.

The next GenCon saw Dennis and me back at the Safe House, talking about the Delta Green sourcebook again. The project had come a long way. There were new stories about the evil Karotechia organization; a rebel faction of ghouls was kidnapping people for food rather than haunting graveyards; Hitler had almost destroyed the world with a botched summoning spell . . .

"But when are you guys going to finish it?" I asked.

Just over a year later, shortly after I became a staff editor for Pagan, the question became "When are *we* going to finish it?" However, to earn my place in that prodigious "we," all I had done for *Delta Green* was come in at the end of their long creative struggle and help proofread and index the final text. I felt something more was required to secure my attachment to

the Pagan brotherhood in general and *Delta Green* in particular.

And now you're reading it. No, not the intro; the whole book. In late February of this year, I told John and Dennis that I really thought we needed to expand the Delta Green concept into other media.

"So how are *you* going to do that?" Dennis asked. "You're part of the team now, Bob. Get off your ass and do something."

"How about a fiction anthology?"

"Great. Can't wait to read it."

John was a bit more accommodating. "Here's a list of writers with the contact information. Knock yourself out."

Well, maybe the conversation wasn't quite like that, but a perk of editing an anthology is that you get to take creative license with the truth in the introduction.

Anyway, I am damn grateful to the Pagan household for giving me the opportunity to work on this project; to Shea Reynolds, Greg Stolze, Bruce Baugh, Scott Glancy, Ray Winninger, Dennis, and John for turning in such fine work; to Karen for putting up with my mood swings while hammering out that "damned short story that's turning into a novella"; to my cats for keeping the apartment Zoog free; and you for taking a look.

A WORD OF EXPLANATION

JOHN TYNES

This is a shared-world anthology. Each writer has drawn upon a communal well of concepts; some have drunk deep, while others have left but the slightest ripple. All, however, have been strongly guided in spirit by the same body of water: a roleplaying game book entitled *Delta Green*. Published in the spring of 1997, this book posited a world of secrets underlying the daily reality of human life at the end of the millennium. The response of roleplaying gamers, magazine reviewers, and the roleplaying publishing community was of one voice: *Delta Green* was hailed as one of the best works ever produced in the field.

The book covers a lot of ground, but a few key ideas are summarized on this page. If you have not seen *Delta Green*, these notes should serve to introduce the major concepts at work in this anthology. Also recommended, almost by default, is the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. His cosmic vision and the particulars of his fictive worlds were important inspirations in the crafting of *Delta Green* and in the writing of the stories collected herein.

DELTA GREEN Born of the U.S. government's 1928 raid on Innsmouth (*c.f.* Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth") and the Nazis' occult studies of WWII, this organization was an anti-paranormal investigation and sanction group that existed from 1942 to 1970. At that point, after a disastrous operation in pre-invasion Cambodia, Delta Green was shut down. Unwill-

ing to accept this, many of the group's members continued their Delta Green activities on an *ad hoc* basis, investigating many paranormal events but—owing to a nonexistent command structure and the lack of any central files—many operations resulted in failure. In 1994, following the assassination of a Delta Green veteran by NRO SECTION DELTA, the networks branch of Majestic-12, Delta Green reorganized into a classical cell-structure conspiracy. Today, Delta Green remains an illegal, unauthorized, unsupported conspiracy within the U.S. government, doing its best to ferret out instances of paranormal activity and protect U.S. citizens from their effects, but benefiting from a command structure and a centralized intelligence-gathering effort. Delta Green isn't some sort of super-secret group reporting to the White House; they are a *conspiracy*, with no more authorization for the things they do than Oliver North and the Iran-Contra operatives had in the 1980s but without the good publicity. Delta Green "agents" are actually employees of many different federal agencies and organizations whose allegiance to the illegal conspiracy of Delta Green is a grim secret.

MAJESTIC-12 Majestic-12 is a high-level, top-secret group formed to deal with the UFO phenomenon. Everything you've heard is probably true, and worse; in recent years, Majestic-12 has succeeded in making contact with the aliens, and has acquired valuable technological and scientific knowledge as a result. Majestic-12 has even negotiated a treaty with the aliens (known as "Greys") that provides governmental sanction for alien activities on Earth (even those that result in the injury or death of U.S. citizens) in exchange for information and cooperation. In truth, the wool has been pulled over Majestic-12's eyes right from the start; the Greys are constructs—androids, really—used as puppets by a different and far less friendly force. Even the incident that created Majestic-12—the Roswell UFO crash of 1947—was a sham, the kick-off to a decades-long program of psychological experimentation and governmental manipulation by the true masters of the Greys.

THE KAROTECHIA Originally a Nazi program performing occult research during WWII, the Karotechia discovered practical applications of the occult, including reanimation of the dead and much worse. Among other horrors, a Karotechia attempt to summon a malignant deity—to be used as some sort of super-weapon against the Allies—was thwarted by Delta Green near the end of the war. Three veterans of the Karotechia survived the war, eventually coming together on a massive rubber plantation in Brazil known as La Estancia. These three sorcerers plot the rise of the Fourth Reich, following the advice of a supernatural being they believe to be an ascended, godlike Hitler. Having assimilated the remains of ODESSA, the Karotechia is now extending its reach into racist hate groups in the U.S. and Europe. ▲

▲ ▲ ▲

“THIS IS LIKE NOTHING
ANYONE HAS EVER
UNDERSTOOD.

THIS IS PURE EVIL,
PURE DESTRUCTION.

THIS IS THE APOCALYPSE.”

—MAJOR GENERAL REGINALD FAIRFIELD, U.S. ARMY (RET.),
ON THE DAY OF HIS ASSASSINATION
BY MEMBERS OF MAJESTIC-12
2.25.94 1323 EST

John founded Pagan Publishing and began producing a magazine and books for the Call of Cthulhu horror roleplaying game at the age of 19. It was just two years later, in late 1992, that he created Delta Green. He is now a self-employed freelance writer, editor, typesetter, graphic designer, and web site creator, in addition to leading the staff of Pagan. John's fiction credits include "The Second Effort" and "The Nullity of Choice" in the horror anthologies Made in Goatswood and Singers of Strange Songs, respectively. His roleplaying game work has been published in French, German, Polish, and Spanish. His experimental roleplaying game Puppetland recently caught the eye of a Hollywood producer, who has optioned screen rights to its story.

This story deals with the highest levels of the Delta Green conspiracy and defines the mission of the organization, which at times can only be enforced at a high emotional toll.

THE DARK ABOVE

JOHN TYNES

She's about twenty-five. Captain Forrest James of the U.S. Navy picked her up at a bar on Lakeview. They're in his hotel room; their clothes are mingling in a pile on the floor. He's in town for a seminar. He's tall, well-built, blond hair going grey. Twenty-plus years in the service have given him a form of confidence, a certain bearing, that some women find very attractive. She certainly did. When she saw him in the bar, she thought of Harrison Ford. She bought him a drink, asked him to dance. Her name is Carly.

"Yes ..." she breathes. He's kissing her breasts, his breath thick with liquor. "Yes..." She barely recalls his name, but he's good-looking. He's got scars on his chest, weird scars, like from an animal attack. She runs her fingers over the scars as he kisses her. "Yes ..."

Captain James is drunk, wicked-bad drunk, having sex with a woman he doesn't know. It's the only form of intimate relationship he thinks he's ca-

pable of anymore. She liked his edginess, his tales of a life in the Navy, his intimations of things he cannot speak of for reasons of national security. He seems like a dangerous man—but a comfortably dangerous man. He does not seem as if he'd hurt her for the world. He seems, rather, so profoundly grateful for her passion, her attraction, that he is like a child. "Yes ..."

She lies back on the bed, moans, wraps her fingers over the top of his head as he nuzzles at her. Aroused, excited, and rather drunk herself, she draws a pleased breath. "Kiss me ... Kiss me ..."

James kisses her, licks her, presses his face greedily towards her nipples. "Kiss me ... here ..." she says.

Carly smoothly guides his yielding head down between her thighs, brings his lips up against her warmth, tenses her legs for the pleasure to come, expectant for his tongue.

James inhales.

The breath chokes in his throat. The smell curdles in his liquored brain. He's on the deck of the sunken *Santa Cruz*, three hundred feet down. It's 1981. The smell—the smell is everywhere, unaccountably permeating his SCUBA gear. The air from his tanks is somehow tainted with the smell of the green, gilled humanoids that are swarming over the rest of the SEAL team. It's sea smell—the sea made choate, made alive, made mad. One of the freakish things lashes out, lacerates his suit, cuts his chest open and bleeding, leaves scars that Carly will stroke sixteen years later just before she wraps his face in her rich scent. His chest flares with remembered pain from the wound, remembered fear.

He obeys his training. He fights back.

The first blow breaks Carly's nose. James roars, inhuman, throws a meaty fist into her gut, cracks two ribs. He brings his hands together into a mallet of flesh, brings it down, causes fractures in her skull, chips teeth, bloodies her lips. She cries out. He hits her again, and again, he's wailing pathetically and he doesn't know why, then he realizes, then he stops. He looks down at the bloody mass of her face, hears her sudden, ragged breathing, her terrible cry of pain and hurt and confusion, and his scream is both drunken and primal—two states connected in ways no psychologist would ever admit, suggesting as they do something of the human condition that is antithetical to modern psychology.

Hotel security finds James on the floor, curled in a fetal position, screaming his throat raw and clutching his chest, while Carly spits up blood and teeth and cries for help.

The landscape is littered with metal barrels. Dozens, hundreds of them. They contain an industrial cleanser, twenty years out of date and fifteen years illegal owing to carcinogens. This place was once a coastal plain, a

mile from the shores of northern California. Today, it's a newly inaugurated Superfund site—toxic waste, polluted ground-water, corporate culpability as far as the eye can see.

Shanty shacks line the property. FOST Oil deactivated this site fifteen years ago and left it to rot; squatters, ferried in by the cargo trains of the hobo network, took over the area around the site and no one cared enough to tell them not to, to tell them it wasn't healthy. They were squatters in a remote rural area, far from population centers. They stole from farmers and worked odd jobs to buy milk and beer. No one cared about their little shanty town here at one of the worst toxic waste sites in the state.

Dr. Stephanie Park, an environmental scientist with a year-old doctorate, blinked back tears as she knelt in the clearing rimmed by tents. She looked at the fat orange sun looming low over the settlement.

Some of these squatters had been here for ten years. There were children, little boys and girls not five years old, with deformed features and obvious mental disabilities. *Details* magazine had written up this settlement three years ago, pitching it as a Fuck-the-Government commune for the truly out-of-the-loop. Meanwhile, the squatters drank contaminated water and ate half-tended vegetables from sickly tomato plants and splotchy lettuce patches. Don't even ask about the frogs; five legs and three eyes were the norm before the local amphibian population died out entirely three years ago, a warning sign those at the scene either didn't notice or didn't care about.

These squatter folk were fucked. Being fucked socioeconomically was one thing; being fucked biochemically was another. Few of them would live another ten years—disenfranchised, they had no real expectation of relief. Their presence here violated so many laws that no useful lawyer would take their case against FOST: how can you sue someone for endangering you when you were present against the law?

The sun was going down on these people's lives. Stephanie looked down at what she held in her arms—an infant born without a skull. She rocked him back and forth, while the half-assed midwife cleaned up the mother and gathered the afterbirth into a bucket. There was no guarantee that the placenta wouldn't end up a meal for visiting raccoons, sending the chemicals of the site yet further into the regional ecosystem. The FOST site was such a fuck-up that there was little point in trying to recover it; Stephanie could only chart the divergence, mark the point where the ecology took this mad path, and hope that maybe the information she collected for her employer, the Environmental Protection Agency, would help someone else.

Stephanie sucked up guilt like a Hoover. She wanted to take every crime committed by her government, her employer, her race, her species, and

absorb it into herself. Her capacity for absorbing pain was grossly overestimated. She desperately needed to draw lines, to establish priorities. She could only eat the pain and make it her own.

The infant did not last the night. Stephanie went to bed late, eyes red from crying.

The next morning she was roused from the makeshift EPA tent to deal with yet another birth, yet another maudlin situation. She got up, still half-dreaming of her old college boyfriend, wondering how she had chosen a path that led through such misery, when she was taken to a ragged tent where a girl scarcely past puberty had given birth during the quiet hours of morning before the sun rose.

She looked at the mother, whose ignorance and ill health were writ large on her face. Stephanie's eyes welled with tears at the thought of another tragedy, another crime laid at the feet of FOST Oil that they would never pay for, when she finally saw the infant.

The large-eyed little boy took short, sharp breaths, like any newborn infant coping with life in a gaseous environment, coping with leaving the liquid womb.

But he was breathing through gills in his neck.

Stephanie staggered back, cried out, blew her nose into a crinkly handkerchief. "Oh God," she cried, first stumbling, then falling back into the reeds, "oh God, no, no, oh God ..." The young mother beamed with idiot happiness as her little pride and joy flapped his gill slits and processed the unfamiliar air for the first time. Stephanie curled her legs up to her chest and wrapped them with her arms and wished that this damnable current of knowledge had never split her placid sea of ignorance.

If she'd had a gun, she might have killed the child on the spot. Instead, she would begin to love him.

The Washington, D.C., Naval Yard is home to ships, sailors—and academics. The headquarters of the Library of Congress is here, for reasons that no longer matter. Within the administration offices, Dr. Joseph Camp—the leader of Delta Green—stared at the decrypted email message on his desktop computer. It came from Dr. Stephanie Park of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Dr. Camp drummed his thick fingers on his cluttered desk, stirring tremors in his coffee. Dr. Park was a Delta Green friendly: an ally, a contact, but not someone brought fully into the fold. She was not an agent. She believed that Delta Green was a covert program serving under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She had no idea that those very officials had disbanded Delta Green in 1970, the year she was born, and that it had operated as an illegal conspiracy ever since.

The thing about covert programs, Dr. Camp reflected, was that they were easy to mimic if you were in the government. All you had to do was feign authority and speak with certainty. Your basic civil servant, when confronted with a presentation of secrecy from someone with security clearances she's never heard of, will believe whatever is said. What is she going to do—ask her boss? “Hey, boss, this guy under the Joint Chiefs of Staff says he's with a covert program and needs my confidential help. Is this for real?” Bam—kiss that promotion goodbye, you stupid shit. There were so many covert programs running in Washington that it was pointless to pursue verification, not to mention that it ran against protocol. The unspoken reality was that anyone with the balls—sorry, the PC term was *brass*—to feign membership in a covert program was probably someone you wanted on your side as you crawled up the wall of seniority. If you were a woman, they might help you hammer through that glass ceiling and, wonder of wonders, might not even ask for sex in return; better than the drill sergeants on the nightly news, at least. *I'm from the government, and I'm here to help. Welcome to the civil service.*

“Dr. Camp?”

Ms. Buie was at his door. A staffer with the library's Federal Research Division, she worked among many scurrying drones collating information requested by other government employees. She was another Delta Green friendly, only barely; she'd never heard of Delta Green, but when Dr. Camp needed a bit of research done after hours or behind closed doors, Ms. Buie helped out. For that spirit of generosity, she was now in the Delta Green database as a friendly; should push come to shove, she would, by default, be one of the many dozens of sacrificial lambs tossed to congressional investigators or wetworks death squads while the real Delta Green covered its tracks and headed for the hills. The organization had one overriding priority that made such casual horrors commonplace: containment. Containment of threat, containment of disaster, containment of knowledge. So it went. Buie was ignorant of the dangers of the waters in which she swam. She was a beautiful woman of fifty-nine, nineteen years younger than Camp, with lush cocoa skin and a smile that crinkled her cheeks in a way that made Camp feel like a spry fifty-five again.

“Yes, Carssandra?”

“You paged me, Dr. Camp?”

“Oh, yes. I've got one of my special requests for you.”

Carssandra Buie gave him one of her winning, crinkly smiles. “What do you need, Joe?”

“FOST Oil has a site in northern California near Roscoe that has recently joined the EPA's Superfund list. I'd just like a look at their file, if you can get it for me.”

She was quiet for a moment, her face intent. Then she smiled again. "I know someone over there. No problem."

"I won't need it for long. Just need to make some notes."

"I'll get right on it."

Carssandra left. Camp watched her glide down the hall, and sighed.

Then he picked up the phone and began dialing. A lot of numbers were involved. The call went through Delta Green's encryption router, which blocked all known tracers and taps. Forty-five seconds later, he was on the phone with Rear Admiral Harley Patton, the director of the Office of Naval Intelligence.

"Harley? This is Alphonse." Dr. Camp used his Delta Green code name. "I need Agent Darren, pronto." Darren was another Delta Green code name, belonging to one Captain Forrest James, commander of SEAL Team 7 and a Delta Green agent since 1988 whose specialty was a scarce race of primitive, ocean-dwelling humanoids unknown to modern science but apparently antagonistic towards humanity. In decades past, they had attempted interbreeding with humans as a means of asserting power over isolated coastal towns. (Unaccountably, they were genetically and physiologically compatible with humans.) Delta Green's existence could be traced back to a large-scale, successful military operation against these creatures in 1927, at a Massachusetts town called Innsmouth. The government used the Red Scare of the period to cloak the operation, claiming that the town held seditionists and anarchists along the lines of Sacco and Vanzetti; this falsehood concealed a loathsome truth that, it was judged, the public did not need to know. Captain James was one of a handful of currently active Delta Green agents who had faced these creatures directly, and was by far the most experienced: eradicating them seemed to be his personal crusade.

Dr. Camp listened for a few moments to the response to his request.

"Well, shit."

Dr. Stephanie Park's plane touched down in San Francisco that afternoon. Twenty minutes later, she was in a taxi into the heart of the City on the Bay. When she arrived at the metropolitan jail, she paid the driver and kept the receipt. Taxes.

Inside, she took out the credit card delivered to her with the plane tickets and some odds and ends by courier that morning and posted bail for one Captain Forrest James.

The first few minutes of the car ride passed in silence. Captain James sat in the passenger seat, large and sullen and still hung over. His face was covered in bruises. Even given his condition, he was a handsome man.

Driving the rental car that had been waiting for her at the jail (courtesy of Alphonse), Stephanie hazarded a few glances in Captain James' direction. Finally, tired of waiting for his questions, she spoke.

"I'm not with the ONI, Captain. I'm an investigator with the EPA. I'm here on behalf of Delta Green."

James looked at her and a death-rattle chuckle escaped his throat. "Jumping fuck." His face was expressionless.

"I thought you surrendered without a struggle. Those bruises on your face—did the police do that to you in interrogation?"

James shook his head. "Self-inflicted. I woke up mad and had to hit something. Figured I'd hurt my knuckles less on my face than on the wall."

Stephanie ignored this last comment. She exhaled slowly and spoke the words she'd been rehearsing for the last few miles, and on the plane before that. "Look, I don't know what your story is. I know what you did to that poor woman, and if it wasn't for the fact that your experience is allegedly instrumental in my investigation, I'd have left you there to rot. My intention is to make the most of your insight as quickly as possible and then put you right back in jail where you belong. From what I gather, the Navy isn't going to cut you any slack. Your career in the military is probably over. You're a reverse poster child for the new and improved armed forces, which means that as a drunk and an abuser of women you're going to be sent up the river. Given the classified nature of my investigation, your work with me is not going to help you score any points with your superiors and it certainly won't be admitted as evidence in your trial and therefore will not help to sway a judge. If you don't think you're going to contribute anything meaningful to my work, we can turn around right now and put you back in the hands of the SFPD. This isn't shore leave. It's your call."

James sat quietly for a few heartbeats, then sighed.

"There's only one reason why Delta Green would have popped me free. This has something to do with aquatic humanoids, doesn't it?"

Stephanie stared at the road. "Yes. I've got evidence of probable hybridization among a squatter camp living at a toxic waste site up north."

"Then I'm in. Might as well get a few more notches on my belt before they lock me up."

Stephanie shook her head slowly. She'd been hoping against hope that he'd be antagonistic and would just tell her to take him back to the jail or drop him off at a hotel out of spite. Instead, she was stuck with him.

"All right. The file is on the back seat. We'll be on a plane in forty-five minutes and you can't look at those documents while others are around. Read fast."



By the time the plane lifted off, James was sound asleep. He went under, just like that. He'd long since grown accustomed to grabbing sack time at a moment's notice, in anticipation of hard work and long hours waiting up ahead.

Restless, Stephanie kept glancing at him until she was sure he was asleep. Then she allowed herself a long, lingering gaze. He was handsome, even bruised as he was, but that wasn't the only reason that she allowed herself the indulgence of sustained inspection. He fascinated her. She'd read some of his Delta Green reports before, been impressed by his acuity and competence—and, in the moments where it was least expected, his guarded sensitivity. She found it hard to reconcile the mental picture she'd built up months ago, poring over those files, with the man capable of the savage act he had committed the night before. Who was he, to possess such insight and yet such brutality?

Stephanie forced herself to take her eyes off of him. She adjusted her seat back and looked at the ceiling of the plane. It was loneliness, she told herself; she'd been lonely for some time, her every attention focused on her new career. Last night the man sitting next to her had gotten drunk and horribly beaten a woman almost her age that he'd picked up at a bar. He was a monster, the kind of psychopathic freak that the armed forces seemed to draw out of the woodwork from time to time. That was all. She understood him, and could dismiss him.

Yet still she turned her head, studied his face, until she caught herself doing it and closed her eyes.

The EPA land rover bucked across the unsteady landscape, wedging its way through the grassy plains. The squatter camp by the FOST site lay somewhere ahead. Captain James flipped through the document folder in silence.

"All right," James said. "I've got the background. I've looked through this six ways from Sunday. There's nothing here for Delta Green; what's the score? Where's your report?"

Stephanie sighed and clutched the wheel. "There's no report. Not yet. I just found the evidence this morning, and it's not guaranteed authentic. I dropped email to Alphonse, and the next thing I knew I was on a plane to pick you up. I guess he was convinced by what little I had to say."

"So what were you doing on the plane down here? Why weren't you writing up a report? For all you know we're gonna get waxed in an ambush at the next turn, and whatever you've seen will die with you. That's not the way we work. Not anymore."

"I'm sorry. I was disoriented. I'm not used to this stuff. I only got Delta Green clearance a few months ago."

James looked at her and whistled slowly. "Okay. I get it. You're not a Delta Green agent, are you?" There *was* no such thing as "Delta Green clearance." Not since the organization was disbanded in 1970. This lady was a friendly, not an agent, and didn't know the score.

Stephanie glared at him as best she could while she drove. "No, I work for the EPA. I told you that already. I'm not employed by Delta Green."

James was quiet. He'd have to be careful. This woman hadn't yet earned agent status, which meant that he couldn't assume much about her knowledge base or her willingness to comply with Delta Green procedures—which, by most standards, were pretty unorthodox. He'd have to play this assignment carefully. Normally, Alphonse would have briefed him going in, but his being in jail made that difficult.

"Okay. No sweat. Just back up and tell me what made you contact Alphonse."

Stephanie exhaled a weary breath, glad to get onto comfortable ground. "These squatters are pretty well inundated with toxins, and they've been here long enough that they've got kids, families. It's a way of life for them.

"This morning, a child was born, a boy. They've got midwives, more or less. The child had gills, and was actively breathing through them—they weren't just for show. His eyes and other characteristics match that of the hybrids."

"Okay. So what do you know about that? Why did you assume it was anything other than a birth defect brought on by the environment?"

"Well, I didn't. Not completely. We can't rule that out as a possibility."

"But ..."

"But, I got my Delta Green clearance because of a similar case earlier this year. I was investigating reports of toxin contamination in rural Massachusetts, and when I filed my report on genetic defects among the immediate population I was contacted by some Delta Green agents sent by Alphonse. They got me some lab tests I couldn't have gotten normally in that time frame, and a lot of anomalies showed up in the subjects' physiologies that I wouldn't have known to look for. I was with the agents when they went into some of the sea-caves where the subjects were living. They were disenfranchised squatters, much like our current crew—post-hippy, semi-commune, poor as dirt. While we were in the caves, we encountered some of the amphibian humanoids that you seem to know so much about."

James was shaking his head. "Fuck, yeah, okay, I heard about this. I was out of the country when that went down. Otherwise, I would've been there, and you would have been on the first plane back to Washington so we could take care of it properly."

Stephanie felt her hackles rise. "Well, you weren't there now, were you? Two of the three agents died. I got out, along with Agent Garrow. I saw those things. Alphonse showed me some of the files on them; your name

was there.” She wasn’t keen to make compliments, but for some reason she couldn’t help herself. She managed to lower her voice into a faint emotionless whisper that gave away more than it concealed. “I’ve read your work. It’s amazing stuff.”

“Yeah. Fat lot of good it does anyone. So the infant from this morning looked suspicious?”

Stephanie exhaled. “Yes. I mean, I haven’t run any genetic tests yet, but I believe it’s the same phenomenon.”

“Hah! Yeah, it’s a ‘phenomenon’ all right. Let’s see you call it that when it’s looking to slip you the big one. It’s like the old horror movies: Mars needs women, only it’s not Mars. It’s the fucking ocean.”

Stephanie grew irritable again and drove faster. “Thanks for the insight.”

“You’re welcome. So what’re the chances that what you saw this morning is just a birth defect?”

“Pretty slim. Cases of gill-like slits are recorded, but *functional* gills that can breathe our atmosphere as well as underwater are pretty much unsubstantiated. I think it’s hybridization.”

“I think you’re right. Good thing you were here. This shit doesn’t pop up every other Tuesday. Next question: these hybrids usually don’t manifest gills and so on until they reach adulthood. Why was this kid different?”

“I don’t know. It’s possible that the mother is a hybrid also, making the deviant genes more dominant. It’s also possible that the toxicity of the site affected the foetus, damaging the human cells and leaving the stronger hybrid cells to develop more rapidly. At this point, there’s no telling.”

“Okay. Last question: how far now?”

“Not far. Not far at all. But *I’ve* got a question.”

“Hit me.”

“Why the secrecy? I mean, I’ve seen these things. If half of what I’ve read in the files is true, there’s an entire civilization out there, living in the sea. Why don’t we know more about them? What have they been doing all this time? Why are they a secret?”

Why indeed, thought James. He could only reply with the unvarnished truth: “You aren’t cleared for that information.”

Stephanie bristled.

They made the rest of the drive in stony silence. James thought to himself: *I didn’t mean that you weren’t cleared for that information in terms of status or rank. I meant that you weren’t cleared for that information psychologically. No one is. When the time comes, you don’t get briefed. You just get fucked. I can no sooner prepare you for that information than I can ask you if you’re self-conscious about that mole on your cheek.*

He checked himself.

Now what the fuck made me think about that?



They arrived at the squatter site scant minutes later. The site consisted of a population of about forty. Maybe half of those were transient; some might stay, some might leave. The other half were hard-core, had been there for a few years or longer, were eking out a subsistence living as best they could. They lived in tents, in shanty shacks, in groves of trees with sheets of rusted tin roofing hung from the branches overhead. It wasn't exactly a utopian community; James thought briefly that it was more like a dystopian community. It looked like at any moment Mad Max might drive up in a souped-up post-apocalypse dune buggy and start bitching about getting some clean H₂O.

Stephanie took a chug from a bottle of Evian spring water. James chuckled.

They parked by the EPA area. Stephanie and her two colleagues had set up on-site, since there was no motel in useful proximity. It was a little unorthodox, she had to concede to herself, but needs must.

Their first stop after checking in was the site of the birth this morning. The mother, one Andrea NMI Cooper, was nursing her newborn boy. The child was pale, green veins showing through fragile flesh. He suckled hungrily. As he drank from her breast, his gills fluttered; he could breathe and swallow at the same time.

"Well," James said. "Would you look at that."

Stephanie crouched down by the mother. "How is he doing?"

The woman smiled. "He's fine. He's beautiful."

"What's his name?" Stephanie asked.

"Jamile," the mother replied. "After his father."

James perked up. "His father? Is he here?"

Andrea Cooper shook her head. "He's not from around here," she said dreamily.

"Where is he?" Stephanie asked.

"He comes sometimes. With the tide. I met him on the beach."

James snorted. "I'll bet."

Stephanie ignored him. "Tell me about him. About the father."

Andrea got a far-away look in her otherwise dull eyes. "He's beautiful. He comes from the sea. He's the son of nature."

"He's not human," Stephanie asked, "is he?"

"That's not important—not nearly as important as his loving soul."

James looked long and hard at the scene, then turned and stalked off towards the EPA tent. Stephanie lingered a few moments longer, then hurried to catch up. She found James at the tent going through a rucksack.

He pulled out a large handgun, a Desert Eagle, and put a magazine into the handle. The gun was one of several things left by the courier that morning.

"What are you doing?" she asked warily.

James worked the action, checked the barrel, nodded with satisfaction. ".44 caliber abortion."

"What!" Stephanie exclaimed. "What the hell do you mean?"

James looked into her eyes with what he hoped was a grim expression. His shell of cold, stern strength was, at times, taxing to maintain. "You made the right call. That kid is a hybrid. We've got to deal with him. Containment. Sanction."

Stephanie shook her head slowly, unbelieving. "That's crazy! You're going to just blow his head off? He's just a baby!"

James closed his eyes for a long moment, taking his time, lowering the sidearm to his waist. "You don't understand."

"The hell I don't! You're going over there to put a bullet in his brain!"

James nodded. "That's right."

"That's ridiculous! He's a living being! He hasn't even had a chance yet!"

Feeling more confident, James looked at her coolly. "He'll grow up like other kids. He'll play Nintendo and throw a baseball. Twenty years from now, he'll feel the call of the sea, the call of his father. He'll change. He'll transform. He'll adapt to a life of water. He'll regard humans as prey, or as a repository for his seed. Next time you see him, he'll be chowing down on a runaway kid from Portland and waving his arms in the air, calling his crazed gods from the sea. They all turn out the same." He started to walk off, towards the young mother and her son.

"No!" Stephanie barked. "You could be wrong! I've seen the files. Maybe he's got the blood in him, and maybe he doesn't. Maybe his father is human, or mostly human. It could just be a genetic situation with no behavioral abnormalities."

"And maybe you feel like sticking with him for the next two decades, making sure that he doesn't grow up to be a murderous bastard, making sure that he isn't raping women like her to make more of his kind? Do you want that responsibility?"

Stephanie was silent for a moment. "It's premature. We need to do tests. This is my investigation, not yours."

James sighed. "All right. Fine. We'll do your tests. Then, when they show what we both know they're gonna show, I'll kill him. I'll make it quick. He won't know what's happening. But when we confirm he is what he obviously is, there's no way I'm letting him live."

James put the safety on and returned the gun to the rucksack. Then he shook his head and spoke again. For some reason, it was important to him that she understand.

"You think I like this? You think I *like* killing children? I've seen what he'll become. I've seen what he'll do. So have you. Things like him killed

those agents you were with in Massachusetts. A cute face and a baby's cry don't make him human." James stalked off into the trees.

Stephanie breathed out slowly, sank to her knees. She was wracked with guilt: this morning when she'd first seen the boy, she'd felt the same way that James felt now. But now was different. Now, as soon as she saw James heading towards the EPA tent and knew what he was thinking, her first reaction was to protect the child. She knew better. But she couldn't turn off her emotions like that. She just couldn't.

She wasn't cleared for this.

The waves rolled onto the shore. The coast here was cliffs and rocks, with occasional short strips of beach in between. To sea, the water stretched lonely to the horizon, bisected the golden disc of the setting sun. A cool, salty sea-breeze whistled through the rocks, made the grass at the edge of the sand rustle.

Stephanie, James, and Andrea Cooper made their way through the grass, down the gentle slope, and towards the sand. Andrea held newborn Jamile in her arms, propped awkwardly against one shoulder. The boy had been crying during the slow walk from the squatter site, but when he got in reach of the sea-breeze, he suddenly grew quiet and content. James noticed. Stephanie didn't.

"Here," Andrea said. "This is where he comes. My man. We're in love."

James rolled his eyes in practiced fashion. Stephanie noticed, as she was intended to. She shot him a sharp look, and followed Andrea down to the small, sandy stretch of beach.

Andrea took a seat on a rock, and began nursing Jamile.

Stephanie paused, looked away to give them a moment of privacy, looked back, and then sat down on the sand beside them. James stood a few feet behind.

"Andrea, how did you meet him? Jamile, I mean. How does he come?"

The girl smiled vacantly. "He comes when the moon is high. I met him late last year. I called him."

"You called him?"

James perked up at this and took the final few steps down to the sand.

"Yes. I called him. I sang his song. Our song. Our song of love."

James knelt down beside Andrea, a look of wariness on his face. "This song. How did you learn it?"

"From Henry, at the camp. He's a wise man. He did my star chart, told me I was special, that I had a soul-mate who lived in the sea. A true son of nature. We belong together."

James' brow furrowed. "Andrea, could you sing us the song?"

"It's too early. He won't be ready to come until a little later."

"I know. But could you just sing it for us? So we can hear it?" His face was, Stephanie thought, surprisingly earnest.

"Okay."

Andrea gathered her thoughts for a moment, then opened her mouth and began to sing.

The sound was a caress, wordless, an ululating invocation that bespoke all the rich mystery of the sea. It sounded of whale song, of lullaby. It was the most beautiful sound Stephanie and James had ever heard.

James fumbled inside his jacket and turned on his tape recorder.

The song lasted perhaps five minutes. Stephanie and James scanned the surface of the ocean, watched for any sign of an audience. There was none. Finally, Andrea reached the end, the last notes cascading upwards into a plea.

"That's beautiful," Stephanie said. "That's—"

Another voice rose and began to sing, the same song that Andrea had just sung. Only this voice was higher in pitch, a little ragged in tone, and possessed a curious, unsettling quality: it never paused. The voice never took a moment's respite to catch its breath. It just sang and sang without the slightest halt. The effect was beautiful, but subtly eerie—humans are used to hearing pauses in a song.

The singer was the infant boy, Jamile. Less than a day old, and he already knew the song of his father by heart. The effect of the newborn singing was surreal, almost shocking. There was a violence to its strangeness; a lie to its beauty.

James tensed. Perhaps the boy's song would draw the father from the sea early? But no—nothing occurred for the entirety of the song.

Finally, the infant's voice grew still. James turned, ever so slowly in case the boy's father came after all, and then began to stride back towards the camp.

Stephanie hurried after him, leaving Andrea to nurse her son, pleased.

"So?" Stephanie said. "What now?"

"I'm going back. I've got to find this Henry guy and see what the score is."

"I guess we got our test results just now, didn't we?"

James stopped walking. "Yeah. We did. We know what that kid is."

"So why didn't you kill him? Wasn't that what you were all fired up to do?"

James looked away. "I've got to find out what Henry knows. If he knows the score, he might not be alone. If we start taking terminal action now, we could blow everything. It's too soon."

"There's something else. You're waiting for something else."

"Yes."

"The father."

"Yes." No, James thought to himself. *I'm waiting for something differ-*

ent. I'm waiting for the moment when what I have to do doesn't come at the expense of your hatred. God help me, I'm waiting.

"Well, get going then. I'll stay here with her."

James was still looking away. Stephanie touched him lightly on the shoulder. "Okay?"

James turned towards her sharply. His inner shell was in pieces. Their eyes met, and Stephanie saw what he was really waiting for.

"Yeah," he said. "Okay." He walked off.

Stephanie watched him, a hand to her lips, then headed back down the slope to the beach.

Henry lived away from the rest of the squatters, in a makeshift tent of canvas. He was in his eighties, with crinkled, leathery skin and a body hardened by a hard life. His eyes were intelligent, but with a hunted look that James had rarely encountered. Henry was nursing a bottle of muscatel. He hadn't bathed in days or longer. Clots of dirty clothes littered the ground of his living space. Incongruously, a tattered astrological star chart was pinned to one wall of the tent, alongside a torn poster of an eighteenth-century sailing vessel on the high seas.

James came to the opening at the front of the tent. "You Henry?" he asked.

"That's me," the man replied drunkenly. "Come on in, son. Get comfy."

James thought it unlikely he could comply with that last, folksy command, given that the tent reeked of unwashed human. Still, he ducked and entered, then sat cross-legged across from the old man.

"I was just down at the beach with Andrea. We were talking about the father of her child. She said you taught her the song to call him from the water."

"Yep, I did. I did do that."

"How did you know it? What do you know about—about those people, the ones in the water?"

"Oh, I picked it up here and there. You know."

"No, I don't. Tell me."

"It's nothing, fella. Forget about it. Have a drink."

James shook his head, uncomfortable with how welcome the suggestion had struck him. Then he reached out for the bottle anyway and took a long drink.

"It's not nothing, old-timer." He pulled his shirt out and lifted it up, revealing the old scars on his chest. "I know these things. They're not human. They're not kind. They only exist to hurt, to destroy."

Henry took back the bottle of muscatel, had a slug, and laughed. "You're with that nice government lady, aren't you? Seems to me that you folks said those same things about the Indians, way back when."

James felt his face harden. He lowered his shirt. "It's not the same thing."

Henry's glazed eyes regarded James regretfully. He shook his head and looked down at the ground. "No. It's not." He took another drink, then gave James one.

"So what's the story, Henry? The real one?"

Henry sighed. "Well, shit," he said.

"Back thirty-odd years ago, I was a sailor. Worked for merchant ships, small fry. Loved it. Loved the sea.

"One boat, there was this captain, a real drunken bastard. He knew about them things, them folk out of the sea. Had traffic with them. They would scavenge wrecks for him sometimes, sabotage other boats some other times. But he was holding out on them. Seemed he'd promised them his crew someday—us—on account of how they needed a fresh batch of men for something. So finally he gave in, said, 'Okay, you can have my crew. I'll give them a big party on the beach, get them drunk, and you can come in and take them. But I want something in return.' See, they had this jewelry—weird stuff—made of gold and other things. They were gonna bring him a whole big bunch of this stuff to seal the bargain when the trade went down.

"But this captain, he was a real drunken bastard. We knew about those folk, about his dealings with them. He told us the score. We planned an ambush. We'd fake a party, but when they came out of the sea, we'd be ready for them. We'd kill 'em all, and take their gold. When we were docked in Haiti, we got it all ready. The captain passed out guns and knives. We went to the beach late at night and raised a ruckus.

"Of course, the men got into the liquor. By the time those things came, everyone was three sheets to the wind anyway. They were clever. They ambushed *us*. Came by land, by sea, over rocks. Tore into us. Men were dying everywhere. They just tore us right up.

"I saw what was gonna happen. I was sober—had been sober a long time. Back then. As soon as the shit hit the fan I clambered up a bunch of rocks where the captain was hiding. We hid out there while those things killed every man there on the beach. When they were done, they started dragging the bodies out into the surf, and checking around to make sure they got us all.

"That's when I did it. I stood up all of a sudden, hoisted the captain up with me. All them critters looked up at us, and I cut that drunken bastard's throat right on the spot. Kicked him down to the beach below. Then I jumped down, dropped my knife, held up my hands.

"They coulda killed me. But I'd made them happy. Plus, the captain was dead—and they could always use somebody on land to help 'em out. So they let me walk outta there, and said that someday I'd owe them one.

"I came back home, got a job on a railroad, never set foot on a boat again. Never heard from them again till last year, when I started having these dreams."

"So Andrea—that was the one you owed them?"

"Yep. She's a sweet girl. Not right in the head. But she loves her man. She's got a beautiful boy. Hell, maybe her man loves her, too."

"No. He doesn't love her. He doesn't love the boy."

"Well shit, how do you know? Maybe he do! And if not, at least she loves him. Love's worth something, ain't it?" Henry's voice grew plaintive, drunken, and guilty. "Love's worth something, ain't it?"

James rose, standing only halfway up in the confines of the tent, and stepped outside.

He was so tired. So very tired. Tired of all the little corruptions, the little tragedies. Tired of all the misery, all the sorrow. He couldn't think clearly. The muscatel was buzzing in his head. His training would see him through. Delta Green's driving policy was simple, after all.

Containment. Containment of threat, containment of disaster, containment of knowledge.

He crouched and stepped back into the tent. He leaned over and took the bottle of muscatel from Henry, took a long drink. Set the bottle down. Threw a punch into Henry's gut that knocked the wind out of the old man, who fell back wheezing. Grabbed the man's pillow and shoved it down over his face. Held it there. Kneeled on his chest. Stayed put for three full minutes. Until he was dead.

James pulled the pillow off Henry's stricken, still features.

He sat down heavily and picked up the bottle. He drained the rest of it. There was quite a lot. He tossed the bottle to one side. He arranged Henry to look as if he'd been sleeping and died peacefully. No one was going to look at this old bum too closely. He sat back again and watched the dead man's face drunkenly. He put his face in his hands. He wanted to cry. He failed.

He wasn't cleared for this.

On the beach, the sun was gone and the moon was rising high. Stephanie and Andrea had been talking for what seemed like ages. James had not yet returned, and Stephanie wondered where he was. Andrea talked about her life: the orphanage, the foster parents, the reform school, the arrests, running away from home once, twice, a final time. How she'd read this article in a magazine about a place where you could go when you had no place to go. She'd torn it out, read it again and again, dreamed about it, loved it, loved the idea of it. When she'd run off that final time, eighteen months ago, she'd gone there. To the squatter camp.

Stephanie shook her head, shivered in the cool night sea-breeze. Their lives were so different, but only as different as what you see in a mirror: opposite, but otherwise the same. She'd spent so much time searching, unhappy, trying to find her place in the world, wondering why she was always so miserable, always so full of pain. She put her hand on the girl's knee.

"It's okay; it is. Some of us have to make our own way in life. It's not easy."

Andrea looked her full in the face. "Yeah," she said. "That's right." Her face held something back, some suspicion, or some secret knowledge, that Stephanie could not place. Perhaps this was jailhouse reserve.

Then Jamile began to sing.

It was the song again, his father's song. He started it up all of a sudden, jarring them both, his uneven but unbroken tones rolling out across the beach. His mother joined in, singing in her strong, clear voice that nevertheless had to pause for breath every so often, her very humanity damaging the purity of the song. Jamile's singing betrayed no such fragile allegiances to the human race. He sang—as simple as that.

Stephanie felt a chill go up her back. She shuddered. The song was just as beautiful as before, heartbreakingly so. But this time there was something else. It was, she decided, a strange potential. A feeling obvious to them all that this time, the song would be answered.

It didn't take long.

He broke the water, a ways out from shore. His head was powerful, thick, set low into his hunched shoulders. He strode forward, his arms and legs massive, his chest a barrel, his whole body ripe to burst with vitality and the savor of the sea.

He was singing.

The voices of the three joined in song, calling higher and louder. The song was so beautiful, the moment so ethereal, so transcendent, that all of Stephanie's suspicions and fears melted away in the rapture of the moment. There was nothing wrong here, nothing unnatural. Everything was right.

Then she saw his eyes.

His crystalline eyes, which never seemed to close, were the most terrifying sight she had ever seen. They'd seen all the secrets of the cosmos a hundred times over and yet he knew his place among those secrets from the very start. His eyes betrayed him: he was the proper product of the universe, whereas humanity was but incidental. His eyes had no emotion, no spirit, no nothing—they were as blank as a starless sky, and just as deep.

Stephanie froze as the man from the sea, the true son of nature, came striding out of the foam with the awful surety of a god. She could not move. She could barely breathe. His gaze held her hypnotized, and then he was standing before her where she sat upon the beach. The song the three sang came to an end, its awesome sense of joy belied by what she saw in

his eyes: the song was not meant for the ears of humans and its beauty was an accident; it appealed to a different aesthetic sense altogether, and to that sense it was not beautiful. It was proud and terrible.

She would have sat there, frozen, lost in the trackless wastes of his eyes, but for Andrea's voice.

"Yes," the girl said. "I brought her here for you."

Something large swelled between his legs.

The spell was broken. Stephanie spun, stumbled up, tried to run. A massive webbed claw grabbed her shoulder, dug in, ripped her windbreaker, shoved her down roughly onto the sand. She rolled over, threw a punch, he caught it, held it, swung with his other claw and clouted her in the side of the head. She fell back, stunned. He dropped to his knees, moved the claw that held her to her throat, pinned her; then his other claw grabbed for the waistband of her jeans, while the distended thing between his legs bobbed erect and grotesque in the sea-breeze.

Her hands freed, Stephanie reached in the pocket of her windbreaker and pulled out the taser, another item left by the courier that morning—*was it just that morning?*—and jammed it against the beast's gut.

He croaked, a terrible sound like bones breaking, froze, then fell onto her, dead weight.

Stephanie was pinned. The beast was incredibly dense, three hundred pounds and more. She struggled to get him off of her.

"No!" Andrea cried. Stephanie looked to the girl with relief. Her relief died. Andrea had set Jamile down on the sand and was picking up a large rock. She staggered quickly over to Stephanie, raised the rock, and prepared to smash her face in with it.

A single shot rang out. It struck Andrea in the left side of her chest, spun her to one side, dropped her to the sand, her heart pierced and broken.

Bang, thought James.

He stood perhaps sixty feet away, both arms cocked out steady, the Desert Eagle perched in his hands. He breathed heavily.

The beast atop Stephanie stirred. The taser would have made short work of a human. It only brought the beast down for a few precious moments. As he pushed himself up, groggy, Stephanie scuttled back, out from under his weight, and ran. She ran up the slope, into the grass, straight towards James, who lowered his left arm and gestured to her to come, to run, to run to him. His other arm remained out, trying to get a shot around his fleeing partner in the dim twilight.

The beast had scuttled onto the beach, still weak, and then rose to its feet and started to run away just as James took aim and squeezed the trigger. The slug went wide, drunkenly wide in the dark. James walked forward as fast as he dared, still aiming, trying to get a shot that would count.

Stephanie reached him. He warded her off with his left hand, then brought it up to steady the other. With two hands on the gun, he continued walking forward swiftly, closing the gap.

The beast was running now, crouched more than usual, into the surf.

James fired again. Again. One of the shots punched into the beast's back. The .44 magnum slug carved through the beast's flesh, and blew out the other side. The beast staggered, ducked tighter into itself, arms clutching its chest, up to its knees in water now, pressing on through the surf.

Again. Again. Again. The grouping was tight, the muzzle blazing as fast as James could fire. In the space of a breath, all three shots caught the beast in the back. It staggered, roared, dropped to its knees, fell face down into the shallows.

James ran forward, releasing the magazine and putting another one in its place, the gun held out before him like a flashlight illuminating a violent path. Stephanie ran with him.

They reached the surf. James planted one foot on the beast's back, leaned down swiftly, put a final slug into the back of the beast's head. The sound was like a crab shell bursting in a restaurant.

Stephanie stopped just short of running into him. She put a hand on his shoulder.

James lowered the weapon, then put it back into its holster. His trouser cuffs were soaking wet. He turned to her. They embraced clumsily, revolved slowly in the shallow water.

Stephanie's view danced from the far horizon of the water to the near line of the shore as they turned, she saw Andrea's body atop the rocks and sand.

There was something else—something she didn't see. Because it wasn't there. She gasped, withdrew from the embrace. "Turn him over!" she cried.

James looked at her dumbly, then leaned over and grabbed the beast's shoulder. He pulled hard, straining against the weight, and flopped the dead thing over onto his back, the crystalline eyes meeting the limitless night sky.

Where the beast had lain, lay Jamile. A hole the size of Stephanie's fist gaped from the back of the boy's head. One of James' shots had blown through the beast's body and struck the infant—the infant cradled in the hunched beast's arms as he fled for the sunless sea.

Jamile was dead. His father was dead. His mother was dead. The path from her discovery to its conclusion was littered with corpses.

Stephanie looked up, into James' eyes. She smelled the wine on his breath. He looked at her, silently pleading for her to understand. The things that separated them were not important—not nearly as important as the possibility of their being together.

Stephanie looked away. To look any longer would be to understand James. To look any longer would be to understand herself. To look any

longer would be to understand everything. She looked up into the night sky, into the far stars. The dark above held no secret. It held no hope. It would not help her understand. The cosmos radiated ignorance, and she accepted it greedily, for the alternative was too terrible to contemplate.

James watched her face for a long moment, hoping against hope that she would return his gaze. She did not, could not, dared not. Finally he looked down at the bodies, slick with surf. He crouched slowly, his knees coming to rest on the dead beast's back. He put his face in his hands. He wanted to cry.

He did.

By the time the sun rose, a Delta Green sanitation crew had disposed of all the corpses. When morning stood firm, Stephanie and James got into the land rover and headed for Roscoe. At the small airport, James would board a commuter flight back to San Francisco. An attorney, arranged for informally by Harley Patton of the ONI, awaited his return so they could prepare for the trial. A flock of reporters were waiting, too; in James' absence, his crime had become national news. The novelty of drill sergeants raping female recruits had faded, and a nation hungry for the degradation of its own spirit now turned its attention to this latest pairing of lion and Christian to enter the arena. Across the country, talk-radio hosts invited callers to ring in and express their profound disgust for this man, this Captain Forrest James of the United States Navy, prestigious commander of SEAL Team 7, who was a drunk and a woman-beater and unfit to serve his country or his species.

James listened to one such show on the radio in the land rover, hearing his name dragged through the mud, until Stephanie turned it off. James did not object. It was not because they couldn't bear the senseless rage of the callers; it was because the callers—ignorant and ill-informed though they may be—were to a great extent right, and they both knew it.

At the airport, Stephanie walked with James until they reached the gate from which his plane would depart. They stopped when they could walk no farther. They embraced again, a final time, wordless. Then James turned and walked into the gate to board the plane.

Stephanie watched him go, then began the walk back to the parking lot outside the little terminal. She put her hands in her pockets. They contained a piece of folded paper which had not been present before.

She stopped and took it out. James must have slipped it in there when they embraced. Her mouth was dry. She unfolded the paper and read what he'd written:

You are the rock and I am the wave—and when I touch you, I break.

She folded the paper back up and returned it to her pocket, then resumed her walk to the car, and beyond.



Dr. Joseph Camp read through Dr. Stephanie Park's report for Delta Green. It was proper, clear, and informative. With it was the cassette tape of the calling song that Captain James had recorded, something that Dr. Camp hoped would have the same effect in other circumstances.

There was something in Park's report, something that Camp couldn't put his finger on. Something between the lines that she hadn't stated flat out.

Carssandra Buie, leaning against the doorway, said, "Knock, knock."

"Oh, hello. What can I do for you?"

"I'm heading to lunch, Dr. Camp. Would you care to join me?"

Dr. Camp looked at the report a final time. Whatever it was that he couldn't quite catch wasn't important—not nearly as important as the prospect of lunch with Carssandra, certainly. "I'd be delighted."

He stood up gracelessly, approached the door a little unsteadily, and then made up for all his infirm years by gallantly offering his arm. She smiled and took it, and they walked pleasantly down the hall.

There are worse things in life, he thought to himself, than to be in love. Even if it's not returned. ▲

Mr. Detwiller, twenty-five, hardly needs an introduction after the preface to this book. A major shaper of the Delta Green concept, Dennis is our tireless art director, staff artist and writer, and self-styled company "stress guy."

This story concerns not Delta Green but a rival conspiracy in the U.S. government, Majestic-12, whose researchers have learned too many secrets about the universe that are antagonistic to the human mind. Here is the testament of one Majestic-12 scientist who has evidently gone hopelessly mad. Or has he?

DROWNING IN SAND

DENNIS DETWILLER

When you first shoot a man, there is no moment of revelation while the deed is done, no heartfelt trauma of something irrevocably being lost. Not like in the movies.

Instead, there is only the deafening sound of the gun, the violent kicking in your hand as if you were holding the leg of an angry dog trying to get away. It distracts you.

And this is why people die.

The gun gives you no time to think about it when it happens, and in time, it doesn't seem that bad. When you remember the event, you recall the details of the special effects, not the look on the victim's face, not what he or she was wearing. But the way the gun kicked, the smell, the smoke. You work it into everything else, and the important details get lost in the mental paperwork. Misplaced in the shuffle like a card trick.

Life is like that.

The first man I killed was named Dr. Antonio Malbayam, and he died on his knees at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, a neat hole in his chest like a cigarette stain. Today, fifty years later, I still can't remember what he looked like.

I sit across the diner from the man sent to watch me. He is a fine fellow, so good at his job that he makes me feel almost alone, something I haven't truly experienced since before my time in the government. The people who employ him are professionals. They tap my phone, use lasers to listen in on my conversations with the few friends I can maintain, but I don't mind. Somehow having fewer secrets makes the ones I maintain seem more important. No matter what they might be.

I can't write anything down; the notebooks might be discovered. I know they search everything when I am not there, deniable men with no names shuffling through my home in the dark, marking the positions of each item moved, each paper read.

Most would be bitter, followed every day, everywhere, spending their final days monitored and written about by Majestic. Not me. I would do it all again in a moment; I would sign it all away, and more, with a smile on my face.

In my time, I have seen proof that we are not alone in this galaxy. I have seen a thing that was born under another sun, I have stood in a craft that has traveled between our two worlds. I have learned how it is to move and affect matter and energy with only the power of the mind. Enough for four lifetimes, forty lifetimes, and more.

I have seen the final truth, dancing in the mad-man's scribble of the Courtis Equations, the absolute truth, the clockwork that keeps this thing we misperceive as a universe spinning in a series of numbers looking like some accountant's scratch pad.

This set of equations is a small part of my secret, the one I guard with my life. Somehow, by rendering this absolute to nothing more than a segment of my secret, it is as if I have defeated him, Dr. Stephen Courtis, and finally his mocking voice is silent in my mind. But sometimes he is still there in my old-man dreams, like a ringleader, like a Jester, mustering the subtle humiliations of my life into form and force. Laughing at me silently with tears pouring down his cheeks. Sometimes he is silent, and just beckons for me to follow.

Courtis was everything I wanted to be, temperamental, individualistic, brilliant. Bronk let him run all over the program, controlling everyone else. Courtis had *carte blanche* and used it, like I wished I could, muscling everyone out of his areas in the N-4 complex.

The N-4 building/hangar complex at Wright Patterson was where they kept it, the alien disk they recovered in Roswell in '47. A silver hubcap that

just hung there in the air, defying everything, thumbing its nose at Newton and Kepler, and laughing in the face of the best explanations we had to date. As if that wasn't enough to set you off, they had one of the *pilots* too. In any case, the human mind is extremely resilient, and after a couple of months, the Disk just filtered in, like an old card trick, until it was an everyday sight: the Coca-Cola machine, twenty-two feet away; the alien spacecraft from Zeta Reticuli 3 not far to the right. God, what were we thinking?

The N-4 Building clung to the side of the hangar like some sort of parasite, a cinderblock and stainless steel piece of Americana from the age of the Atom Bomb. I guess N-4 was a parasite of sorts—all those jobs, directives, budgets, all somehow siphoned from that silver grey thing from another world. It was always all about what we could get from the saucer, what we could learn from it, what we could steal from it. Everyone in my memory from that place has his face set in eternal consternation, like a child who cannot finish the long division, like the boy who cannot reach a toy on a high shelf.

My office was in the basement, looking much like the cubbyhole I had used for my doctoral researches at Chicago, covered in papers, empty Coca-Cola bottles, grease-stained food cartons. It seemed the same, but felt a million miles from that place, like I had just been transported to another lifetime, like everything before N-4 was a dream.

I was recruited from the Los Alamos Foreign Technologies team by a man called Stepman, who never told me his first name, just flashed a badge from a department of the government I had never heard of. Back then at Los Alamos the brass ring was a rocket capable of sporting an Atom Bomb, so I already had the K clearance that was required to view sensitive atomic data. It was just a matter of bumping me up to the new highest level, MAJIC, and I could join the new team at Wright Patterson. "What's more sensitive than the Atom Bomb?" I said. All it took was a fifteen-minute conversation, two photographs, and a list of people who had already accepted and I was beyond sold, I was a zealot.

I was Superman, the world was going to be changed forever, and I would be a pioneer, a name that would be inextricably mixed with the incident, the most significant occurrence in known history. I was on the fast track.

That's before the first real contact with the Others, you see. I had high hopes, the American Government was a chisel-chinned white knight rushing towards the answers to everything. There was a feeling back then—I can't really explain it. The physicists I was working with, hell the entire scientific community, was sure those answers were just around the next corner. We thought we were so advanced. We were all so sure ...

The Disk capped that feeling off for me. The first time I saw "the Bucket" (as we lovingly called it), I was twenty-seven. You know that point in *The*

Wizard of Oz where they switch it to color? That's what happened to my life when I saw that thing, the most sensitive piece of data any world government possessed, sitting in a small hangar guarded by two men with barely a high school diploma between them.

It made me die a little, to know that an intelligence possessed the knowledge to create something like that disk—that that territory was no longer virgin. There was a look in everyone's eyes when we left, and it never went away. Until you feel the greed of discovery, you cannot know what I mean. It became a contest, as I knew it would, to discover who could rip the secrets of the saucer from the frictionless anonymity of its makers. As with most contests, no one cared who was second best. Courtis was the top man from day one. Everyone else was just a warm body on hand so Courtis had someone to prove wrong. Me among them.

If I sound bitter, it is true—I envied the man, and I wish to convey this more than anything else. His insightfulness and ability to dismiss preconceived notions, all this which led to his downfall, were beautiful to me. I coveted his mind. I did not wish to be his friend or colleague or student; I wanted to be him. Somehow, even in his untimely death, he defeated me, leaving me behind to waste away slowly.

Perhaps now after all these years I will catch up.

About this statement you have found, reader, you are wondering, Why here? Why in this condition? Perhaps you will dismiss it, but I think not; it is human nature to pry, especially when invited to do so, and today's youth are obsessed with conspiracy.

Many of us, that is, my colleagues and I, were blessed with a talent for memory; it was very important for our work, which would sometimes cover dozens of chalkboards before coming to a conclusion (if at all!). My memory is eidetic—that is, I remember everything I have ever experienced as clearly as if it were happening to me now. All the notes, all the formulae, plans, proofs, and documents I have read in my lengthy career in the military are in my head still, and will be until my demise.

And so you find yourself here, reading a careful document I have constructed in my mind over a period of years. As I have stated earlier, I am unable to hide anything from Majestic, save what I keep in my mind, and so my mind was my notepad, until I had an opportunity to place it on paper here, safely.

I have cultivated the airs of an old man for the benefit of my watchers. I am prone to sit in the park and feed the birds, to read the newspaper for hours on end, to engage other old men in pointless chess matches filled with witty banter. I too have perfected my one chance of earthly escape. For the last three years I have done crosswords for hours a day at the diner you have found this in. You are no doubt wondering about the gaudy

cover, and why there are no crosswords within as it advertises, only normal sheets of paper covered in my hook-handed scrawl.

Yesterday I purchased a crossword book as I always do. Inside the relative safety of my bathroom, I replaced the interior of the book with the paper you find here, carefully bending the staples back to their former position. Today, over lunch, I was not trying to figure out a four-letter word for Trick, as my babysitter believed, but was writing out my final statement to humanity I had spent the last three years perfecting. Eleven Down: Ruse.

Please enjoy the one-hundred-dollar bill I have left for you in this booklet. I assure you it is not counterfeit.

Anyway:

During the late forties it soon became clear that the subtleties of the spacecraft were beyond even our brightest minds. Four people “left” the team in 1947 alone, due to emotional strain (back in the naive days when I believed you “left”). The mathematics involved in some of the discoveries (some from the craft; others, I am told, from the pilot), stretched our minds taut, and there were times back then, with everything mankind has strived to achieve in science lying in tatters at my feet, that I strongly considered reaching for a gun. I don’t know what stopped me, or, rather, stopped the chorus of voices urging me to do it, but one day, my mind was clear again. It was like awakening in an asylum surrounded by gibbering inmates; I found myself repulsed by the company I was forced to keep.

We had hit a brick wall, and no one was moving forward, but everyone continued to scrabble at the wall like trapped animals. Except Curtis, of course; he steadily pushed onwards, secretive and rude, logging more time with the craft than anyone else. It was Curtis who discovered how to activate the “motor” of the craft, it was Curtis who measured the tiny time dilation apparent when it was on, it was Curtis who discovered the maintenance of gravity within the craft. Curtis, Curtis, Curtis. Every significant discovery that was made then was made by Curtis, and would not be topped until the 1970s. We all sat back and applauded, maintaining our straining sense of camaraderie through small talk, which even from the start had felt forced.

One day in December, Curtis was found by Louis Montgomery squashed like a bug beneath a copy of one of the geometries found within the craft. Louis said it looked like he had been steamrolled flat, spilled open like a gourd crushed beneath a truck tire, and although I myself never saw him, I often imagine the scene. In it I find some comfort. It makes me feel warm and happy, as if I had finally found out a long-nagging secret.

They say the sigil was exerting 190Gs, the equivalent of 10.9 times the force generated by the Saturn V liftoff on the human body. It was like hit-

ting a concrete wall at 500 miles an hour, with no car. The pavement surrounding him had sunk $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch in compensation.

It must have been wonderful to behold.

The morning of his death, Courtis had etched the symbol on a plank of wood in the hangar, about three feet above his head, while standing on a stool. It was his discovery that the very symbol he was etching (in a quite smaller version, I may add) was maintaining gravity within the craft through unknown means. When the craft was inverted, everything remained level within it. From the outside, occupants could be said to be standing upside-down.

The piece of wood the sigil was on was later removed, and although the 190Gs continued to be exerted away from the sign, *no counterforce was generated*. A man could walk around with it in his hands and level a brick wall, rend flesh, hit target drones at fifty miles, feeling no reciprocal force. This problem alone sent four of our men to the imaginary mental facility (how young I was then to believe there was such a place!). This, I would later find, was a hospital the U.S. government was very familiar with. Your treatment: two bullets to the back of the head. Your cell: a lime pit outside of Mesa Verde, New Mexico. Your stay: permanent. I know many people who went to that hospital and were fully cured.

Why Courtis had etched the sigil, how he learned to do it, and why he would do it larger than the original are all questions left unanswered until now. Frankly, then, I didn't care. Finally, it seemed the madness he had been accumulating had caught up, and crushed him beneath the weight of his own intellect.

Or had it?

His notes pointed towards some huge revelation; his equations would become known as the White Sheet, and would be referred to in tones of reverence by members of the N-4 team. If there was a Bible ever written for physics, this was its Genesis—thirty-four equations on two sides of a piece of plain paper, with a single word on either side.

That word was "Escape."

Of course, it was overlooked by the rest, the scrawl of a man who had crushed himself to death with alien science. From the moment I was given access to it, I knew that was what I wanted to do, and all I have been trying to do ever since—escape. It was in late December after Courtis' accident that I and Dr. Antonio Malbayam were given the green light to study the Courtis Equations. Two people working in tandem, it was hoped, would be a safeguard against a repeat of the previous incident. I found out after I killed him, that we were both briefed similarly. If I had not killed him, he surely would have pulled the trigger on me.

We were both told that we were to keep an eye on our study partner. Signs of mental deterioration were evident in him, each of us was told—

strain, emotional problems—but he was also brilliant and necessary, like a dangerously clever tool.

I had never held a gun before that day in '49, and in an instant, all the dim memories of childhood leapt back. It was difficult to not just point and shoot, in order to hear the noise, to see things shatter and break. Holding the huge, cold weight of the gun, my hand trembled, not from fear, but excitement, and it took all my strength to place it in the fresh leather holster on my hip.

We studied in an antiseptic little room in the basement of N-4, each working on portions of Courtis' equations, sitting on plain wooden stools beneath fluorescent lights that clicked and hummed like insects. I had not met him before, Antonio Malbayam, but his work was familiar to me.

We didn't like each other from the start. In retrospect I know why. We were both wondering, when we first met in that little room, the same thing at the same instant, I am sure: *Why does he get a sidearm? He's crazy!*

It seems strange to me now that we were both plotting against each other from the beginning of our time in the Vault, as it became known to us. That we both believed we were the hero, the good guy, when only one of us really was.

I'll give you a hint: it wasn't me—that's why I'm still alive.

As we worked on the problems, dissecting the guts of some new, horrible physics as alien as the thing that had come down in the ship, we began to open up to each other. We had much in common, it seemed, and we learned to talk to one another, pretending to ignore orders, the gun at each other's hip, to see past it all to the great and holy answer to everything. I know I never truly forgot our situation; I know that my gun was loaded and ready even after the thirtieth time I went down there for the day, a painted smile on my face. It is hard to tell what Malbayam was thinking, but I like to imagine he was just as suspicious of me, although I know it's not true. It gives me some measure of comfort to tell myself it was him or me.

When Malbayam started shouting that day in September, I found the gun in my hand, but no interim memory of retrieving it. My hand did not tremble or waver; it found its bead on Malbayam, who kept on shouting, "I've found it! I've found it!"

And then I saw it would be my chance for revenge. At that moment, Dr. Antonio Malbayam had arrived at the incredible revelations of Dr. Stephen Courtis, now dead for more than a year. He had become my tormentor.

I knew then I hated him.

Like I said, he died. I shot him; he fell. I was rewarded for being a loyal member of the N-4 team, so I was there for the rest of it. No one suspected what truly went on. I said Malbayam had a breakdown and had begun to

destroy notes he had made on Courtis' equations. No one asked many questions; maybe they knew this would be the outcome from the beginning.

In my remaining time in Majestic, I witnessed with the disinterested eye of an occupied child events which would shape the world: Forrestal "died"; Kennedy was killed; Korea, Vietnam, and Watergate crashed the headlines and the aftershocks ebbed into the background pulse; "the Bucket" was destroyed in an accident in 1972; the crazed NSA made contact with the pilots of the craft in 1978; and they made the deal that signed away everything in 1980. Other things happened. In the end, nothing had any effect on me.

All those years I was studying those notes in my head, on endless blackboards in private rooms beneath N-4. By 1965 I knew them all so well I quit writing completely. The problems went through my head incessantly, a looped tape, flipping over and over. Everything else was secondary to incorporating Malbayam's fragmented notes to the Courtis Equations.

One day not too far back, it came to me as I sat in my old-man chair on my front porch, and it was like the sunlight breaking over the rocks in the morning, as light and easy and transparent as a soap bubble. I had been looking too hard for the answer when it was right in front of me the whole time. In my time as a scientist, I have experienced only several moments of true wonder at a discovery; this put them all to shame, along with every other earthly pleasure I had experienced. The only thing better than understanding it, I knew, would be to use it.

It is a difficult thing to explain, the Last Equation, but I will try. I have thought long and hard on a method of translation for someone who most likely has no training in scientific fields, and I have come to the conclusion that even to someone of a scientific bent, a simplification of the Equation would be meaningless. So I have settled on metaphor.

Imagine there is a puzzle, and you are left in a room to solve it. Some take longer than others. Those that finish leave through a single door in the room. Some never finish at all, but are called through the door from the room. This is the world: the room, the puzzle, the door.

But what if one day, as you were working on it, the puzzle arranged itself in such a way as to resemble the room, its components, and you, in perfect, minute detail? What then? What does this event mean? If you move a piece, does it change the room? No, it does not.

You think long and hard on the nature of the puzzle, until you realize, perhaps sooner, perhaps later, that you are solving a puzzle *within a larger puzzle*. Somewhere some unimaginable giant manipulates the pieces of his puzzle and you dance.

What can you do? Forces control you and are controlled, above and below you, to infinity. You continue to play with the puzzle, pondering how

to break the loop, knowing now that you are altering the outcome of other people's destinies, other puzzles. But if you are altered yourself, then no action is your own and you can hold no blame. It is a difficult question, one you find eating at you as you move the pieces. Until one day it strikes you.

You can *put the puzzle down*.

You stand for the first time in the room, and turn and look behind to see an endless expanse of open ground you had not noticed before. Past the fake room and the distracting puzzle and the false door.

It is territory in a direction that until perceived does not exist, and once perceived does not need to. It is what encompasses the whole of everything. An absolute perfect eternity.

When they find my body, they will ignore the important things, but you will know. Courtis did what he could to leave a hint behind, as it is not something that can be shoved in one's face. I too have done my best, as I am watched fastidiously. You are holding the fruits of my labor. It is my statement and last confession, the compilation of all I have learned in this illusion we call reality.

Beyond this, I have no true idea what awaits me. Only glimpses from dreams, of something more whole and more complete than anything in this broken-down world. Here, I am nothing but a localized effect, the consequence of a billion different rules, put there by the actions of a Maker who had no hand in our creation. We are only a side effect.

It reminds me of a poem:

So Man, *who here seems principle alone*,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges some goal,
'Tis but a part we see and not a whole.

Did Courtis imagine that he would breach that sphere? I know now that he did, and I will too.

Like any truly great teacher I have ever had, Courtis was distant; he was harsh and unforgiving. But he taught me more than I will ever be able to repay him for. It is hard to look back and realize my whole existence here was folly except for those few brief years I knew him, and the time I spent studying his work. But now I have a chance to show him, to make him proud. I will move on tonight.

When I see him again, I am sure we will have much to speak of. ▲

Ray Winner lives in Evanston, Illinois, and hopes to stay there a long time. He's a multimedia producer, hack author, game designer, and pseudo-scholar. If you have a problem, you may as well call him for advice. Everyone else does.

Ray's ingenious tale deals with the curious nature of language and time, and the terror that results when they are turned against us.

PNOMUS

RAY WINNINGER

Curious photo—a close-up. At arm's length, the girl held a foot-long rusted nail, bent to one hundred twenty degrees halfway up its shaft. A common household centipede—a *scutigera*—cautiously scuttled up the nail, its body coiled round the perch for added traction. The awkward angle of the girl's elbow suggested that she was controlling the centipede's movements by inverting and re-inverting the nail. Each time the centipede scaled all the way down to investigate and possibly assail its tormentor, a quick change of hands returned it to the summit.

The girl herself was young, maybe eleven years old, with stringy hair, puffy cheeks, and crooked teeth. She wore a blue-and-white checked summer dress and a dime-store bracelet on her left wrist. A pair of smeared glasses rested uncomfortably on her crinkled nose and beneath them, her eyes told a story. They betrayed not a trace of awe, not a hint of curiosity, but something sterile and vacant—a humor akin to resignation. Jordaan

could imagine that centipede scuttling up and down the nail, head to point, for several hours before the girl finally tired of observing its journey and used the nail's tip to draw her captive's entrails in a long, jellied arc across the sidewalk.

A fluid and loopy hand captioned the photo, "Cedarside Falls, Summer 1973," in indelible ink across its face.

"This is all she was carrying when she was found?" Jordaan was startled by the sudden and short-lived realization that he'd anticipated this juncture—this time, this place, these circumstances—for as long as he could remember. The snapshot's musty odor tickled his senses with an eerie familiarity, while something far less tangible diverted his thoughts down uncomfortable paths trod deep through his synapses during years of sleepless nights. God, the ice in her eyes! The demeanor was all too familiar to Jordaan; the last several times he'd seen and studied it, he was staring into a mirror. He began to suspect how this case, out of the hundreds that crossed his desk each month, had attracted his personal attention. All his life, Jordaan had been stalked by an odd sense of detachment, a fatalism that would sink its fangs into his soul when least expected. On those few occasions in which he attempted to describe his peculiar malady to a friend or lover, he discovered that words deserted him. He could explain his irksome mood swings only as a kind of macroscopic "awareness," an icy "feeling." Now, staring at the photograph, Jordaan was certain the little girl felt it too.

"Just that photograph. She was naked when she strolled into that post office last week. I still don't know how the police managed to get her out of there and past the press." When he finished, Dr. Hibbert shut his office door, isolating himself and Jordaan from the orderlies and nurses shuffling through the hallways of the Lang Mental Health Center.

"Any idea where she got it?"

"It's a photo of Ms. Kober herself taken during a family vacation to Wisconsin when she was twelve years old; we found similar photographs in her Santa Monica condominium. The handwriting's been identified as her mother's." Both men paused to explore the obvious contrasts between the young Kober, the grainy photostat of a glamour shot long ago attached to the APB in her file, and the fevered, trembling face now flickering over the live closed-circuit feed before them.

"She retrieved the photo from her home?"

"We assume so, but we're not certain. Tell me, Mr. Jordaan, just what exactly do you do for the FBI? I understand you're some sort of supervisor." There was just a hint of cautious impertinence in the question.

"It's Doctor Jordaan, actually. I'm the Bureau's Chief of Forensic Psychology. Quantico, Virginia."

"You've come a long way to see Ms. Kober, Doctor, though I suppose this is a rather extraordinary case."

"It may be more extraordinary than either of us realizes, Dr. Hibbert." Jordaan removed his reading glasses and returned the photo to Kober's file folder. "Seven years ago in Houston, Texas, a woman named Mariel Guzman suddenly disappeared one night, abandoning her husband and two young children. Guzman was an Assistant State's Attorney; she fled right in the middle of an important prosecution—a murder case. She wasn't seen again until she turned up naked and sobbing on her parents' doorstep four years later. Sound anything like your case?"

"A little. Ms. Kober disappeared six years ago, just as her film career was taking off. She was four days into the filming of her first starring role. Until she turned up last week, everyone assumed she was dead." The twitch of Hibbert's brow was beginning to betray a newfound interest in the conversation.

"There's more," Jordaan continued. "After Guzman reappeared, evidence started to emerge indicating that she'd spent the four years of her disappearance traveling around the world—airline ticket purchases, hotel reservation receipts, voucher stubs. Her passport revealed that she'd visited thirty-one separate countries in those four years. Guzman has no memory of anything that transpired while she was missing. No one knows how she managed to pay her traveling expenses."

"You're drawing a connection, of course, to those photographs published in the tabloids two years ago, alleging that Ms. Kober was alive and well and visiting Caracas. I'd presumed they were faked."

"If so, they were very good fakes. The FBI crime lab found no signs of alteration or digital editing and concluded that the subject of those photographs was probably the genuine Gina Kober." As he continued, Jordaan noticed the look of interest on Hibbert's face giving way to the first few ticks of discomfort. "And these two cases aren't isolated incidents. I've also uncovered the journal of Dr. Emil Baden, a pupil of Freud himself. In 1915, Baden briefly studied a man named Peaslee who experienced a similar dissociative episode. While Peaslee was missing, he too did a great deal of globe-hopping. After he reemerged five years later, Peaslee discovered that he was suddenly and inexplicably fluent in Classical Greek and *Aklo*, an ancient language known at the time to only a handful of scholars worldwide. Baden claimed to have encountered other, similar cases, though I've been unable to follow up on his references." Jordaan's words trailed off as he once again found himself staring into the frail face haunting the video feed. "Anyway, I'll be happy to continue this later. If you don't mind, Doctor, I'd like to speak with Ms. Kober now."

"Speak?" Hibbert's sweaty hands squeaked as he slowly slid them down the arm rests of his chair. "Dr. Jordaan, Kober hasn't uttered a single syllable since she reappeared, just over a week ago."

Kober's new home was an eight-foot-by-eleven-foot holding cell haunted by the faint smell of mildew. Its walls were smothered by a phalanx of dingy gray gymnasium pads which corralled and banished any light that happened to escape into the cell, mercifully swaddling its occupant in cool, comforting darkness. The room's only features were a carefully padded porcelain toilet, a matching sink with a malignant drip, and the camera's unblinking eye in the ceiling, its red light signaling that it was efficiently dispatching everything it saw down the closed circuit.

"If you don't mind, Dr. Hibbert, I'd like to begin with a physical examination."

The vacancy in her eyes told Jordaan that Kober hadn't bothered to make more than a few of those eighty-eight square feet her own. Most likely, she stayed rooted in the corner where Jordaan and Hibbert found her as they entered the cell. After exiling the disturbing familiarity of these surroundings from his thoughts, Jordaan cautiously approached the woman, trying not to obstruct the thread of light leaking through the open doorway. As she felt his delicate grasp on her ankle, Kober snapped her head back into the corner and pulled taut the muscles in her face and legs.

"Take it easy, Miss Kober; I'm with the FBI. I won't hurt you." His words slowly drew her eyes back to his face and her resistance quickly and somewhat surprisingly ebbed away. Only when Jordaan was certain she had relaxed did he proceed. "I can see a series of superficial lacerations and abrasions just above the ankles, though the soles of her feet appear to be free of cuts or scars. That would seem to suggest that she didn't linger around for very long before you picked her up. If she'd walked any real distance on bare feet, I'd expect at least a blister or two."

"It looks like a kidnapping to me," Hibbert added. "Her assailant released her near her condominium, where she grabbed the photo and walked to the post office; it isn't far. See the pattern of those lacerations? Looks like she was tied up."

As Jordaan cautiously reached for her wrist, Kober flinched, again meeting his gaze for a moment. Though difficult to pick out of the shadows, a breeze of some unidentifiable emotion seemed to waft across her barren face. For just a moment, Jordaan sensed the warmth entombed beneath the calloused layers of her experiences and instincts, and more than that, he felt his own instincts attempting to alert him to some terrible truth in a language he couldn't comprehend.

"Kidnapped and released after six years? No, the lacerations aren't deep enough and there aren't any corresponding marks here on her wrists or arms. These are the sort of abrasions you see on the legs of outdoorsmen. They're caused by strenuous activity in tightly laced boots."

"Maybe she was kidnapped and brainwashed by some militant terrorist group—like Patty Hearst."

"Or maybe she's been hiking through the jungles outside of Caracas." The suggestion clearly startled Hibbert.

Beyond the scratches on her legs, the last six years had left hardly a trace on Kober's body. The muscles of her arms, back, and shoulders were still firm, suggesting frequent exercise. Her teeth were clean and well-maintained. A few more scratches marred her hands than one might expect from those of a famous fashion model and actress, though nothing resembling serious damage and nothing providing any clues to her recent whereabouts. As he continued his examination, Jordaan became increasingly aware of a strange bond he felt with this woman: not quite familiarity—he was sure they'd never met—but something deeper and older. He had already sensed it as he flipped through her case file back in Quantico, three thousand miles from Los Angeles and twenty-four years from Cedarside Falls. Stranger still was the fact that the girl felt it too—he knew it. As he ran his probing fingers over her body, Jordaan watched that mysterious emotion he noticed earlier gradually transform itself into something more familiar—recognition? kinship? trust? Occasionally, his penlight caught her face and held it for a moment. During one such glimpse, he noticed the tears welling up in her eyes.

"Miss Kober, can you speak to me? Where have you been? What have you seen?"

Jordaan's questions went unanswered.

"Thank you, Dr. Hibbert. There's really nothing more I can do this afternoon. Let's let her get some rest. Tomorrow we might begin pharmacological therapy and a personality overlay."

The moment he finished the sentence and shifted his weight to stand, Kober softly and secretly grasped Jordaan's left wrist. She was trying to tell him something. While searching the shadows for clues to the nature of this response and its meaning, he noticed a single tear was now streaking down her face. "On second thought, Doctor, I'd like to reexamine those lacerations one last time. You go ahead. I'll catch up to you in your office." Hibbert seemed momentarily shocked by the suggestion, but left nonetheless.

The moment the cell door slammed shut, Kober rolled forward out of the corner and frantically wiped at her eyes. The sudden activity startled Jordaan, and he retreated to the opposite wall. Slowly, Kober made her own way to the other side of the cell, and as she approached, Jordaan no-

ticed that her lips were quivering and obviously struggling to form words. After a few practice moans and snorts, she finally managed to produce something akin to speech.

"Ph-Phillip? Phillip Jordaan? It's you, isn't it?" Her cracking voice steadied with each new syllable.

"How do you know my name?"

"It's ... all right, Phillip. At first ... I didn't remember either. God, Phillip, it's so good to see you!"

Jordaan's heart was pounding and he could taste the sweat starting to run off his upper lip. His memories struggled to fit the situation, but failed. Though he couldn't deny the strange kinship he felt for this woman, he was certain they had never met. "How do you know me, Miss Kober?"

"Try to remember, Phillip. The Tutor—we served her together. You and I tended her gardens while she was away on expedition."

"Why haven't you spoken since we found you?"

The question startled Kober and for a moment, the familiar ice passed over her eyes. "Very dangerous." She didn't give Jordaan a chance to follow up. "Pnakotus, Phillip? Do you remember Pnakotus? The library? The spawning pools?" She was on the verge of becoming hysterical. "Do you remember the acid etchings on the sheets of gold?"

"This tutor you mentioned, was she your captor?"

"No, she was a friend. She was unlike the others."

"Where is she now?"

"On expedition."

"Where?"

Kober brought her hands to her temples and bowed her head in deep concentration. "What's today's date?"

"November 17th."

"And the year?"

"1997."

For a moment, Kober smiled. "Yes, beautiful. One of my favorites." Her voice trembled slightly as she recited a verse unfamiliar to Jordaan:

"From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a pnopus spring—
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow—I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone—
And all I lov'd—I lov'd alone."

For a moment, they sat in silence, Jordaan trying to assemble some sort of meaning from everything he had just heard. Finally, after a lengthy pause, Kober's face lit up once again.

"What about Peaslee, Phillip? Surely you remember Peaslee?"

"Did you say, 'Peaslee?' Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee? What do you know of him?"

"He was your friend, Phillip. The two of you spent hours in the gardens together. Try to remember!"

Jordaan knew that these were more than the delusional rantings of a schizophrenic. Although sure he hadn't lived or seen any of the things she was describing, he could feel those things reaching out to him, attempting to supplant all the familiar enigmas and drag his mind out of sorts. "But Peaslee died almost ten years before I was born."

A look of sudden realization froze Kober's features. "You ... you don't remember because it hasn't happened. They haven't taken you yet." Tears were now streaming down her face. "They'll ... they'll kill me. You must leave here, Phillip. At once!"

"Miss Kober ... Gina. I ..."

"Leave, Phillip! And keep them quiet—the doctors. Don't let them speak to me. Don't let anybody say a word!"

Over the next three weeks, the centipede haunted Jordaan's dreams. He was right there with it, walking the nail from head to point, attempting escape, attempting to locate his captor. But every time he felt himself getting close, the nail rolled over in the deepest recesses of his conscience. The trek was exhausting and its ending inevitable.

Each day he returned to Kober's cell and each day, she refused to speak. Most often, in fact, his attentions or those of his colleagues provoked in her only an hysterical fit. After two weeks of such behavior, Dr. Hibbert recommended transfer to the facility's long-term isolation ward for heavy-duty pharmacological therapy. Similarly, Jordaan's superiors back in Quantico gradually started to wonder what he hoped to accomplish, and pressured him to return. For his own part, Jordaan refused to yield. Over time, he'd come to feel himself approaching discovery's rim, close to a remedy not for Kober but for himself.

Over those three weeks, he searched for clues everywhere he could imagine. He spent several days familiarizing himself with Kober's brief acting career and marvelling at the curious detachment she brought to her roles. This is undoubtedly what the public recognized and admired in her. Her characters all seemed unusually aware of their fictional status and the emptiness of their imaginary surroundings. They acted as empathic lightning rods to those members of the audience not quite fortunate enough to

entirely surrender themselves to Hollywood's illusions. Key to these performances was the subtle disdain she inevitably mustered for those characters fated to succumb to her beauty.

Jordaan also interviewed those few of Kober's friends he managed to locate. They described a restless soul who seemed to enjoy a peculiar sort of wisdom she was rarely willing to share. Curiously, none of them was surprised by her sudden disappearance or recent return. In their eyes, Kober spent her whole life in the service of some grand mission, pursuing some mysterious destiny. A few thought that her aptitude for acting stemmed from years of experience—she behaved as though she was simply animating a script her entire life.

More than anything, Jordaan spent those three weeks poring over each word Kober uttered the afternoon they met. He carefully reviewed the closed-circuit footage of their encounter more times than he could remember, hoping to find some sort of secret message encoded in her voice. Though the word had a certain familiar air about it, he was unable to locate anyone who could identify "Pnakotus" and none of Kober's friends knew anything about a tutor. Most interesting was the poem. What did it mean to her? What message had she hoped it would convey to him? Jordaan finally identified the poem four days after he first heard it.

ALONE

by Edgar Allan Poe

From childhood's hour I have not been
 As others were—I have not seen
 As others saw—I could not bring
 My passions from a common spring—
 From the same source I have not taken
 My sorrow—I could not awaken
 My heart to joy at the same tone—
 And all I lov'd—I lov'd alone.
 Then—in my childhood—in the dawn
 Of a most stormy life—was drawn
 From ev'ry depth of good and ill
 The mystery which binds me still—
 From the torrent, or the fountain—
 From the red cliff of the mountain—
 From the sun that round me roll'd
 In its autumn tint of gold—
 From the lightning in the sky
 As it pass'd me by—
 From the thunder, and the storm—

And the cloud that took the form
 (When the rest of Heaven was blue)
 Of a demon in my view—

Although he could imagine how the Gina Kober her friends described might identify with Poe's verse, he couldn't imagine why she chose to recite it during their encounter. Was the poem somehow connected with this tutor she had mentioned? A clue, perhaps, to the tutor's identity?

Surprisingly, he didn't notice the inconsistency until the third week. After he'd read the poem so many times that he was totally familiar with its language and rhythms, he finally noticed that when Kober recited the poem, she replaced the fourth line's "common" with the curious "pnomus," a word that sounded vaguely familiar, though Jordaan wasn't sure exactly what it meant. In fact, now that he had isolated and scrutinized the word, he couldn't believe he didn't notice it earlier. Even to an untrained scholar such as himself, it seemed that the word belonged to an era and place far removed from the remainder of Poe's language. For a time, he wondered if the substitution may have been a simple error—a glitch in Kober's voice that he had mistaken for speech; though the whole of the recital was so clear and so confident that he was soon forced to discard that hypothesis.

It took him a few days of inquiry and almost an hour to check every possible spelling, but he finally located a profoundly disturbing entry in a battered copy of the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

pnomus (no' mis). App. derived from Aklo. Deoxyribonucleic construct stripped bare of countenance and revealed as an abstract algorithm for the prescience of despair. 1922 ELIOT *The Waste Land* I. 60. Unreal City, under the brown fog of a pnomus dawn.

Even taking the nonsensical definition at face value, the word's first recorded use preceded the discovery of DNA (or Deoxyribonucleic Acid) by decades. Equally impossible was the derivation. Aklo was known to only a handful of scholars in Peaslee's day. How could an Aklo word have entered the language in 1922? And how could the ancient tongue have yielded a synonym for such a complex scientific concept in the first place?

None of the scholars to whom Jordaan turned for help could explain these peculiar discrepancies. He readily located the word in *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City,
 Under the brown fog of a pnomus dawn,
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
 I had not thought death had undone so many.

But none of the scholars Jordaan questioned, several of whom had studied the poem for years, knew what “pnomus” meant. In fact, none of them seemed to think the word an unusual choice for Eliot. Nor could any of them explain why they’d never attempted to ascertain its meaning.

Jordaan again found himself staring at the photo of Kober at Cedarside Falls. That little girl somehow held all the answers in her eyes, answers Jordaan no longer wanted but knew he needed. Every discovery, every bizarre circumstance was another step in a line of footprints long present in the sand of his soul. The mystery that stalked him all his life now had a name, and only Kober might explain its meaning. Somehow, he had to make her understand what her answers might mean to him.

As he entered her cell, Jordaan found Kober waiting for him in the usual corner. She still hadn’t moved more than a few feet since their last chat. Although it took some doing, Jordaan finally persuaded Dr. Hibbert to allow him to question Kober for the first time in more than a week. At first, Hibbert was reluctant to allow Jordaan to enter the cell alone, but when reminded that it was Jordaan who precipitated their first and only breakthrough, he cautiously agreed.

“Hello, Gina. How are you feeling?”

The moment she heard his voice, Kober clamped her hands over her ears and resumed her familiar hysterical wails, as she’d recently gotten in the habit of doing.

“Gina, I need to talk to you ...” Kober’s wailing only grew louder, and was now accompanied by a few tears.

“Gina, the last time we spoke there was something you wanted to say to me. I’m not leaving this room until we talk ...

“GINA!”

It was the first time Jordaan had raised his voice in her presence and it obviously caught her by surprise. For a moment, the wailing stopped, though the sobs were still audible. Jordaan quickly took advantage of the silence.

“Gina, tell me about pnomus.”

The moment she heard the word, her sobs intensified and a lengthy torrent of emotions blazed across her normally frozen face. At last, she calmed down and for the first time in three weeks, her lips struggled to form words.

“Ph-Phillip.” She paused for another round of sobs. “I’ll talk to you now. But first, you’ll have to ... forgive me. I’m sorry, Phillip. I’m just not strong enough.”

Something had broken through to her. The word “pnomus”—Jordaan was suddenly aware of its power. “Gina, where were you for the last six years?”

"They ... took me, Phillip, just as they'll take you. They'll take you, and you'll serve them, and one of them will replace you here on Earth to study our world and ... and then ... they'll erase your memories and let you go ... like they let me go. And if you're lucky, Phillip, you'll never remember what happened to you. Because if you remember, they'll have to return and kill you ... like they're going to kill me."

"Who are they, Gina?"

"I don't know ... beings ... from another world. They took my mind there once—it's a blue place, shallow pools, floating fungi, obscene stones. They built a gleaming city ... Pnakotus ... here on Earth. That's where you and I met."

"Where is this city?"

"In Australia, seventy-five million years ago. The beings ... time is meaningless to them. They pass through it using our bodies as vessels. They ... they trade minds with beings from the future ... and the past. They live in every moment of our history." Kober's sobs were catching up with her. "Oh, Phillip ... you have to forgive me."

"Why, Gina? Why should I forgive you?"

"I ... I realized when we last spoke that the reason I couldn't make you remember is that they haven't taken you yet. All of us they take ... all our minds ... they're brought to the same place, though they come from many different times."

As delusional as the girl sounded, there was something about her story that was beginning to resonate with Jordaan. He heard the fibers of his mind unravelling, giving way before the onslaught of information. As preposterous as it all sounded, he knew it was true—every word of it. He'd somehow known it was true even before he'd heard it. "That's how I meet Peaslee?"

"Yes! You should already feel their presence, rippling back through your memories. You haven't even met them yet, but you can still feel it."

"Why should I forgive you, Gina? How do you betray me?"

"I ... was thinking about meeting you here ... in our world. It seemed like ... an impossible coincidence ... until I realized they hadn't taken you yet." For a moment, Kober's hysteria became uncontrollable. "They take you because of me, Phillip! Because I tell you about them ... because I'm telling you about them right now and they'll need to silence you. It's all my fault. You'll suffer every day for ten years because of me! I tried not to tell you, Phillip ... but I couldn't bear the thought of you disappearing from my memories. I ... I never could have made it through that place without you beside me."

Jordaan had no time to explain the folly in her words. His destiny was written the day he was born, just like hers. She couldn't have possibly denied it. "The poem, Gina ... what does it mean?"

"Did you find the Tutor?"

"No. When you read the poem, you changed a word ..."

"No! The beings ... their minds are far more complex than ours. They've learned to enter realms of existence that we can't even perceive. To them, language is just ... another dimension ... like time and space. They can travel through our words, just as they travel through time. I didn't change the poem, Phillip. When we last spoke, the Tutor's expedition had reached that poem ... in this time. Every copy in the world changed as she passed through it ... and changed back as she left. We ... don't have the faculties to notice."

"Pnomus."

"Yes—that's her shadow in this world. While she is gone, you and I tend to her gardens in ancient Pnakotus."

"I saw her again ... in *The Waste Land*."

"Yes. And she's since moved on again."

Jordaan opened his briefcase, retrieved his copy of the book, and flipped to the bookmark he left there yesterday afternoon.

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.

"These beings, what are they trying to accomplish?"

"I ... I don't know. They once allowed me to see as they see. I saw ... just how little we can ever understand. I saw all our knowledge and experience as a rusted city of words built upon a foundation of rock carved by the forked tongues of those who preceded us. I saw the vast plateau of ideas that lie beyond our reach. I learned new words ... terrifying words ... that describe all the things that happen to us after we die, words that pluck strings leading back to a mad god who sits at the center of the universe. And worst of all, I saw them ... thousands of them, scuttling in and out of our minds, gaining purchase on the lips of toddlers ... shaping our thoughts and our ideas. Every day, everything we know ... everything we've ever felt ... changes without our notice. And the only trace they leave behind is fleeting shadows in old poems and half-remembered conversations. I don't know what they want, but whatever it is ... it's unspeakable! And now, to safeguard their plans ... they'll have to send someone to kill me. We have to choose our words very wisely, Phillip. You have to keep the Doctors away from me! Don't let them speak to me!"

"Whom will they send? Pnomus?"

"No, Pnomus is a Tutor ... a teacher. She's already here; her presence has been here ever since you first mentioned her name. I have nothing to fear from her ... She's just an observer. They'll send a hunter ... a killer."

"I can hide you."

"You can't hide from them, Phillip. They're inside your thoughts ... they *are* your thoughts. They know where you are. They know what you're thinking. They know everything you ever thought."

Her words were like hammer blows finally starting to chisel out something recognizable from the chaotic lump of his memories. Mysteries that had plagued him all his life were drifting away like clouds, affording him the occasional glimpse of the truths that lie beneath. Yet one last mystery was refusing to yield. Still, the centipede walked the nail from head to tip. Something about that image haunted him as it clearly haunted her. Something prompted her to retrieve that single page from her previous life.

Jordaan again reached into his briefcase. "Gina, this photograph ... you have to tell me where you found it. Why were you carrying it?"

The moment she set eyes on the photo, Kober let out a sharp scream and collapsed back into her corner. Jordaan cleared his thoughts just in time to notice that she was plunging into a cardiac arrest. Grasping her hand tightly, he looked at the photo himself in a vain attempt to spot the source of her distress, but the girl, the caption (B'dallside Falls, Summer 1973), the centipede, and the nail were all as he remembered them.

Fifteen minutes later, she was dead. Jordaan wondered when they'd meet again. ▲

Bruce Baugh wantonly spoiled the heritage of three generations of Californian ancestry on one side and four on the other by falling in love with the Pacific Northwest. Here he does his little part to make the world a brighter, or at least stranger, place. He has written material for the roleplaying games Nexus: The Infinite City and Feng Shui, and is currently scheming away on projects for Wraith: The Oblivion and Trinity. He also serves as webmaster for the Delta Green web site at <http://www.delta-green.com/>.

CLIMBING THE SOUTH MOUNTAIN

The Final Thoughts of Bai Beishi

BRUCE BAUGH

I.

For five generations the men of the Bai family
Have failed to be poets.

First there was Bai Zhongzhi,
Who received medals for his poems about life
In the shadow of the Great Wall, in Lanzhou.
Visiting dignitaries once patted his head
And posted four lines of his on the new harvest.
But as a young man he turned to banditry
And on the long night trails from the Great Wall to Canton
There was no time for pen and ink.

Then there was Bai Zengwen,
 Who turned from mere brigandage
 To the heroic struggle against Manchu oppression.
 But there was no time for pen and ink
 In the Triads anymore than there had been
 Among the highwaymen,
 And so his boyhood lines withered
 Rather than blossoming into mature growth.

Then there was Bai Li,
 Who gave up the fight for Chinese self-rule
 To work on the railroads.
 He made no lines of poetry in his youth,
 Preferring the balancing of equations.
 For fifty years he helped throw railroads
 Across the body of the Central Kingdom,
 Rising through the ranks
 Until, at his death,
 He was one of the most senior of Chinese engineers.
 Only after a trestle collapse crushed his legs
 Did he take brush in hand
 And write soft lines about hard things.
 But he died too soon.
 He said, "My few fine lines
 Are like rail ties not sealed or ballasted.
 They will support no weight of freight."

Then there was Bai Huang,
 My father.
 In his youth he too showed some promise as a poet.
 But he lived in a turbulent time,
 Becoming a man just as the final dynasty fell.
 There were Chinese fascists to be resisted,
 Then Japanese fascists as well.
 Finally the Great Chairman brought peace,
 But not in time for my father,
 Who died from illnesses contracted
 In his long years hiding in the wilds,
 Preparing to strike for justice.

Then there was me.

2.

By the time I was ready for college
 It was already clear that it was not a time for poets.
 The Soviets were giving up their duty
 As leaders of the world revolution,
 And had forced the Great Chairman to blaze his own path.
 Then the American imperialists
 Took over where the French imperialists had left off
 And turned Southeast Asia into the focal point
 Of the world struggle for hegemony.
 Even the Great Chairman,
 A far better poet than I might ever be,
 Attended to his duties
 Rather than to the pleasures of the scroll.

So in school,
 At the great university in Canton,
 I studied history and law,
 Preparing to join the civil service
 And support the struggle with the imperialists.
 I might have joined the army
 As so many of my childhood companions did,
 But my eyes and heart were too weak.
 So I looked for the next best thing.

3.

For four years I labored
 In a minor office of a minor department,
 Tracking the conversion of Cantonese factories
 To wartime production.

It was boring work when it was work at all.
 Far too often some necessary item—
 Paper or pens or filing cabinets—
 Would be delayed.
 “Sabotaged by wreckers and reactionaries,”
 The Party told us,
 And in our youth and naiveté we did not think to doubt.

On days when we could not work,
 My office mates would scurry off
 To take unfair advantage at the markets,
 Or to fondle their wives and mistresses.
 I strolled the parks along the river,
 Learning the seasons
 As they showed in the plants and animals.
 Sometimes I tried to write poetry,
 But I never finished it.
 I felt guilty about indulging personal pleasures
 In a time of such popular need.

For four years I labored.

4.

In the fifth year there,
 I had the encounter that changed my life,
 And brought me here to the mountains to end it.

It was winter.
 The trees in Three Heroes Park were bare.
 No birds sang;
 A fire in a warehouse the day before
 Had filled the park with smoke
 And a light coat of ash,
 And the birds had gone somewhere else to feed.

For most of the morning
 I was the only one
 Disturbing the quiet.
 I thought about the poet Jiang Mao,
 Who in the Song dynasty
 Wrote so well about the evil he had done
 To preserve the goodness of his masters.
 "My heart is like black ice,
 Rotten slush waiting for a true thaw
 That may never come."
 I thought adolescent thoughts
 Which I imagined to be profound
 About the countless small evils that make great good possible.

Out of the debris of the fire
 Came an older man with purposeful stride.
 I had seen him before,
 On occasions when I had to requisition supplies
 From the security office.
 He was shorter than me, and I am not a tall man,
 But his manner was full of purpose.
 His brows suggested an ancient imperial soldier
 Preparing to smite the friends of unrest.
 His hands, I saw,
 When he withdrew them from his coat,
 Were gnarled, as though
 He had labored in the fields for a long time.

His voice was quiet
 As the pause before the thunderclap.
 It did not disturb the calm of the park
 Or the memories of the three heroes,
 But I fancied that it could shake the trees
 If he wished it to.
 "Comrade Bai?"

"I am, sir."

"Comrade Bai,
 The people have need of you.
 You know that this is a time of great struggle,
 And that we all labor for the victory against imperialism."

"I do, sir."

"The people, through their organs
 Of democratic centralism,
 Which I have the honor to represent,
 Know that you have talents they can employ
 More fruitfully than is at present the case.
 Will you join me in my office?"

"I will, sir."

That was my first meeting with a spy.

5.

Comrade Colonel Hu recruited me.
 Comrade Major Shang trained me,
 One of a class of twenty, in the midst of the jungles
 On the border with Laos,
 Along some minor tributary of the Mekong.
 Comrade Captain Wei took me
 And two of my classmates
 On our first mission across the border,
 To place little packages of equipment
 Like children's presents
 To reap a harvest of American signals.
 I do not know whether their gifts were worth giving;
 Some other team was responsible for bringing them back
 To give to our superiors further removed
 From the barbarians.
 Comrade Lieutenant Ma became my partner
 Once I completed training and was assigned to the field.
 Together we wandered the darker paths of the jungle,
 Seeking to recruit the small tribes
 In the war against those we hoped they would learn to see
 As our mutual enemies.

It was a happy time for me
 For two years.
 It was hard and ugly work,
 And we won few victories,
 But it was a time of adventure.
 My studies of history bore unexpected fruit
 In the field:
 I played the sage,
 The wise one who could put all the stories
 In their proper context,
 While Ma was the warrior,
 Rousing the peoples of the jungle
 To the peril confronting them.

6.

That good time came to an end in 1970.
 It ended with the American soldier.

We found Corporal Grabowski
 In a little village somewhere northeast of Muong Singh,
 In a mountainous arc of land
 Where the language seemed to change
 With every next village.
 The headman told us that they had found him
 Wandering along a stream channel,
 Out of his mind with shock and disease.

The villagers thought he might serve
 As a unit of value with which to bargain
 With one or another of the mysterious great tribes—
 Chinese, American—
 That had lately forced their way
 Into the small world of the mountain villages.
 So they took him in and gave him shelter.
 He had never spoken.

But when he saw Ma and me,
 He broke that silence.
 A torrent of words,
 Many of them mere nonsense syllables,
 Poured forth like a mountain river
 Flooding as the last ice dam of winter gives way.
 The words lingered in my memory
 Like knives unearthed from some unknown civilization,
 Familiar in deadliness, though alien in form.

He spoke of "Delta Green"
 And of a "botched mission"
 Conducted somewhere in Cambodia the year before.
 He spoke of "Mi-Go of Yuggoth,"
 Who were up to something sinister
 In the greater mountains to the west.

The villagers looked at one another calmly
 For an instant like the long moment of sunset.
 Then they shrieked, "Ia!"
 And flung themselves upon the American
 And Ma and me.

I was furthest from the center of their gathering
 And was able to elude my half-dozen assailants
 And flee into the jungle.
 The screams of Ma and the American
 Chased me through the shadows,
 Making me stumble.
 I glanced back once,
 To see the villagers dismembering
 My friend and the stranger.

It took me two weeks to make my way back along our "trail"
 To a village whose loyalty was trustworthy,
 And another two weeks to arrange for my return
 To China itself.

7.

Then came the gray years,
 When the ash through which Comrade Colonel Hu had strode
 On our first meeting
 Swirled up and around all of my life.
 At first they believed I had gone mad
 And killed my friend Ma,
 And concocted this story as a cover.
 For a year they held me in isolation,
 Questioning me from the far side of a sealed door.

Finally a scrap of confirmation—
 I do not know exactly what—
 Came to my interrogators.
 Then came a year in which they accused me
 Of having become a double agent.
 The questions were much the same.

Then someone came from Beijing—
 I do not know exactly who—
 With a story of his own about Delta Green.
 Then came a year of stranger questions.
 They asked me about Leng,
 And about blue-lit realms and toad-gods,
 And about inhuman creatures of the snow.
 They seemed to assume that I would already know

How all these things might fit together,
 As though "Mi-Go" and "Yuggoth"
 Should be as familiar to any scholar
 As the four virtues and the eight trigrams
 Or the story of Bull Mountain.
 My interrogators' voices carried fear,
 Which they had not before,
 And that itself heightened my fear.

No answers were ever given.

8.

In 1973 they sent me to the fields,
 Or at least to a work camp,
 To rediscover the joys of virtue through labor.
 For three years I had begged for the chance
 To do something more productive than crouching in my cell.
 One must be careful what one begs for.

All through the Cultural Revolution I hoed.
 During the era of consolidation
 After the death of the Great Chairman,
 I plowed.
 In the era of opening to the West
 And industrial partnership,
 Of betrayal of the essence of the Great Chairman's vision,
 I reaped.
 In the era of democratic rebellion
 Against the democratic center,
 During which I became very confused,
 I planted.

Many of my coworkers were rehabilitated.
 Sometimes we saw their names or pictures
 In the carefully censored newspapers made available to us.
 But some of us knew that we would never leave
 In any conveyance more hospitable than a coffin.
 I felt the black ice Jiang Mao had described
 Stir uneasily within my soul,
 And woke one morning to realize that I had no faith.
 I had nothing to struggle for,

Nothing to obtain,
Nothing to expect.

So I decided to escape.

9.

It took four years of careful planning.
I could trust no one.
There were those who still believed,
And I could not confide my disbelief to them.
There were those who no longer believed,
But I could not trust in them,
For opportunism flourishes in every prison,
Even those spread out along the banks of the Yangtze River
Rather than shaped by narrow walls.
Where the heart is narrow,
It does not matter what form the building takes.

So I planned by myself.
To the guards I must have seemed
One more resigned soul,
Which would never sink and never rise,
But poise frozen in the black ice
In which our mutual masters had positioned us.

The opportunity arose
One spring day.
There was flooding through our little Szechwan gorge,
And while the guards were busy
Trying to keep their huts from floating away,
A number of us made our way through gaps
Torn in the fences by the torrents.

I do not know where any of the others went
Or what became of them.
They turned east or north.

I turned south.
In my mind was the story
Told to me in my third year of interrogation
About strange creatures in the Himalayas.

I decided that perhaps the pure high sunlight
 Might melt the black ice,
 Or at least stir the ashes and smoke
 Into some fresh semblance of life.

It took fifteen months.
 With every passing day
 I saw some fresh sign of the corruption
 That was weighing down my beloved country.
 When the leaders do not lead,
 How can the people know the path
 To true democracy and social justice?
 But all were getting rich,
 Or scheming to,
 And none gave thought to purposes
 Larger than their wallets.

I was glad that I no longer had any faith;
 If I had, the tragedies I saw would have burned it all away.
 I merely passed sorrowfully
 From one birthing place of excess
 And unnecessary class struggle
 To another, and held no expectation for the future.

10.

I came to a little village
 Somewhere between the Brahmaputra River
 And the border with Nepal.
 The people did not speak my language
 And I did not speak theirs,
 But we managed to communicate.
 They did know of something
 Living within the mountains that loomed
 In the south.

(Jiang Mao's final poem speaks of climbing the south mountain,
 A pilgrimage to purge his soul so that it might pass
 Cleanly to his ancestors.
 I knew that my ancestors are merely dead
 And do not care,
 But perhaps the pilgrimage might do me some good

In the moments before I die.)

When I said those syllables the American said—
 “Mi-Go” and “Yuggoth”—
 And when I drew the outlines my third-year interrogators drew,
 The villagers cringed.
 Something was there,
 And they wished to have nothing to do with it.

Having found no one deserving of my support,
 And nobody to whom I owed any kindness or consideration
 Not already repaid long ago,
 I decided at last to indulge the scholarly passion.
 I would go into the mountains
 And record what I found.

II.

The mountains gleamed white in the sunshine,
 Even the northern slopes illuminated by reflection
 From streams, lakes, and the southern slopes of
 Smaller mountains guarding the approaches
 To the heights.

Birds flew above me,
 Then beside me as I continued to climb,
 And finally below me.
 All animal life lingered lower down,
 Among the grasses and trees.
 Plants, hardier or perhaps merely more persistent,
 Continued to mark my way,
 Pushing their slow insistent growth
 Through every available crack.

Then I noticed strange shadows
 Moving down the slopes toward me.
 At first I took them to be strange insects
 Somewhere close by,
 And waved my hand dismissively.
 Only then did I realize that they were much larger
 And much farther away.

There were four of them.
 They were each bigger than I was,
 Something like fungi shaped into the form of insects.
 Their wings glittered in the sun
 Like gelatin, and I remembered the times in camps
 When we rendered down ailing horses
 To keep the rest of the herd, and ourselves, alive.
 Their heads were tangles of crystalline fibers.
 One carried a metal cylinder
 To which were strapped knives and sealed toolkits.
 Their limbs seemed to come and go:
 Now an extrusion to push off against an outcropping,
 Now withdrawn to cushion some other part of the body.

Sometimes in the camps
 I had been wracked with fever
 And seen many strange things.
 I suspected that I must have relapsed
 Or perhaps begun to hallucinate for lack of oxygen.
 I sat on a nearby rock and waited for the fit to pass.
 It did not.
 It never will.

12.

There were four of the things.
 In a matter of moments they were upon me,
 One firing darts tipped with some anesthetic.
 By the time I was convinced of the need to flee,
 It was too late.

I sat rigid as they gathered around me.
 The one with the cylinder set it on the rock beside me
 And withdrew from its toolkits
 A set of surgical tools.
 It stretched out some new limbs to hold them all;
 The other things held me down,
 Though in truth I could not have moved.

The next minutes passed in a daze.
 I remember the one with the tools
 Wiping my forehead with something sponge-like

That numbed all sensation in the top half of my head.
 There was a series of grinding sounds.
 Suddenly all my senses went dead.

For a timeless time I drifted
 In silent intangible blackness.
 I wondered if this might be the moment before my death.
 (Later I was to wish it had been.)
 It was not just black, but the absence of all sight.
 Even the stray flashes of light one sees with his eyes closed
 Had disappeared. It was an absolute void.
 So with my hearing. I could not detect
 The faint rushing of the blood or the drumbeat of my pulse.
 I could feel nothing: no brush of air, no tingle of my skin,
 No sense of up or down, or of direction.
 Nothing filled the universe but my own awareness.

Suddenly I heard voices,
 Scratchy mechanical ones,
 Like the voices of my superiors over the Laotian radio
 So many years before.
 Most of them merely babbled incoherently.
 As I strove to make some sense of their words,
 I realize that I still heard no sounds from my own body.

I screamed into the void.

A voice called back to me,
 And I screamed again as I recognized it.
 It was my old friend, Ma.
 He sounded drained, wearied, the veteran of a campaign
 That might have lasted a thousand years.

He did not, I think, truly recognize me,
 But my voice had stirred something in his memory,
 And he began to recite his story.
 I remembered how some men in the camps
 Who had been interrogated too long would develop mental ruts or grooves,
 And if pushed with the right suggestion
 Suddenly relive the experience of their last interrogation.
 So it was with Ma.

First he told the story I have told here,
 About our journey into the jungle together.
 Then, he said, once the villagers had torn him apart,
 They placed his severed head in a vat of something gelatinous.
 The substance of the things' wings, perhaps, I thought,
 But Ma could not pause in his recitation.
 For days he lingered in that unnatural awareness,
 Until the winged things—which he identified as the Mi-Go—
 Came for him.

He said they placed his brain inside some system of life support.
 Then they questioned him.
 They wished to know, he said, about intuition and emotion and hunches,
 As though only the irrational aspects of human thinking
 Were worthy of their attention.
 For what seemed to him like years they questioned him.
 Finally they said that he had nothing further to tell him,
 And they put him "here," in this void of voices.

It was difficult to follow the later parts of his story,
 Because his recitation seemed to trigger many others.
 However big this void might be,
 It was full of damaged minds
 Who lived only to tell their own tales
 In the hopes of some relief.
 There were fellow soldiers in the war against fascism,
 And peasants, and agents of imperialism,
 And all the other sorts of people who have from time to time
 Wandered or become lost in the parts of the Himalayas
 Where these Mi-Go live. If it is living that they do.
 Each one had been questioned about what reactionaries would call
 The human soul, and which scientific materialists know
 To be merely the parts of the mind not yet brought
 Under the control of reason.

13.

The Mi-Go have not come for me yet.
 I have endeavored to organize my thoughts for their questions.
 Perhaps if I tell them what they want to know
 They will let me die.
 Already I can feel the first traces of dissolution,

In the urge to wander through the byways of my life
 In the obsessive search for—I do not know what.

It might have been years since they took me.
 Perhaps it has been only hours.
 What keeps my brain alive? I do not know.
 I do not think I want to know.
 I want this to end.

I have set about ordering my life as a poem.
 Though no one will ever know,
 It is time that at least one Bai
 Finally succeed as a poet.
 Once it is written,
 I will recite it to myself, and to any who will listen,
 Again and again and again
 Until it is engraved into the very fabric of my mind.

In the end,
 All that is my self will fade away,
 I hope,
 Leaving behind only this poem.
 Let the Mi-Go make of it what they will;
 Of myself I hope to make nothing.

Let it end.

—Artifact 26 recording transcript #124. From the Cantonese. 2JUNE97.
 <<DELTA GREEN EYES ONLY>>

Artifact Summary: Cylinder of unknown metal, sole artifact recovered during Operation LITTLE STAR 3AUG95 from Nepal Pr98, a cave at altitude 5,173 meters. Life-support system for human brain, equipped with active gas-exchange and nutrient recycling membrane. MRI reveals foreign cortical, medullar, and hippocampal structures that attach to output speaker and what may be a device for data input from unknown broadcast media. Input device, if in fact it is an input device, is a nearly complete mystery; does not respond to sound, direct pressure, chemical, or wide-band electromagnetic attempts at activation; however, subject speaks of hearing voices and displays heightened brain activity in regions associated with speech interpretation, especially Wernicke's area. Prognosis for subject if we breach the container is poor; life-sustaining membrane and power source are insufficiently understood. ▲

When he was just sixteen, Greg Stolze, now twenty-six, wrote a short story that he later sold to Haunts magazine. Currently, he is a professional in the hobby gaming industry—a part-time freelancer, and an employee of Alderac Entertainment Group, publishers of the Legends of the Five Rings (LSR) roleplaying game. He has written numerous magazine articles and several roleplaying sourcebooks.

This fine story involves the same monstrous antagonist as another piece in this anthology, but explores it from a very different angle. Fighting the Mythos in some desolate place across the globe is sometimes easier for Delta Green than fighting it at home, especially when confronted by the obstacle of a potential ally who has gotten himself in too deep with the wrong crowd.

POTENTIAL RECRUIT

GREG STOLZE

“Fear is sacred because it is a reaction to the actual. Fear deals with reality and liberates us. Anxiety is just a tool of society, used to keep us in line, because it is a foreboding of the future. Anxiety deals with the potential, and paralyzes us.”

—from *Cultural Deprogramming* by Delmar Gates

It was April in Davenport, Iowa, and the winter had been bad. There was still snow on the ground in patches, chaff from last year’s corn lay in slimy tatters over shallow lakes that lately were fields, and the Mississippi was passing flood stage up north and threatened to make the city environs an island in a sea of muck. It was an especially hard time on corpses.

“Exact cause of death is impossible to determine due to the condition of the body; appears exsanguination was compounded by exposure and

cranial trauma.” Rebecca Marks spoke into the microphone with a slow, even tone. Her coroner’s voice. The voice in her head was different: “A tug-of-war between bleeding, beating, and freezing. Poor little guy.” But she could never let her feelings show on the job. Emotions had no place among the bright, cool chrome and porcelain of the morgue.

To a layman, the mound upon which she worked might not be immediately recognized as human, let alone as a nine-year-old boy. Too many changes had been worked on it by knives and cold and teeth. Some of the teeth had been human.

Dr. Rebecca Marks, however, was used to looking at a corpse and seeing the person it had once been. Seeing the changes that had switched it from living to dead.

Sometimes she found herself looking at the living and wondering how, one day, they would be switched. It frightened her.

Once, she had seen the switch worked the other way, from dead to living—or moving, at least. That had frightened her too.

Rebecca Marks was forty-two. Sometimes she thought about turning forty-six; that would be the year when she could say, “I’ve been an FBI agent for most of my life.” Sometimes she wondered if she’d live that long.

Special Agent Rebecca Marks, M.D., was also an operative for Delta Green. That was one reason she, rather than one of the other doctors, was performing an autopsy on Dennis Cook, aged nine. (They’d gone to DNA for a positive ID. His teeth were all gone, fingers and toes too.) Rebecca had FBI superiors in the cabal, and they had pulled strings to make sure the boy got her personal attention.

She switched off the microphone and began making casts of the gnaw marks on some of the bones. She thought dental records might show the bones had been gnawed by Ashley Cook, the boy’s uncle. If they did, it would solve the case; but part of her hoped they wouldn’t.

Six hours later, Ashley Cook was arrested and charged with kidnapping and murder, for starters. Dr. Marks headed back to her house outside the city. Driving past the drowned fields under gray skies, she thought about going out and buying bourbon, but didn’t. Thought about calling her A.A. sponsor, but didn’t do that either.

As soon as she got home, the phone rang. It was Ben, one of her partners from the FBI.

“Hey, Rebecca; good work on the Cook case.”

“Thanks.”

“You all right?”

“As good as I can be.”

“I know. I was hoping it wouldn’t be the uncle.”

“He seemed ... nice.”

"Yeah."

They were quiet for a while. Then her partner spoke again.

"Becky? You wanna go get a capuccino?"

Inwardly, Rebecca groaned. "Wanna go get a capuccino?" was a code phrase. It meant, "One of our Delta Green bosses wants to talk."

"Sure. When and where?"

"How about that Starbucks at 45th and Brunner? Half an hour?"

"I'll be there," she said. Ben, of course, wouldn't be.

The coffee house was mahogany and fern green. Dr. Marks' hand almost matched the table. She was cradling a cup of plain coffee, running her other hand idly over the globe on the end of a brass railing, when the phone behind the nearby counter rang. A moment later "Gail Green" was paged.

"I'm Gail Green," Rebecca said to the counter girl, and took the phone.

"Gail? This is Barney."

If his code name was Barney, it meant he was in B-cell. Very high up.

"This is Gail."

"Congratulations on busting Ashley Cook."

"Yeah, thanks."

"Listen, we'd like your take on this New Potential thing." It took only a moment for Rebecca to make the connection: Ashley Cook had been a member of a group called the Brotherhood of New Potential.

"My take?"

"Yeah. This isn't the first time one of their members has gotten involved in something gruesome." Rebecca clenched her jaw at "Barney's" casual tone. "There may be some weird mojo shit around one of their places out in California—where else, right?—but we can't get close. They're too clean on the outside."

She turned her back on the counter girl and lowered her tone as she said, "I had some similar thoughts, but I've been over their stuff with a fine comb. I can't find any incitement to murder in their literature—not much of anything that's suspicious, even."

"Multiple murders by members isn't suspicious?"

"Oh, I'll be the first to admit the group gives me the creeps; but I've seen zero evidence that the murders weren't just acts of individuals. Nothing to justify acting against the whole group." She was tired, but tried to keep her voice professional—maybe even interested. "You have an idea for getting something more?"

"Uh huh. As it happens, the IRS is investigating the Brotherhood. Seems there's something slightly fishy about that California property, but nothing they can hang a subpoena from. So they've inserted someone."

"Is he one of ours?"

"Negative. Guy's name is Henry Woolrich, and apparently he's a pretty sharp undercover op—at least by IRS CID standards. He's in San Francisco, and he's joined the Brotherhood. Been in there most of a year now, under the name Derek Anderson."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Evaluate him and keep track of the situation. Give him information if you think he needs to know it—size him up as a recruit. At least warn him that these people are more than a pack of feel-good neo-hippies."

In the IRS CID regional office in downtown San Francisco, Henry Woolrich sat in the short chair in front of Betty Nakamura's desk, stirring a cafe latte and looking at an ugly ceramic vase her husband had made. His boss had just asked about the possibility of bringing up charges against the Brotherhood of New Potential for abusing their tax-exempt status, and he was still collecting his thoughts.

At last he said, "Betty, I don't really see the point. They have never—not once—asked me for money. And if they did, so what? Passing the hat isn't illegal." Without thinking, he ran a fingernail over his teeth.

"The Brotherhood hasn't been recognized as a religion."

"Not yet. But still, they're not for profit ... so what if they did ask for donations? Big deal."

"What about the drugs?"

Henry sat up a little straighter.

"If you want to turn it over to the DEA or the local cops, be my guest. They can arrest Henrietta for distributing marijuana, and some of the other members for using it. Is a couple dime bags going to justify a year-long undercover operation?"

"So you're saying the Brotherhood doesn't encourage the use of marijuana in its ceremonies?"

"I'm saying you'll never get a jury to believe it was the Brotherhood—that it wasn't just Henrietta's idea. Besides, what 'ceremonies'? The stuff we do, it's more like ..."

"We, Henry?"

Henry felt the corners of his mouth tighten.

"If you didn't want me taking part, you shouldn't have made up Derek Anderson and gone to all the trouble of signing me up. Yes, I take part in the exercises—but this stuff is less ceremonial than what you'd find in a Moose lodge, a Boy Scout troop, or a fraternity initiation. It's more like ... like psychobabble almost. It's all about exploring your inner self, stretching your boundaries, examining what you will and won't do and why."

"I don't know of any Moose lodge that makes its members hack up live chickens."

"You a vegetarian, Betty?"

"I know ..."

"Someone's got to slaughter your lunch. The whole chicken thing was just to get us to ..."

"... 'own up to the meaning of meat.' Yes, you've explained it to me. I still don't like it."

Henry smiled. "I wasn't wild about the idea myself," he said, "but you can see the point about hypocrisy, right? So okay, it wasn't really sanitary; you going to sic the Health Department on them too?"

Betty Nakamura sighed. "Henry, do you think we should cancel the operation?"

"I don't know. I don't have the whole picture ... and I doubt I'll get it from this one Family. It could be that the central organization is dirty—but there's practically no connection between the small, local Families and the central Brotherhood. I mean, I have an address where you can send away for books and pamphlets and can sign up for the retreat center ..."

"... but we've checked them and they're clean. Or at least clean enough. Hmph."

"Do *you* want to close this investigation, Betty?"

"I don't know anymore, Henry. I was almost ready to let it blow over, but suddenly I've got pressure from above to keep it on. Maybe even step it up."

"Pressure from whom? FinCEN?"

"Someone in the Treasury Department is interested in the Brotherhood. *Really* interested. I half expect it's some gang from ATF who want us as a diversion for a big raid, but who can tell? Do you want to stay in?"

"I've been in this long. Sure. What the hell, right?"

Henry left his cubicle for the day. On the way out of the office, he waved at a co-worker here and there, said "goodbye." A few waved back in silence.

He went to the shooting range and fired a few clips from his service nine millimeter. He stayed inside 7 ring, but missed the 10-X this time—he didn't seem much more accurate than last month, or than six months ago. He knew he was supposed to be getting better, but it didn't seem that way.

At the convenience store, picking up milk, he saw a nice-looking blonde woman flipping through a bundle of coupons. He considered talking to her. He bit into a thumbnail, his teeth making a little "thunk" in his ears as they came together.

He considered asking her where the laundry soap was, but then thought she'd probably think he was a stalker.

Later, as he unlocked the door to his apartment, he called out, "Honey, I'm home!" The joke wasn't funny to him anymore, but he'd gotten into the habit, something he'd started not long after joining the Brotherhood.

He thought in passing, as he often did, of getting a dog or a cat even though the lease prohibited it. And then rejected the idea as too much hassle.

He put away the milk he'd bought, made a cappuccino, turned on the TV. After his first re-run of the night, he made a gin and tonic. After his second re-run, he switched the TV off. He got up and walked around the room, glass in hand, and finally went to the kitchen.

As he put his glass in the sink, something glittered on the kitchen windowsill and he caught his reflection smiling in the dark pane beyond it.

His New Potential "Family" had given him a little crystal—polished quartz, he guessed. Actually, Henrietta had sold it to him. She'd told him that when he was feeling defeated, or isolated, or empty, he should look at the crystal and think about the Goddess (the Brotherhood of New Potential was quite enthusiastic about "the Goddess") and offer up all the bullshit of daily modern life to her. In return, She was supposed to "purify his psyche" and help him return to "a more natural mental state."

Of course Henry had never used it, but now he found himself wondering why. After all, he thought, it was what Derek would do.

He put the crystal, which sat on an injection-molded plastic stand (\$20.00 from New Potential Enterprises) in the middle of his kitchen table, sat, and looked. He blinked a few times, kept looking.

This was a waste of time, he thought, then immediately considered that wasting time would hardly be an inconsistency in his life. After all, this was no more pointless than all the paperwork he had to do to requisition the fucking cash to *buy* this little knickknack.

Oh Goddess, hear my plea; deliver me from paperwork and memos. While you're at it, you could smite those ugly ceramics Betty's flake husband keeps churning out.

He almost smiled, but then felt ashamed. He could remember Henrietta saying, "Irony is the enemy of pure thought. Irony is nothing but the fear of fear. If you're going to be afraid of something, have the balls to really *be* afraid."

He kept looking at the crystal, which seemed to be getting dimmer. He wondered if the sun was setting, then realized it had set long ago.

"Primitive man had no words for fear, no words for desire or for any emotion. We were meant to simply feel things, not to know we feel them"—Henrietta had told him all this when he'd gotten the crystal; he had forgotten it until now; actually, it surprised him that his recall was so good. *"You will be in the presence of the Goddess when you aren't thinking—when you're only doing, when you're purely feeling ... don't consider, don't evaluate, just let yourself go."*

For a moment, alone in his kitchen, Henry felt a wash of despair.

His head twitched to the right, automatically, at some movement out of the corner of his eye.

But no. It was just him, alone, in his well-lit kitchen, with his heart beating hard and medium-fast, in what seemed a peculiar rhythm of shock. It was very much like what he'd felt at times in wrestling back in college when he'd been pinned after a hard match.

For a second, he'd been sure he'd seen something big—rough flesh, with dark hair like that on a spider's leg. But looking around he saw only the microwave, his shiny espresso machine, gin glasses with twisted lime wedges in the sink, and an overpriced chunk of quartz on a plastic base.

He took a deep breath and hissed it out between his lips.

"Henry, my boy, you're cracking up," he said aloud. He sat back down and stretched his neck—moved his head up, down, jerked it to the right and left. Then he noticed something odd, and laughed.

When he sat just so, with the light from the parking lot behind him, a blurred reflection of his face appeared briefly in his glasses. It appeared as a dark mass off to the right, and his thick eyebrows were magnified and grossly distorted.

Scared by my own fucking reflection.

The relief quickly gave way to depression. He went to bed early, disgusted with himself. He was almost glad there was no one around to appreciate what a loser he was—almost.

Driving through the piney Sierra foothills to the next meeting of his Brotherhood Family, Henry—"Derek Anderson"—took deep breaths in through his nose, out through his mouth.

You're Derek. You were born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. You got your B.A. from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. You got downsized six months ago and you had to take a worse job. You hate it but you're shy.

With each breath, he thought about being more Derek, less Henry.

You put Henry away with your handcuffs and your gun. Who's Henry? I'm Derek. Derek Anderson. My middle name's Emile and I hate it.

He turned off the main highway onto the short gravel drive lined with madrona and parked behind four other vehicles, got out with the bottle of Gevurtz, went to the door of the clapboard house, and knocked. The door opened a moment later, and there was Tabitha McHugh ... bare naked.

"Hi, Derek," she said. It was clear she was enjoying his shock. Tabitha was a good-looking woman. Red hair. Very good looking.

"Derek?"

"What? Yes, I'm ... uh ..." *Don't say, "I'm Derek," you shithead!*

Tabitha giggled and said, "Come in," just as Henry asked, "Aren't you afraid of the neighbors seeing you?"

"Afraid?" asked another voice. Henry came in and saw Henrietta Graham, the "Big Sister" and impromptu leader of the Family. The house they

met in, filled with pastel cushions and soft corners, belonged to her.

Henrietta was about 5'10" and 200 pounds. She had straight dark hair and a clear, creamy complexion. Nude, round, and rosy, she looked like an expensive teapot for English nobility.

Also in view, to his right, were two other naked people: Allison, pale and gawky, and Patrick, a red-headed guy of unremarkable build with freckled shoulders.

Tabitha closed the door behind him, revealing her boyfriend, Dale, off to the left, who fixed him with the somewhat unfocused stare of a complacent predator. Dale was naked as well, hairy and dense-looking. His stomach didn't sag or jiggle like Henrietta's, but it was round and smooth like a ball, with a seam of hair down the front. Dale reminded Henry of a college wrestling coach whose bellowed, abusive exhortations had soured Henry on the sport forever.

Don't stare at Tabitha! he ordered himself, but then wondered if Derek might not stare after all.

Dale strode over to Tabitha and put a proprietary arm around her shoulder. "I don't care who sees her," he said, as if reading Henry's thoughts. "I'm proud of how she looks. You should be too," he told her.

"I am," she said, and struck a little pose, head tucked in seductively toward her shoulder, which she turned slightly toward Henry.

Look at the way he touches her tit. Oh so casual. Derek would be intimidated, look away. No, I'm Derek. I'm intimidated; I'd like to bash his face in, but Derek knows he'd lose.

"What's the matter, Derek?" Henrietta's voice was sweet and concerned—like always.

"I'm just, uh, surprised."

"Why?"

He laughed, and relaxed a little. "Because I'm used to people wearing clothes."

"But what's the need now? We're all friends—all family, Derek. You wouldn't be uncomfortable undressing around a brother, would you?"

Did I tell her about a brother? I have a brother, uh, Phil Anderson. Older.

"Derek?"

"Look, I'm really sorry. I'm spacey. Hard day at work."

"You haven't answered the question, Derek." This came from Allison, who always gave Henry a touch of the creeps. She seemed awkward, socially clumsy—yet she always asked the bluntest questions, the most difficult ones. Her scarecrow-thin body was as pale as skim milk.

"The question? What, about Phil?"

"Phil?"

"My, uh, brother." *Shit, you're close to blowing it. Cover! Use it!*

He dropped his head a little, took a deep breath.

"Yeah, I would be embarrassed. I, uh, always turned the lights off before undressing at home—you know, when I shared a room with Phil." Henry brought up the bottle in his left hand. "Hey, I brought some white wine, anyone interested?"

"I'll open," said Dale as he took it from him, and he walked with it into the adjacent kitchen room. Dale was obviously interested in a drink. Allison looked almost hungry—hungry for his weakness. Derek knew why: she'd been raped three years ago; she was always trying to prove her strength, show how much she'd recovered. He suddenly thought about how much harder nudity must be for her.

"I feel like an ass standing here with my clothes on while you're all ... you know."

"You're welcome to take them off," Henrietta said.

"Thanks." He unbuckled his belt, stopped, sat, on the floor and unlaced his shoes. Dale came back, loomed over him, and he looked up a bit surprised to see that Dale was offering him a glass. "Thanks," he said to Dale as he took it.

"I, uh ... I was uncomfortable with my body a lot in junior high especially," Henry said. "I was smaller—well, shorter and thinner—than the other boys, you know. Gym class was, uh, it sucked. You know, the locker room." As he spoke, he took off his glasses, unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it over his head.

Derek would still be uncomfortable, he realized, hunched in, hiding his chest.

"Part of it was maybe the glasses. You know. I had to take them off in the shower of course; otherwise, the other guys would think I was, you know, staring. And then I couldn't know if any of them were looking at me."

Dale chuckled, but it didn't sound overtly malicious. Patrick said, "I've been there. It's supposed to build character."

As he pulled down his pants, Henry made a sudden decision to use one of his own experiences.

"Yeah, and the thing was, if I'd looked at any of them—natural adolescent curiosity, am I right?—they'd have called me a fag and everything. But they were looking at me; one of them called me 'needle-dick,' which is pretty silly now, saying it as an adult, but back then ..."

"And there were a couple bigger boys who called you that for weeks, maybe months. Seemed like months, right?" Patrick was grinning and shaking his head.

"So Derek, you still embarrassed about the size of your tool?" Dale said, sliding firmly into character.

Henry's face went hot without any acting effort at all. He stood.

"Derek." It was Henrietta. She had a hand on his shoulder. It felt cool against his hot, prickly skin. He turned his head to her, and she smiled. "It looks fine to me."

He laughed. "I guess I have issues."

"Who doesn't?" asked Tabitha. "I mean, society. The beauty myth and everything. Whatsername, you know, she wrote that one book?"

"Susan Faludi?" said Allison.

"Maybe ..."

"Let's go have dinner," Henrietta said firmly. As the others turned towards the dining room, Henrietta left her hand on Derek's shoulder, holding him back. He turned to her again.

"Derek—I think you're very brave."

She doesn't know the half of it, Henry thought. Then the doorbell rang.

"You want to get that?" Henrietta asked.

"Sure. What the hell, right?"

It was after 10:00 when Henry left Henrietta's house and started driving home. He reflexively took a deep breath to relax, and realized he was already relaxed. After dinner they'd spent more time talking. They'd talked about their bodies, about self-image, about looks and sex and nudity and physicality, and about what culture taught them about all those things. Then they'd given each other back rubs. Derek had rubbed Allison's back. He'd felt her flinch—slightly—under his first touch, and he'd felt a flood of sympathy for her.

It had been years, he reflected, since he'd touched a woman with that much ... tenderness, he guessed it was. But of course that wasn't him. That was Derek.

Henry felt an unaccountable sadness, and it wearied him.

The next day he went to work. He had a cover phone number—Nancy, the secretary, would answer that line as "Acer Construction" and would eventually lead any caller to "Derek Anderson." If he ever needed it, a fake office could be set up for him overnight. So far, no one from the Family had visited him at work, and probably never would.

There was no mail for Derek Anderson. There was a big envelope for Henry Woolrich, and he felt a vague unease when he saw it had neither postmark nor return address.

When he dumped out its contents on his desk, he nearly lost his breakfast. As an investigator of financial crimes, Henry was not accustomed to seeing photos from a murder scene. Particularly the murder of a nine-year-old boy.

Quickly he rifled through the pictures to a letter at the back.

TO: Henry Woolrich, IRS CID
FROM: Gail Green
RE: The Brotherhood of New Potential

Enclosed, please find four crime-scene and autopsy photos of Dennis Cook, deceased 2/3/97. His uncle, Ashley Cook, was arrested for his murder. Ashley Cook is a member of the Brotherhood of New Potential.

The Brotherhood of New Potential was founded in 1989. Of the original twenty members, fourteen—Roger Ash, Judith Bellamy, Dolores Brankovich, Edward Curran, Cynthia Dexter, Terrance Foscett, Delmar Gates, Eugene Gorecki, Chad Hoffmann, Angela Jacobson, Oksana Kosulic, Lawrence Mennecke, Joslin Olmstead, and Bethany Schaell—were members of a commune known as the True Love Study Group. The TLSG commune was shut down in 1977 when three of its leaders—Joshua Freese, Chester Marsh, and Richard Waugh—were indicted for first-degree murder.

In 1991, Newbury Developments purchased the site formerly owned by the TLSG commune. It is now the site of the Newbury Wilderness Retreat Center, which has been used by the Brotherhood of New Potential for seminars almost since its inception. Ashley Cook was there in 1994 and again in late 1996.

Henry stared at the letter, then back at the photos.

What the fuck is this?

He'd heard of the Newbury Retreat Center, of course—Henrietta had gone there; Allison and Dale and Tabitha had reservations for a trip there soon. That was where you learned the secret name of the Goddess or some such thing. He'd dug into Newbury's background and knew they were close to the Brotherhood—but not illegally close. No one had mentioned any "True Love Study Group." No one had mentioned murder.

The phone rang, and he jumped. He hit the speaker button.

"Henry? There's a Gail Green on the line for you."

He was suddenly aware of his heartbeat.

"Nancy? Can you put a trace on the line?"

"Wh ... well sure, Henry."

"Do it. And put her through."

There was a click.

"Hello, Ms. Green?"

"Mr. Woolrich?" Her voice was low, with a little drawl. Henry guessed she was southern or black.

"Yes. I just got your envelope."

"Really. Have you had time to ... digest the contents?" His stomach clenched a little at the thought.

"I'm not sure I have. Just, uh, what are you trying to insinuate with this?"

"I'm not trying to insinuate anything, Mr. Woolrich. I'm trying to prove to you that the Brotherhood of New Potential is dangerous."

"Why?"

"We have our suspicions that there's an inner cult behind the Brotherhood ... something sinister, something based at the Retreat Center."

He blinked, and hardened his voice with skepticism.

"A sinister cult, huh?"

"Waugh, Marsh, and Freese were performing human sacrifices on that land in the seventies. Fourteen of their students bought the land and have formed a new, nationwide organization. Several members of that organization have been linked to brutal homicides."

"Several, eh?"

"Cook is the first suspect charged with murder who can be tied to the Brotherhood. There are at least two other cases where strong circumstantial evidence indicates that similar, bestial murders were performed by Brotherhood members. Furthermore, Etta Holmes, convicted in 1996 of murdering her own daughter, has suspected ties to the Brotherhood."

"So why are you telling me this?"

"Because you're in the Brotherhood. We want to alert you to the dangers you may face."

"Uh huh. Listen, I'm just a tax man."

"The crimes of the Brotherhood may extend far beyond tax fraud. They may extend to crimes against humanity."

"You really believe that a self-help group is conducting *human sacrifices* in California?"

"We strongly suspect it; you're our best hope to find out for sure."

"Who's 'we'? You and the voices in your head?"

"I represent a specialized, interdepartmental federal task force. If you wish to contact me, I can be reached at ..."

"Save your breath." He hung up, then immediately dialed the secretary back.

"Nancy? You get a trace?"

"Uh, kind of ..."

"What do you mean 'kind of'? Did you or didn't you?"

"I did ... but it's August Kronengold's line. She called from this building, two floors below you!"

When he got home, Henry skipped his normal evening cappuccino and went straight for the gin. His head hurt. He knew caffeine was supposed to be

good for headaches, but he was already nervous and didn't want to compound his jitters.

At first he'd assumed he was the butt of some cruel prank. He'd gone down to Kronengold's office, but it had been locked—no one inside. Betty hadn't heard of any "interdepartmental task force." Then he'd started checking the facts.

Nothing in the newspaper articles about Cook mentioned the Brotherhood. He found articles about the TLSG—the story about Waugh, Freese, and Marsh was true. But the articles didn't say where the commune was, and there was no list of other commune members. He had requested crime reports from the TLSG raid, from the Cook case; he'd tried to track the land from Newbury backwards, but it was all a mess—a tangled trail of agents, lawyers, and limited partnerships. He'd sort it out in time, but right now he was confused and unhappy and a little scared.

He reflected that he should have gotten Green's phone number after all.

As he got out of his car at Henrietta's house for his next meeting with the Family, he felt like he couldn't get enough air by drawing it through his nose. He couldn't relax. He stood in the driveway awhile, trying to get himself together before approaching the house.

I'm Derek. I'm Derek. I'm Derek.

Ashley Cook had purchased a number of Brotherhood books, pamphlets, and video cassettes. He'd paid with his American Express card.

I have a brother named Phil Anderson. My middle name is Emile and I hate it. My parents are ... are ...

The crime-scene reports from the TLSG raid indicated that the commune had owned a very large parcel of land. The area owned by the Newbury Wilderness Retreat Center overlapped with the TLSG lands, somewhat.

My parents are Marjorie and Nathaniel. Marjorie—Mom—died when I was twenty-four. Dad hasn't remarried.

He was unable to verify Gail Green's data about TLSG members founding the Brotherhood.

So what if they did? Maybe their leaders freaked out, and these guys didn't want to see the progress they'd made slide down the crapper. "Not everyone is strong enough for the dreadful burden of freedom."

That was something Henrietta had said once or twice.

When he finally went up and knocked on her door, he was half expecting Tabitha to open it naked again. Instead, it was Allison and Dale, fully clothed. Their faces were hard, inscrutable.

Shit, did I blow my cover? Did Allison see through me?

"Hi, guys ... What's going on?"

"Come in, Derek."

Would Derek be nervous? Would he be this nervous?

Henry noticed that Patrick wasn't there. It was just Allison, Dale, and Tabitha—all of whom, unlike Patrick, had been members for more than a year.

"Why don't you take all your clothes off?" Dale asked. As usual, he was dressed all in black: light turtleneck sweater, slacks. Everyone else was fully clothed as well. From the kitchen came sounds of a knife chopping down on a wood block.

"Where's Henrietta?"

"I'm here, Derek." Henrietta came from the kitchen, dressed in a flowing, tie-dyed dress. Her arms were covered with smears of blood. "I'm making stew. Here." She handed him a glass of white wine.

He stared. Her fingers left little bloody smears on the glass. He looked up. Everyone was staring at him. He drank.

It tasted funny.

"I ... I'm not sure I want to undress when you're all clothed."

I don't want to. Derek doesn't want to. Henry and Derek agree fully on this.

"Why not?" Dale's chin had an aggressive thrust. "You just have to do what everyone else does? Can't think for yourself? You just another sheep, Derek? Just looking for another good shepherd?"

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Derek felt the wine warm his belly—he hadn't eaten in awhile.

"Don't you trust us, Derek?" Allison's dark eyes glittered like chips of mica.

"Uh ..."

Derek does. Of course he does. They're his only friends.

"You're my own friends. My only friends, I mean."

"Please take your clothes off, Derek. For me?" It was Tabitha. Derek (Henry?) whipped his head around, and it seemed like it took a second for his vision to catch up with where his head was pointing. Like he was drunk.

Off one sip of wine? Is Derek that much of a lightweight?

"I've seen you look at her," Dale said.

"Dale, Der— I look ... uh ..."

"No one's going to hurt you," Henrietta said. Henry was so grateful to her that he felt tears coming to his eyes. Her hands were a red blur as she wiped them on a paper towel.

"Why did you join us, Derek?" It was Allison, all hard eyes and hard angles and hard questions. "What does the Brotherhood offer you? What does a straight-arrow accountant want with all this hokey New Age sewage, huh?"

If anyone's going to blow Henry's cover, it's her. Why did I join?

"I'm lonely."

The moment he said it, Henry knew it was the truth. The absurdity of admitting this deep, personal truth, when everything else he'd told them was a lie, overpowered him. He started to cry.

Tabitha swam into view, and her hair left red trails behind her. Derek blinked; everything that moved left streamers, and it was hard to focus his eyes.

Shit, I've been drugged.

"Lonely? Why not join a church choir, or take some classes or hang out in bars? Why us, Derek? Why us?"

"I ... I didn't want ... That other stuff didn't ..." He was crying in earnest now. Henrietta knelt next to him. There was a rich coppery smell from her hands; he could see blood under her fingernails. She put one hand on his cheek, and tilted his head up to have him face the crystal on the table. His vision swam, and it seemed that the whole room was darker.

"It's okay, Derek. We're going to let you talk. But you have to tell us the truth." It seemed to him that the crystal was rushing towards him at full freight-train speed, getting bigger and bigger while staying perfectly still. "You have to tell us everything."

For a second, he thought again that he saw something from the corner of his eye—thick dark hairs, and sagging flesh like great, full breasts. His head twitched again, and everything left trails; there was nothing there, no spider hairs, just his friends, the crystal, and Henrietta's face behind the crystal, her hands cradling it, her eyes full and dark.

He began to speak.

"I really loved this girl in college named Jane Widdoes and when I was with her everything made sense, I could say anything that popped into my head without worrying that she'd laugh at me the way everyone did in junior high. I loved her so much and she married Rick Ford, he was my roommate, I still send them Christmas cards but I'd like to put a bullet in his skull and then fuck her on his coffin, I never even fucked her, I never even told her how I felt and then it was like I died inside and drank all summer and when this recruiter showed up she was kind of pretty and I thought, 'Sure. What the hell, right?' and joined and once you're out of college how the fuck do you meet people? No one gives a damn about me at work, I'm just another bean counter getting them their numbers... . And since then I haven't had any, any tenderness! Not until I rubbed Allison's back ..." The words poured out like a flash flood, on and on. It was everything he'd held back since college, since Jane and Rick. Behind the crystal, Henrietta's eyes got bigger and closer and darker.



When he woke up on his side the next morning in the sunny bedroom, he wasn't sure if he was Derek or Henry. He looked up at the near wall and saw a large, framed photo of the Golden Gate bridge taken from the Marin Headlands, looked down to see a plain blue, quilted comforter bunched at the foot of the bed. There was someone next to him, warm. Cautiously, he craned his head over his shoulder.

Guess I'm Derek.

It dawned on him that he was as naked as Henrietta was. With rising dread, he realized that large parts of last night's memories were simply gone.

Anger surged through him as he fought to remember what little he could.

Fuck, I spilled all that bullshit about Jane Ford. God damnit, I'm over her. Fuckin' Henry is anyhow. Guess Derek just can't let go.

Absurdly, he was as angry at Derek as he was at the rest of the Family. He got out of bed slowly, trying not to wake her. He stood looking down at her, and he could feel rage pulsing behind his temples.

I don't know what that bitch dosed me with, but I'm going to get the DEA on them like a million-ton shithammer. Did I crack? Did I blow my cover?

I could just strangle the whore while she sleeps. Put a knife in her hand and claim she jumped me in the middle of the night.

Henrietta opened her eyes and smiled. Then she wrinkled her brow.

"Derek? You okay?"

Derek?

"You look kind of angry," she said, sitting up. Henry's eyes flicked down to her breasts, and suddenly he remembered her, last night, holding him. He'd sobbed like a child and she'd cradled him like his mother.

"I'm ... really confused."

She smiled and opened her arms. After a moment, he sat down and let her hug him.

"I know. The first time it really hurts. But you came through it like a trooper, Derek. I always told them you were tougher than you look."

"What ... ? What 'first time'?"

"Last night was a Purge, Derek. We're trying to break the chains that society has wound around your soul; the nudity taboo, the monogamy taboo, all the social bullshit they stuff you with. You've seen us sawing at the chains for months. Last night we struck our first decisive blow."

"I ... I don't remember a lot of it."

"That's common. It will come back as you're better able to accept it. As you become free."

He was silent; then he said, "It was terrifying."

She smiled, and her eyes were full of compassion. "Fear is sacred. If you learn how to listen to it, the voice of fear leads to the palace of freedom."

He was silent for a moment, then said, "I, uh, have to go."

"Can you at least stick around for breakfast?"

"Sure," he said, and thought, "As long as I watch you fix it."

Dr. Rebecca Marks gnawed on the end of her pen as she read through a copy of Henry Woolrich's personnel file. Whoever had copied it (someone she'd called "Janet Green") had put tape over the parts where it said "Do Not Copy," but Rebecca still planned to burn it when she was done. Better not to take chances.

"Five-foot-five, a hundred forty pounds, brown hair, glasses—wouldn't look at him twice. No wonder he's good at undercover," she thought. "A wrestler. Second in state as a high school senior. Not bad."

She paged through case files—a string of successful but unspectacular busts: mail fraud, credit fraud, tax evasion. She lifted her eyebrow when she got to his one mob-connected operation, but it had apparently gone very smoothly. He'd gotten a mid-level money launderer for a cocaine cartel but hadn't followed it any higher. No one had tried to kill him, no car chases, no shootouts; just paper trails and phone taps and endless hours poring over computer entries.

She could find no evidence that he'd ever drawn a gun in the line of duty. She was starting to have doubts about his becoming a Delta Green field op but thought he might work as a "friendly"—someone behind the scenes. She flipped back to the psych profile.

What she found made her sit up straight. After reading carefully for a few minutes, Rebecca phoned her field office. "Hal? Yeah, it's Becky Marks. Could you fax me the psych profiles on Ashley Cook and Etta Holmes? Uh, it's not urgent, but I'd like to— ... Tonight? You're a doll, Hal. What? Oh yes, a manly doll. More like an action figure."

She found herself smiling at his laugh, and then dropped the smile as she hung up the phone. She tapped her pen against her teeth. She was afraid that the fax would only confirm her suspicions—that Henry had too much in common with Cook and Holmes for her comfort.

When the faxes came, she called "Fred Green" and asked him to get Woolrich off the case.

"Henry, frankly I'm concerned."

Play it cool. Remember, you're Henry Woolrich, the ice man; no one bugs you.

Henry shrugged, looked straight into his boss's eyes.

"Why's that, Betty?"

"You seem awfully sure that you're close to something. I mean, you've been in a year and you've got drugs and nothing."

Shit, not long ago you were riding me to stay in; now you want to pull the plug? Make up your fucking mind.

"If you want to asscan the job, well, fine. But personally I'd like to stay in."

"Why? The interrogation you described was pretty brutal."

And you don't know about the drugs and nudity.

"Are you sure they don't suspect you?"

"Don't you see, Betty? It's *because* of the interrogation that they don't suspect me. They hazed me, and I passed. I'm on the inside now, I've been 'purged.' I'm good to go; if they have anything dirty going on, they're only going to show it to someone who's been through the initiation. Am I right?"

"I'm just uneasy with the detailed questions you described."

He shifted in his seat again, exasperated.

"Look, everyone in the Family gets examined. That's the whole *point!*"

"Henry, calm down!"

Shit, she's right. Don't blow this, Henry.

He took a deep breath—in through his nose, out through his mouth.

"Everyone gets examined. We all have to open up, share our weaknesses."

"Yes I know, your reports are ... very interesting. Allison's assault, Tabitha's sexualized childhood, Dale's scars. Doesn't it bother you that this organization is full of abuse survivors? And from what you've told me about Tabitha and Dale, it's not therapeutic, it's almost enabling."

He felt a dull flash of anger about her criticizing Tabby and Dale. *It's their choice, their true will ... but she'll never understand.*

You have to tell her something she will understand.

"Betty, please. I know I've gotten really close on this case."

"In more ways than one. I'm worried that you're too close, too emotionally involved."

"I didn't mean it that way. I mean I think I'm close to really uncovering something. Something big. You think I like the Brotherhood's tactics? Hell Betty, they ..."

Don't say they drugged you!

"... they ripped me open just to see who I was. They're creepy, and there's more there than meets the eye. If you cut me off this, I'll ..."—*don't say you'll stay in on your own, you idiot!*—"I'll always wonder what was there, what I didn't see."

Betty Nakamura squinted at him. He felt an irrational annoyance at the short, cramped chairs she had in her office—a cheap Psych 101 trick to make people uncomfortable, put them at a disadvantage. He bit a pinkie nail.

Okay, she's dubious but still open. Play the trump card.

"Listen, Betty; they've invited me to the Newbury Retreat Center. That's the core of the whole thing. If there's dirt to be found, I'll find it there."

"The Retreat Center. That's where they teach you the secret name of whoever it is."

Smile, Henry. This is funny to you.

"Secret name of the Goddess, right. Look, I just don't want this investigation to be a fat, hairy waste of money and effort. I've been in there getting picked at for eleven months I'll never get back. Maybe I'm throwing good effort after bad, but if I don't find anything at the Retreat Center, I'll not only give up gracefully, I'll ... Gee, I don't know ..."

"Wash my car?"

"If you like."

She smiled. He smiled.

"That won't be necessary. Just get me something good—or Derek Anderson is out the door."

Henry went straight from Betty's office to the men's room. No one inside; he soaked a handful of paper towels, grabbed some dry ones, and locked himself in a stall. His armpits were soaked. He opened his shirt, and wiped them, thinking about the Purge, about how nervous he was.

He knew he wanted to go to the Retreat Center very badly, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to destroy the Brotherhood or be completely accepted.

"You want the truth," he told himself. "When you find that, you'll do the right thing."

He buttoned his shirt, straightened his tie, took a breath in through his nose.

He wished the mysterious Gail Green had called him back. Failing that, he wished he hadn't blown her off. *What was I thinking?* But on the other hand, her disappearance was suspicious. Damn sure not the behavior of a genuine task force.

"Could just be some lone fanatic," he thought. "Heard something bad about the Brotherhood and started putting together conspiracy fantasies. Actually, that fits her whole approach better than a real investigation."

For a moment, he was confident that she was just a nut, and he resolved to tell the Brotherhood about her—once he'd established their innocence, of course. He left the stall, pushed his way out of the bathroom.

Still, those crime-scene photos—he couldn't get them out of his mind. In fact, he'd had a hell of a nightmare the other night about that little boy's corpse out in some woods, and something with long hairy legs and skin like hardened blood, like a scab.

He shook his head, and sat down at his desk. There was a flashing light on his phone.

"Nancy? I've got a message? It wasn't Gail Green, was it?"

"Even better. It came through on the phony 'Acer Construction' line."

"Oh?"

"It's someone named Tabitha McHugh. She wants to meet you for lunch."

In the hotel restaurant's bayview lounge, Henry worked his teeth around the cuticle of a thumbnail as he waited for Tabitha. The restaurant was a nice one, beige valances over the wide, tinted windows, oak moldings. Very nice. It made him uncomfortable.

Would Derek want to go dutch? Hell no ... he wants to get laid. I mean, I want to get laid.

Tabitha walked in through the arched entryway wearing a tight skirt that came to just above the knee, appropriate for any office, but still very tight—one man at table near the arch turned his head a little to watch her legs. Tabitha's velvety chocolate blouse clung to her breasts. When she sat next to him, he felt a pleasurable flush of being envied for being with the prettiest woman in the restaurant.

"Hi, Tabitha. You look great!"

"Thanks, Derek. You're sweet."

"So what brings you downtown?"

"A little shopping. Lunch, with you. I've been to this place a few times."

"Uh, what's good?"

"I like the shrimp cocktail."

"Whoo. I think I'll just have the, uh, pork chops."

She smiled, wrinkling her nose.

"So, uh, Tabitha ... what's this about?"

"What do you mean?"

"I guess I wanted to, you know, find out why you asked me to lunch."

She said nothing. Then he felt her foot sliding up the leg of his pants.

Henry thought Derek would be flustered, panicky, but he leaned in and looked at her intently. She looked right back at him.

"What about Dale?" he asked.

She leaned back and laughed a little. "Dale," she said dismissively. "You know, I started seeing him right after his first Purge. He didn't take it well—not nearly as well as you. He wound up thinking he was six years old again, about to get beaten and half-drowned by his stepfather. Before that, he made me sick with all his flexing and posturing and macho bullshit. After ... well, it was nice to find out how weak he is. To him, I'll never be anything but a way to impress other men. That was okay—for a while."

"And me?"

"You're like the opposite. Weak and puffy on the outside ... but I bet you're really very hard."

He said nothing for a while, then asked her, "What about your first Purge?" She looked away and ran a finger over her lower lip before speaking.

"I realized that I'd never once, in my whole life, done what I wanted. Not really. I was always, *always* trying to please someone else. My low self image, of course. Pretty women are really taught to hate themselves, you know. It's to make us easier for others to use."

"Like Dale?"

"Why do you keep talking about Dale, Derek?"

He shrugged. "I'm sorry. I'll stop if it makes you uncomfortable."

Her beautiful smile widened. "That's just it, Derek. It doesn't. I love it." Her foot, smooth and slippery in nylons, was outside his pants leg now, rubbing the back of his calf.

"Dale thinks you're weak; he's contemptuous of you and of men like you—men who fell in love. Sure, it's a mistake, but it's one only the strong make."

"Falling in love is a mistake?"

"Always. Haven't you learned anything? Love is a lie, a tool used for obedience. It takes without giving, just like Jane Widdoes."

He flinched. Her face softened and she reached across to take his hand.

"Your roommate—Rick, right? He got her and betrayed you. Now you can be the betrayer. You can help me betray Dale, who's betrayed me by using me against other men. And believe me; if he found out I was sleeping with you, he'd curl up and die of shame. That will make the secret better, don't you think? For you too; knowing that you could crush him, kill his heart—and that he doesn't suspect. Knowing he looks down on you, despises you, when all the time you're doing to him what he thinks he's doing to you."

"Sounds complicated."

"It's a hell of a lot simpler than 'love.'"

"But won't you just throw me over eventually?"

"It's possible. So what? You won't fall in love with me, not if you're half the man I think you are."

"Really."

"Really." She leaned in, arching her back a little to show cleavage. He wasn't sure if she did it on purpose, or if it was just a reflex. "Listen, Dale's gone as far as he's going to go with the Brotherhood. He's got me as a devoted little trophy fuck, and he thinks he's happy and liberated. He's never going to get in touch with the real power, with primal freedom. In your very first Purge, you came closer than he ever will." Her foot was on the inside of his thigh, sliding up and down, up and down. "You've got real potential, Derek. You could be one of the few who really sees the truth—one who gets the power of the Goddess. I want to be part of that."

He was on the brink of saying, "Hell with it," leaving the restaurant with her, getting a room or going to her apartment—but he could feel the weight of his pistol in its shoulder holster, he could picture Betty

Nakamura and Nancy and August Kronengold, and he knew he couldn't do it.

Not yet.

"Not yet. I'm sorry, Tabitha, but this is all ... Um, it's very sudden and confusing."

She sat back and her foot vanished from his lap. The expression dropped off her face like a mask falling.

"Don't apologize, Derek. Please. It makes me want to puke."

Henry was at the Newbury Retreat Center, located in the heart of the northern Sierras, for the second time that week. Unbeknownst to the Family, Henry had come by a few days before and driven its perimeter, to see if there was anything sinister about it. There hadn't been and there wasn't now. In fact, the place couldn't be more inviting: tall, stately buildings of polished, rounded logs; the pervasive smell of pine and fresh-cut incense cedar. People of all ages and descriptions were wandering about among the trees—many wearing nothing but shoes and spectacles. He saw some children, all clothed, playing dodgeball and shrieking delightedly.

Then he spotted Tabitha. She was wearing lycra shorts, a black sports bra, and hiking boots. She smiled and waved.

He walked over and hugged her. She kissed his cheek by his ear.

"I got you put in my cabin. Don't think you're getting out of here before I've shown you a few things about getting beyond words."

"I guess there's no hard feelings then." She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. He laughed. "I'm surprised you're wearing clothes. I thought you'd be flaunting it."

"Well, I can't stand running around barefoot—kills my arches. And I feel like an idiot wearing boots and nothing else ... though if that's your scene ..."

"Now, you're not here to please me; you're here to please yourself."

"I don't think those are mutually exclusive."

At that moment, something shuffled past the corner of his eye—something with a strange, hitching gait. He turned his head to look.

"Jesus Christ!"

"Poor thing," Tabitha said. It was a dog, a short-haired mutt with only three legs—and its foreleg looked like it had been broken and had healed wrong. As it limped closer, Derek could see that it had scars on its back and belly, as well as some fresh cuts.

"They probably call him 'Lucky,'" he said at last. Tabitha laughed. Then they spotted Henrietta, who was chugging towards them, wearing a blue pastel muumuu.

"Hi, kids!" she said, hugging them both in turn. "It's great to see you here."

"Great to be here," Henry said, and meant it.

"There's going to be an early dinner in about an hour. Clothing strictly optional—it's kind of a custom to buff it the first night for the big ceremony. Sorry about your arches," she said to Tabitha.

"It's a pretty small sacrifice for the first night rites. Trust me, Derek, this is really going to blow you away."

Rebecca Marks was working on a kidnapping in Duluth. The kidnapper had mailed back a finger, and she was examining it in the lab, when she got the call.

"Dr. Marks?" her young male assistant said. "It's for you. Someone named Fred Green."

"Oh. Thanks, I'll, uh ... can I take it in there?" she asked, pointing with a gloved hand to the office behind the young man. He nodded. "Thanks."

She closed the office door behind her and pulled off one latex glove before picking up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi. Did you know that Henry Woolrich is in California?"

"Henry? The IRS guy? I thought you got him pulled off the case!"

"Apparently he was hot on it and talked his boss into keeping him on ... Have you briefed him?"

"A little, but not much, not after I asked you to yank him!"

"Why not?"

She sighed. She could feel the urge, the absolute *need* for a drink, welling up in her, and she said a little prayer.

"Gail— Uh, Doctor? You still there?"

"Yeah, 'Fred,' I'm here. Look, I didn't like what I saw in his file. In the psych stuff particularly. I thought he might be a risk."

"A risk how?"

"If you look at his MMPI and compare it with Ashley Cook and that Holmes woman, they're close. Very close. They're three tightly wound, introverted silent types. They've all got strong trust and intimacy issues, problems with expressing anger, and a tendency to keep secrets."

"You think he's been turned?"

"I don't know. I thought it was certainly possible."

There was a pregnant pause.

"Would you say it's likely?"

"Jesus, Fred, I'm not a psychiatrist. Why?"

"Because he's spending the weekend at their headquarters."

"Oh Christ. Fred, what are we going to do?"

"Watch him real close when he comes out. There's not much else we

can do, not right now, not without possibly jeopardizing him more. I mean, hey, maybe they're clean, right?"

"Yeah. Right."

The cabin he would share with Tabitha had one double bed. He smiled wryly.

Guess I'll just have to endure being seduced. Like James Bond.

Glancing now and then at the door, he unpacked his nine millimeter and checked it over. Then he looked around for a place to hide it. He was uncomfortable with the idea of going to dinner unarmed, but he figured that if they realized what he was, one gun with seven bullets wasn't going to make much difference. He looked with longing at his hiking boots, but no way was it going to fit in there with his foot.

Probably shoot my damn foot off. In the end, he taped it to the underside of the bottom drawer in the bedside table. He had just closed it when Tabitha walked in.

"Hurry up and get undressed for dinner!" she said, pulling off her top. He walked over and put his arms around her, under her nice, full breasts.

"Can't we be a little late?" he asked.

"Oooh, you tempt me, but I'm hungry, aren't you?"

He let go, reluctantly, and started unbuttoning his shirt. "I suppose there's plenty of time after supper." He wriggled free of his pants.

"Oh, you probably won't be in any shape for it."

He looked over at her.

"What's that mean?" He felt his half-hard penis droop.

She looked down between his legs, laughed. "Nervous? I know I was, my first time out." She came up and put an arm around his shoulders and they set off for the dining hall.

It was a long building with heavy log tables and tall windows. Henrietta waved at them from the far end, where a gigantic fireplace roared. Derek sat between Henrietta and Tabitha. Dinner was huge, tender steaks, and the conversation flowed easily between the Family from San Francisco and the other Families from all around the nation. Derek found himself more and more relaxed.

This is going to be cake. Tonight there'll be some big blowout, everyone gets drunk and exhausted, then I get up around three in the morning, let myself in the office, and get a good look-see.

He tried not to eat too much—he wanted to stay alert—but the food was fantastic, and it was easy to eat more than he intended.

At the meal's end, a woman of maybe fifty years stood up in front of the fire. In each hand, she held aloft a pitcher.

"Brothers and Sisters, let me welcome you on this most holy of nights. Some of you have been here before, and are returning to free yourselves

once again from the insidious chains of obligation, guilt, and foreboding. For others, this will be your initiation—the first moments of true liberty in your lives!”

She passed the pitchers down. Everyone poured a small measure into their glasses. When the pitcher came to him, Derek sniffed it. The milk inside seemed musky—darker and thicker than what you got in the supermarket. He poured some and passed the pitcher.

“Tonight, the Goddess will show us the way we were meant to be: wild, unchained, living one endless moment! With Her help, we can live a seamless flow from past to future, without anxiety or regret or remorse!”

Someone in the hall shouted something—“Iä!” Soon, others were calling it out.

The woman at the front waited until everyone had some milk; then she raised hers in a toast. Instantly, there was silence.

“The milk of Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!”

The Brotherhood howled, and as one they raised their glasses. Henry wanted to just wet his lips, but Henrietta turned to him and said, “Drink up, Derek; don’t be afraid,” and he swallowed it all.

It tasted ... earthy. Strange, but not bad. Just unfamiliar. He blinked, turned his head a little. No visual trails, no blurring ... but a strange feeling. Nothing he could put his finger on—just a sense that there was a hovering presence in the room.

The woman from the front had walked down the side of the table and stopped next to him. Suddenly, he was afraid.

He fought an urge to look off to his right.

There’s nothing there, no spider legs; it’s just your goddamn imagination again.

“Hello. I’m Angela Jacobson. It’s a real pleasure to meet you, Henry.”

His whole body felt like it had been drenched with ice water. He planted his hands on the table, shoved himself over the bench and to his feet. No one moved to stop him.

They don’t have to stop me. There’s a dozen of them between me and every door. He could feel the panic like booze in his blood, prickling his skin, and every shadow looked like the grotesque breasts of his visions and nightmares.

“Relax, Derek. Or I guess it’s Henry. No one’s going to hurt you.” Tabitha looked genuinely concerned.

“Funny that your name is so close to mine,” Henrietta said, in a soothing voice.

“What are you going to do to me?”

“Do to you? The same thing we always intended.” The old woman—

Jacobson—took a step towards him, and he held his arms out, ready to hit her, ready to grab. She put a cool, frail hand on his arm, and her voice was kind.

“Henry ... we’re going to set you free.”

He stared, but her eyes held no guile.

“Look at you. You’re the one with authority. You represent the whole government. You have the power to destroy us—or at least make our lives hell for years on end. Yet when we take away your clothes and your badge and your symbols, you’re terrified. You don’t have to be, Henry. To us, you’re still just a person.”

He blinked.

“What do you ... ? How did you find out?”

“Nothing hides from a good Purge,” Henrietta said affectionately.

“Then if you knew I was CID, why bring me here?”

“Because it showed us how much you need us,” Angela said. Tabitha stood and stepped gracefully over the bench. She came to his side, put her arm on his shoulder.

“Henry, we’re about freedom. About being above the absolutes of regular, slave morality, right? How can we condemn you for ‘betraying’ us when we see nothing wrong with betrayal?”

“If there’s one thing we’re not, it’s hypocrites,” Henrietta added.

“You know everything? How I deceived you, and, and set you up? How I came here, lying, and ... ?”

“Everything,” Henrietta said, and smiled sweetly.

“And you still accept me?”

“Of course,” said Tabitha.

Wordlessly, he began to weep—but his tears were tears of joy.

They still want me.

Angela Jacobson leaned close and whispered in his ear. “Are you happy?”

He nodded.

“So happy you can’t express it? Too happy for words?”

He could only nod again. Slowly, she began walking him towards the door.

“This feeling is your birthright, Henry. It’s been stolen from you, but Shub-Niggurath, working through us, has given it back. This is what we seek, freedom from constraint, from blame. Pure action, pure emotion, without thought. This is the only joy that’s pure, that’s natural, and you can only have it through Her—and through us.”

Everyone they passed put a hand on his shoulder, shook his hand, hugged him, or smiled at him.

“I was so afraid,” he said. They reached the door, and someone opened it for them. They stepped out into the cool grass, and she began to lead him down a well-trodden path.

"Fear, like joy, is sacred. Every emotion is sacred if you express it purely."

"No, I mean, I was *really* scared." Up ahead, he could dimly see a clearing, lit by a great bonfire. "The stuff I'd heard about you guys from some nut called Gail Green—all about murder and madness and human sacrifice."

Then he stopped, perfectly still. He could hear and feel the mass of people behind him on the trail, breathing like a great sleeping beast. Angela's arm on his shoulder felt clammy and chill.

Before him was an altar. Tied up on it was an elderly woman. Her wrinkled body was naked to the sky, and he could see the ropes cutting roads in her flesh. The great fire was in front of her. Between her and the fire there was a pedestal, and on a pedestal, a curved knife.

"Joy is the gift of the Goddess. You must prove yourself worthy. You must give yourself to natural actions. Joy must be counterbalanced with hate, happiness paid for with rage."

"No."

"It's your true will. You live to betray—it's your nature. You loved lying to your Family, gaining their trust and buying it with deception. Society is the ultimate cruelty; betrayal is the ultimate liberty."

Creeping in on every side of his vision, thick flesh with orifices ... hair sprouting between scabby cracks ...

"I can't ..."

"You can and you will. You will free yourself from the slavery of your morals or you will die. Before sun up, you will kill without remorse or be killed yourself."

He shoved her and ran. Straight towards the fire at first, then off to the left, then veering immediately right. He heard them shouting.

"Where'd he go?"

"I can't see! It's too dark!"

"Find him!" This last was a shriek from Angela Jacobson.

Blindly, panicked, he raced for the tree line. He saw dark figures coming towards him, and he faked right, went left, and was in the trees, running, stones and twigs stabbing his feet, but he felt nothing, nothing but the overwhelming fear, and every branch looked like a great twisted leg, every pine needle a thick black hair. The night was full of eyes he couldn't see, full of scabby skin and openings that weren't mouths. Over him, from every side, came the sense of immanence, of presence—something dark and mindless and primal, something without words or thought but full of hunger and lust and primitive, raging joy.

He hit a slope in the darkness and pitched forward, free-falling, no up or down for an infinite moment of void, and then he went through branches, snapping them, scratching his skin until he hit the ground.

There he crouched, panting, his lungs on fire.

He could hear them, calling out. Shafts of light, like knife blades, swept back and forth across the forest. One passed right over him, but he was ignored.

"Where did he go?"

"This way! I heard him!"

"No! He's over here!"

Then he heard voices that made his flesh crawl—eerie high voices giggling with glee. "Hide and seek! Hide and seek!"

He got on his belly, but he couldn't crawl that way naked, so he worked his way forward on all fours. He'd crawl for a while, stop, then crawl again.

The sounds of them crashing through the bushes were getting farther off. The lights were distant, more diffuse. He felt a brief, sweet hope shooting through him. He put a finger in his mouth and bit into his ragged nail.

Then he heard footsteps—someone thrashing through the brush. Maybe someone lost. He dropped as low as he could when he saw the flashlight beam sweeping left, then right. Then, in the beam's brief flash, he saw something that stopped his heart.

A truck.

A truck parked on a deep, rutted road. The lights were on—he couldn't hear, over his own labored breath and the thumping of his heart, if the engine was on. But it was a truck. He began to creep forward—slowly, quietly. He reached the edge of the road. He was towards the back of the truck. One short sprint, and he'd be at it. He stood up, and that was when he saw someone leaning against it. Someone looking at him, stepping towards him, turning on a flashlight and moving it in his direction.

He lunged forward low, grabbing for the back of the knees. It was a woman, unusually light, and she hit the ground hard. He was on top of her, and he yanked the flashlight from her grasp. He reached for her throat; both her hands grabbed his wrist and he could feel her underneath him, pulling in breath, getting ready to scream and then they'd all be on him. He brought the flashlight down hard, then again and again on her skull until he felt it give.

In the forest around him, countless lights blazed and they were all pointing at him. When his eyes recovered, he looked down at the smashed skull of a young girl. She couldn't be older than thirteen.

"Iä! Iä!"

"The sacrifice!"

Voices poured out of the forest around him. They were all staring at him and shouting with joy.

Fear leads to freedom. Action without thought is sacred.

Then he saw Her. He had caught glimpses in his nightmares. Now he saw Her with his naked eyes.

"The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!"
 "Iä! Shub-Niggurath!"

Dr. Rebecca Marks wanted a drink very badly. She was sitting in a Denny's, waiting to brief "Fred." There was a convenience store across the highway. She could stop there after the meeting, get some malt liquor or a bottle of fortified wine. She shook her head, disgusted.

"If I fall off the wagon, I should at least go to a liquor store and buy something worth it," she muttered.

"What?" a man asked. She jumped. The man sat down across from her; it was Fred.

"I was just, uh, talking to myself."

"You all right?"

She shook her head. "No. No, I'm a pretty long goddamn way from all right."

"Hey, it's not your fault."

"Maybe it is. I should have trusted him—given him the knowledge he needed."

"What knowledge? We still aren't even sure this cult was the real McCoy. And who's to say he'd have believed you?"

"Why are you trying to convince me that I didn't screw up?"

"Cause maybe you didn't."

"You didn't read this."

She flicked him her copy of Henry Woolrich's suicide note.

I can no longer face being myself, knowing what I've become. I have betrayed my government and my family and myself. I'm not sure which of those matters most. The Brotherhood would say I've just started to be true to myself. If that's true, I'm not dying a moment too soon.

The terrifying truth, the most horrible revelation, was that the evil was there all along. It was not foreign, not alien. The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young is strange, but She did not invade or confound my view of the world; She completed it. SHE WAS THERE ALL ALONG—I just never saw it.

Imagine if you'd never in your life seen the color red—and then suddenly you got a cut. Welling out of you, alongside this terrible pain, is this new, alien sensation—and yet part of your mind recognizes it for just what it is. There were nerves in your eyes waiting to perceive this color; they were unused, but they were there.

I have seen Shub-Niggurath and Her Dark Young, and I have served and worshipped and killed in Her name. I have cut my chest with a knife to mingle my blood with that of strangers. I have sucked Her milk and clung

to Her body and planted my seed in one of Her wombs. It was in me all along. I know now what I am—what we all are and what it means. The cultists scream, “Iä!” to show that they recognize their freedom, that they know our insignificant part in the maelstrom we call reality.

I am finally free. My last act is to reject this horrible freedom.
Iä!

“Fred” passed the note back to her. They were silent for a long time before he spoke.

“That’s rough.”

“Rough? What’s rough is that he got so deep into his secrets that he couldn’t tell who he was betraying and who he was serving! And Jesus Christ, it’s like looking in a mirror! I can’t tell the FBI about Delta Green, I can’t tell Woolrich or Goldstein or whoever the dupe or recruit of the day is about the FBI, I can’t tell A.A. about any of it or anyone about how much I want another drink ... I shouldn’t even be telling you.”

“Fred” put his arm around her, then leaned in and whispered in her ear.

“Listen ... my real name is Andrew Bloch. Does that help at all?”

She laughed, and then paused a moment.

“Weirdly enough, it does.” ▲

Mr. Glancy, a co-author of the Delta Green sourcebook, was a prosecuting attorney in Florida when he wrote this story. Since then he has relocated to Seattle to join the staff of Pagan Publishing, and is hard at work on future Delta Green projects as well as making sure the bills get paid on time.

The vile Nazi Karotechia still survive in certain remote enclaves around the world, principally in South America, and occasionally have run-ins with Delta Green. This clever piece concerns a farflung branch of the Karotechia whose existence has just come to light and that, presumably, is no longer a threat ...

AN ITEM OF MUTUAL INTEREST

ADAM SCOTT GLANCY

Dear "Adam":

I have attached here an item of mutual interest.

This photocopied document turned up in the hands of an acquaintance of mine two days ago. He claims to have no idea where the photocopy came from or who delivered it. The fact that someone knew to give the document to him could indicate that his association with our group has been exposed.

I've kept a photocopy of the original for myself. If there's anything the forensics wizards can tell us about the original, let me know. We need to determine whether this document is a fraud or not.

In any case, read though the document and let me know what you think. There are a number of familiar and unfamiliar terms here. I think I may have let slip about the Karotechia once or twice over brandies with you. My theater was mainland Asia, but I heard a few things about the Karotechia from colleagues who worked Operation LUNACY. Some of the terms mean nothing to me. Anything you can tell me about "MAJIC" or "MJ-5, PROJECT MOONDUST" is critical. A few discreet inquires among our colleagues at the Pentagon and NASA would seem to be in order.

Be Seeing You,

"Alphonse"

CLASSIFICATION TOP SECRET / ORCON / MAJIC

CIRCULATION WITHIN MAJIC CHANNELS ONLY

COPY 3 OF 12
DO NOT COPY

FROM: MJ-5, PROJECT MOONDUST
SUBJECT: AKTION EISSCHLOSSE, Operational Update

Addendum "C"—The Journal

The handwritten, hardbound journal was recovered December 23, 1996, among the wreckage of a Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condor, a four-engine turbo-prop transport plane manufactured by Nazi Germany. The wreckage was located at latitude 74°14' south, longitude 4°6' west, east of the Riiser-Larsen Ice Shelf in the Queen Maud's Land region of Antarctica.

Forensic examination has determined that the journal dates from the same period as the aircraft and the deceased occupants. (See Addenda "A" and "B.") The paper used is a bond typical for European bookbinders of the late 1930s. The ink is similar to inks used in other documents of the era.

The journal was severely damaged by exposure to the elements. Passages were also obscured by blood from the aircraft's occupants. Only about 10% of the journal's text is salvageable.

Text Follows, translated from handwritten German.



...his personal choice for the assignment. My youth spent high in the Bavarian alps, my years as a mining engineer, combat engineer, and amateur archaeologist. And of course, the excavations we conducted under Krakow. My previous work for the Karotechia demonstrated my abilities beyond question. Such skills would be invaluable to Operation ICE PALACE. Or so said Reichsfuhrer [Himmler]...

...[As my ship] pulls away from Wilhelmshaven dock, I cannot think of this mission as anything less than a voyage into the past—a quest for the secrets of Thule, the wellspring of the Aryan race. Our destination has been referred to only as “Point 103,” but I cannot seem to think of it as anything other than ancient and hallowed Thule. How appropriate that the commerce raider that is taking us on the first leg of our journey is named “Atlantis.”

For reasons of security, I do not know my team’s ultimate destination. Not even the Captain of the *Atlantis* knows. We are due for a mid-ocean transfer to a U-boat, somewhere in the South Atlantic. From there the journey will be beneath the sea. The Reichsfuhrer hinted that Point 103 is only accessible from beneath the sea, cut off by the permanent ice shelf surrounding the coast of New Schwabia.

September 2: God in heaven. Still seasick.

October 2, 1941: My voyage has been nothing short of horrific. The last three weeks aboard the *Atlantis*, there has been little break in my violent bouts of sea sickness. I find the close, stale confines of the U-88 to be a pleasant and soothing change. Beneath the gray [waters] of the Antarctic ocean, this submersible glides effortlessly. Thank God, no more waves.

Kapitain Ostmann has said little about Point 103. He claims to have seen almost nothing of the site’s interior, his crew’s liberty being limited to what he referred to as “The Harbor,” the underwater entrance to Point 103. Ostmann claimed to have been the first U-boat commander to guide his vessel under the ice shelf and into the Harbor. The U-boats follow a sonar signal that the team inside Point 103 broadcast to guide them in. But Ostmann seems uncomfortable even talking about what little he has seen of “Ancient Thule.” He was quite taken aback by my assumption that Point 103 is Thule. Ostmann described what he saw as more like a creation of nature than a construction of man. Gargantuan. Weathered by time and the elements.

Ostmann is a Prussian and can fathom little beyond his weapons of war. The edifices of the Maya and Sumerian cultures are of a scale that ...



October 7, 1941: We've been at Point 103 for seventy-two hours and I still cannot comprehend the enormity of what we have found here. At first I thought that the U-Boat had surfaced inside some kind of underground submarine pen like the ones I'd seen at Wilhemshaven. Then Kapitain Ostmann turned the conning tower's spotlight on the ceiling of the half-flooded chamber, revealing a dome ceiling perhaps a hundred meters above us. The chamber had to be five or six kilometers across—a vast underground harbor, accessible only under the sea.

The U-188 moored at a makeshift dock at the far shore. There, under electric lights, was the camp of Operation ICE PALACE. There are a half-dozen prefabricated shelters and several more tents for supplies. The ICE PALACE personnel assisted the U-Boat crew in unloading our supplies but did not speak with them. Apparently this is part of the security [protocols].

The camp is quite cold. Dr. Walter Kluge, project leader, explained that the sub-freezing salt water keeps the air at just over zero degrees Celsius—still far better than what it would be like on the surface. New Schwabia is perhaps the most inhospitable outpost of the Reich.

Dr. Kluge has been less than gracious while giving me the tour of his domain. He's been down here with his staff for nearly a year, and the strain and isolation are showing in him. He seems, for lack of a better word, nervous. I believe he sees my team of combat engineers as a threat to his position as project leader. If we succeed in [accelerating] this excavation where he and his archaeologists have failed, he may find himself answering to me.

Dr. Kluge derides my notion of New Schwabia being the site of ancient Thule. He claims there is no evidence these colossal stone galleries were constructed by humans. There are no stairs, which he claims indicates that the builders of these halls didn't have articulated legs like our own. The doorways are, on average, three meters tall and are in the shape of a pentagon—a size and a shape that does not describe a human figure.

...five-sided motif throughout the halls is even more reminiscent of starfish anatomy. Pentagon-shaped halls, doorways, and even rooms. Equally curious is the apparent total lack of masonry. The dark primeval stone segments interlock like a titanic puzzle.

A puzzle. How appropriate.

Dr. Kluge has shown me numerous mosaics lining the walls and ceilings of these vaults. The images on these walls do not depict men. They depict the builders of these ruins as something inhuman. Things unlike any that ever walked the Earth. Kluge believes that the true builders of this underground complex were not human, or even remotely related to mammals.

The mosaics show them to have a radial symmetry, like primitive invertebrates. These “masters” are shaped like upright sea cucumbers, topped with a thick, star-shaped organ. Midway down their torsos is a ring of five delicate tentacles, and at the bottom are five thick tentacles for locomotion. Some of these “masters” are equipped with wings, but there just doesn’t seem to be any way such ...

... however; there are other even less wholesome things depicted in the murals. Things possessing a vile elasticity ...

... [Dr. Kluge] believes that humans, or some kind of proto-humans, may have coexisted with the masters of this labyrinth, as pets, or perhaps a source of protein. Certainly there are ape-like creatures moving among the barrel-shaped masters and their shapeless [slaves] ...

... Hoss is no closer to translating these disgusting pictograms and their braille-like captions than he was when he arrived a year ago. We are going to need [assistance].

December 17, 1941: Yesterday I made a trip to the surface through the original shaft that Kapitain Ritscher’s men descended on the first expedition to this buried necropolis. A winch and gondola has been added up to link the warrens with the camouflaged airfield on the surface. U-Boats bring our supplies, so the planes lie idle. Even so, the tenuous connection to the surface is important. The men come here often, just to stare up at the sky, to relieve the suffocating claustrophobia. It makes me feel like a deep-sea diver at the end of a long air-hose. But instead of the sea pressing in around me, it’s the ice of this dead continent.

The unsetting sun reminded me of our racial destiny, the sun which shall never set on our thousand-year Reich.

December 25, 1941: Merry Christmas. Point 103 has yet to reward our efforts. Blasting is out of the question. These galleries and halls will have to be excavated by hand and shored up like mine shafts. Otherwise, they will continue to collapse. The ice-choked chambers and corridors will have to be cleared with flamethrowers, or perhaps phosphorous charges. It will take dozens of men working hundreds of hours. To properly exploit Point 103, it will be necessary to call for extreme measures.

January 1, 1942: I have dispatched the U-boat to take our request back to the Reichsführer himself. Perhaps the new vault will offer up something of interest besides rubble and ice.



... some kind of mechanical apparatus, although its function has yet to be [determined] ...

... while it is too large to be removed from the chamber, it has solved our power requirements. The megawatt output is comparable to what I'd expect from a hydro-electric dam.

As if it weren't beyond belief that this generator functions after tens of millions of years of inactivity, without any discernible fuel source, it also broadcasts the power it generates like radio waves. When we activated it, every piece of electronic equipment in the camp surged to life. Power flowed through the air and lit up the electronic circuitry of radios, electric torches, power tools, everything. It was like nothing I could even have imagined had I not seen it.

With this much power at our disposal, Operation ICE PALACE will be able to support a labor force of any size necessary to [exploit] ...

... [I am] not comfortable with the number of Jews they have sent us. This can only lead to trouble. There are sufficient Waffen SS troops to keep them in line, but Jews have a corruptive influence. Having them in our proximity just seems unsanitary. After all ...

... Hoss's translation efforts have been increasingly successful. The book he calls *The G'harne Fragments* has proven to be the key. But the problem with the Thule Generator is not mechanical.

It is biological.

It needs to be fed.

Literally.

I detailed a couple of trusted guards to shoot some laborers in order to provide the Thule [Generator with fuel] ...

... hurling them into the generator's "mouth." Five laborers seem to keep the generator running at power levels sufficient for our purposes for a week. Undoubtedly we would need hundreds more if we were to really light a city. It is a shame we have not found more of these generators. It would simultaneously solve the Fatherland's power problems and clear out our ghettos and concentration camps. When I think of all the effort and energy wasted on crematoria and mass [graves] ...

August 12, 1942: The history of the Thulian race is becoming increasingly clear to us. Their civilization rose and fell before mankind came down from the trees, pre-dating even the dinosaurs. During the aeons of their

rule they fought numerous wars with other non-terrestrial civilizations. At least three of these civilizations appear in the mosaics, including a community of conical time travelers centered in Australia, crustacean-like entities who mined Earth's highest mountain ranges, and semi-aquatic octopoid creatures whose home was a now-submerged continent in the Pacific. The wars fought with these other empires were conducted with weapons of incredible destructive power. This is what we must find. Our buried treasure. Our Grail.

... [the Thulians] used it to sink the continent of Mu, the fabled Atlantis of the Pacific, except the Thulians called it Rel Yeh, as far as we can tell, according to a brief corresponding passage in the *G'Harne Fragments*. This superweapon was also used to cut the land bridge between Australia and Antarctica, which ended the war between the Thulians and the conical time travelers, although this seems to have been part of a negotiated peace settlement to separate their respective spheres of influence.

Once this weapon is recovered, we shall have the ability to effortlessly obliterate the enemies of the Reich. But the galleries and halls we have so far explored give the impression that they were cleared out with studied deliberation. Almost nothing remains, except what could not be ...

... [efforts] of my engineers. Dr. Kluge has not acquiesced gracefully to the change of command. His objections to deeper excavation are becoming obstructive to our efforts. He rails that there still exists life in the bowels of this tomb-city, and that our digging will free it. I fear his hysterics are beginning to affect the staff.

... [Ostmann keeps] asking what we are doing with so many prisoners. Ostmann has noticed that the food supplies his U-Boat brings to Point 103 are nowhere near sufficient to support our laborers. I'm sending a message back to headquarters with Ostmann, Reichsfuhrer Himmler's Eyes Only. The message recommends Ostmann's execution as a security risk. The next U-Boat officer they assign to ICE PALACE should be a party member. Ostmann is asking too many questions.

... [U-188 was] sunk by American warplanes. It is just as well. A new U-boat will be dispatched soon. It should be here by October.

... unquestionably an act of sabotage. We executed a dozen of the weakest laborers as an example, but I suspect that we will find our saboteur elsewhere than the slave pens.



... caught him in the act. I had suspected as much for months. I suppose I should have ordered him sent home months ago, but it was far more satisfying having the old fraud fed into the Thule Generator. Kluge doesn't appear to have been working with or for anyone. His motivation for sabotaging our excavation seems to be nothing more than the result of his complete mental collapse. The isolation, the claustrophobia, and, of course, my wresting command away from him broke his mind. He must not have wanted us to succeed unless the glory could be his and his alone.

As it stands now, it is mine. The name Ohlendorf shall be inexorably tied to the salvation of the German people.

... will begin tomorrow.

February 23, 1943: Our first test of the weapon was only partially successful. A weapon designed to be aimed and fired by a five-armed, radially symmetrical being with twenty-five sub-digits proved impossible for just one human to activate. It took three of Stahlecker's technicians to trigger the ring-shaped weapon. The weapon vaporized several dozen cubic meters of matter in the blink of an eye. Unfortunately that included most everything in the lab, including six of Stahlecker's staff. I suppose I should have seen it coming. A radially symmetrical being could mean a weapon that can fire in five different directions at once. Which it did. The next test will be conducted up on the surface.

The process by which the contents of the lab were turned into hot gas remains unknown. Stahlecker has speculated that the weapon breaks matter down into its component atomic particles. But again, we are like ants trying to contemplate a telephone.

I have forbidden any tampering with the thing Hoss has called "a sphere of Nath." Hoss speculates that it may have the destructive power to remove an entire city from the face of the Earth.

March 2, 1943: Berlin has made the decision to send the experts to Point 103 rather than send the artifacts back to Germany. There's less chance of the material being lost or hijacked, and with all the researchers here at Point 103 the possibility of a spy or a leak is reduced.

... fleet, [including] a "Milk-Cow" U-boat tanker, three of the newest Type XXI U-Boats, and two Type-X minelayers converted to cargo carriers arrived today. Their orders were to begin turning Point 103 into a site from which to launch a superweapon strike at the Americans. I had no idea

things were so bad at home that Point 103 could be considered more secure than our facilities under the Harz mountains.

Several dozen officers and technicians from the V-2 Rocket facility at Peenemunde arrived as well, along with their equipment. There is some hope that we can combine the V-2 delivery system with the Nath Sphere ...

August 28, 1944: The V-3 launch facility should be ready in about six months. The shaft to the surface has proven to be an excellent site to erect their launch scaffolding. One V-3. One Sphere. The question now is, What to target?

The hypothetical range for this V-3 is only 6000 kilometers. They'll be lucky if their rocket reaches the equator. That leaves Australia, New Zealand, maybe some of the English possessions in Africa. They are wasting my time and limited resources with this distraction.

September 4, 1944: U-boats continue bringing supplies, but our excavations into the lowest galleries are far behind schedule. As is the V-3. My men are driving the slaves to exhaustion, and yet the entryway into that sunless sea, the site of the "last city" spoken of in the inscriptions, remains hidden. The mortality rate among the workers is growing too high. Not to mention the generator's appetite. We cannot be assured of new shipments of labor from Europe. Stahlecker has suggested trying to arrange a trade with Perón. The Atlantic blockade doesn't extend far south of the equator, so there's a chance one of the U-boats could make it to Buenos Aires. Still, the English presence on South George's and the Maldives would make any such mission perilous in the extreme. Regardless, I have vetoed that option for the time being. That opportunistic little monkey might try to seize Point 103 for himself. Instead we will follow Kapitain Koller's plan and acquire new labor from ...

... [the passengers and crew] of the liner are proving nearly worthless as laborers. However, the Generator's hunger is sated, and that will do for now.

May 3, 1945: The Fuhrer is dead. But as I do not worship Hitler, I am not hopeless. National Socialism is not dead. Germany is not dead.

The BBC began broadcasting the news about the Fuhrer yesterday. Shooting the radio operator on duty was the only thing to do. If the others knew, or suspected, my command would disintegrate, and we are so close. So very close to unlocking the secrets of grand and mystic Thule. The Thulians waged wars millions of years ago on a scale so savage it would wither the hearts of the fiercest men. If only we could find the weapon they used to sink their Muvian enemies to the bottom of the sea.

We are the Reich now. We of the Karotechia. And with the tools of ancient Thule, we will drown Germany's enemies beneath the boiling sea. What will it matter if Germany lies in ruins, when all the world becomes a watery graveyard?

May 14, 1945: Hoss was beginning to suspect the war is over. I shot him this morning. This is a setback. Hoss was fluent in the language of ancient Thule, and my own command is so much feebler.

We are rapidly running out of workers to feed the Thule Generator. I think perhaps I shall need to prioritize my staff.

June 1, 1945: I can scarcely believe it. I have been buried in this ice-bound tomb for over three and a half years, toiling in the ice and blackness. Now we have won. We have won it all!

We have the weapon. The Tectonic Agitator. The Navel of the World. From this dead city we can reach out and sink continents or raise new ones.

The power to reshape the face of the Earth! Where shall I begin? Where shall I draw my finger and erase the works of God?

June 15, 1945: Lt. Schaeffer, Corporal Mueller, Sergeant Recke, and myself are the only ones to escape. It must have been one of the Jews, or perhaps we pushed the Thule Generator too far. Somehow the biological motor tore free of its bonds. Power was lost. The tunnels plunged into impenetrable blackness. Then it boiled out of the generator room with a loathsome mobility I could never have imagined from something with no skeletal structure.

It tore into the slave pens and rolled through the vaults swallowing my men in the dark. Sucking them apart. Howling that strange cry, "Teckelly lee! Teckelly lee!" over and over again. The crack of impotent gunfire. And the echoing screams.

I don't know how many died before we activated the backup generator, got the lights back on. Dozens? More? The surviving Jews fell on us like wild animals and much time was wasted trying to beat them back. I saw a pack of them, malnourished and sickly, bring down Stahlecker with their teeth and nails.

I screamed, I bellowed, I even shot them. No one paid attention. No one followed orders. They ran, mindlessly screaming. Most began fighting and killing each other for space on the U-Boats, hoping to escape by sea. Even amidst the chaos and insanity, one U-Boat got its diesel engines up and running before the thing from the generator burst into the harbor.

Like a boiling froth of iridescent black slime, it surged down the hallway, filling it from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling. It rolled like an avalanche,

burying the men in its loathsome bulk. I could see them, submerged in its mass, screaming soundlessly as their flesh and bones were pulled apart. The men shot it. Hurling hand grenades into it. Nothing slowed it. Nothing distracted it. It latched itself on to the hull of the U-1406 and burst its deck open, flooding its interior and spilling its fuel into the water. The U-boat sank in minutes, taking all aboard to the bottom. Somehow the fuel ignited, and the harbor became an inferno. Remembering the fat tanks of fuel on the U-boat tanker, I fled the harbor, running for the shaft to the surface. Behind me were only the screams and the thudding explosions as the fuel tanks went up one after another.

Fleeing blindly, four of us squeezed into the gondola, Zundel and another man, badly burned, clung desperately to the outside of the cage. The burned man lost his grip almost immediately. The fall, I would guess, did little more than break his legs. Then Zundel lost his grip about halfway up, died as soon as he hit the stone floor.

From below, we heard it, wailing.

And the screams of the men.

We scrambled after Schaeffer to the Condor and piled in. He had us airborne before I could calm myself enough to focus. It was only then that I realized what I had lost.

So close. A few more weeks and the shadow of my hand would have fallen across the face of the Earth.

The power to remake the world ...

The handwritten German text in ink ends. The last page is painted in human blood. The blood type is matched to that of the corpse now identified as SS Standartenfuhrer Karl Ohlendorf (see Addendum "B"). The following is an approximate translation of the text:

FORGIVE ME, BELOVED GERMANY. I FAILED YOU.

Analysis of the aircraft (see Addendum "A") indicates that its fuel tanks were dry on impact. The maximum operation range for a Focke-Wulf Condor is 2,210 miles. Therefore, the aircraft could have been launched from any point on the Antarctic continent, or even Tierra del Fuego in South America. The journal hints that the airfield is located in Neu Schwabenland, or New Schwabia, an area of Antarctica claimed by Nazi Germany following the 1938-1939 German Antarctic Naval Expedition. All MOONDUST search operations are concentrated in that area. We are, however, no closer to discovering the location of Point 103 than we were four months ago.

The search for Point 103 continues. ▲

Bob Kruger is an author and editor whose twin interests in roleplaying games and science fiction / fantasy / horror literature have served him in good stead over the years as his career has blossomed. A recent graduate of the prestigious Clarion West Writers' Workshop, Bob lives with his wife, Karen, and the obligatory two cats.

This ambitious novella tells the strange and dramatic story of people who look like monsters and monsters who look like people. Encompassing a respectable range of locales, points in time, and characters, it's an interesting and frightening look behind an unpleasant set of masks.

—John Tynes

IDENTITY CRISIS

BOB KRUGER

Special Agent Gary Tanaka trudged through the sidewalk crowd toward the dripping magazine kiosk. Car horns and sirens blared in the distance; moving legs and drizzle created a constant flutter against the glare of headlights, and behind the clatter of feet, a steady pissing sound from the gutters swelled and ebbed.

Five minutes ago, the contact called Gary's cell phone with the address, but it often happened that the Watchers spooked from a meeting. All the stimuli would be hard on the contact, who was used to the relative quiet and dark of Manhattan's underground: from the shallow utility conduits, to the deep squatter camps in rail tunnels abandoned by the transit system, to far deeper places never explored by men. Gary really hoped he'd be there, though: in the front pouch of his windbreaker was a package from the city morgue he'd been carrying around all day, waiting on the call, and he was eager to get rid of it.

Abruptly, the crowd relinquished him to a wide vacant area before the kiosk, and he hit a terrible smell. The contact. And it was not only his rotting-meat stench that marked his failure to be inconspicuous. He wore a fedora, but advertised the deformity of his back by pulling his head too far down, sinking his hat's top almost level with his shoulders. Between the brim of the hat and the turned-up lapels of his canvas trench coat, his snout poked out from a mass of unkempt gray hair. Gary tried not to think about the hair; it certainly wasn't the contact's, and he doubted it was a wig.

The contact turned to one side as he approached.

"Mordiggian," Gary said, then cupped his hands over his mouth and nose, blowing into them. It was just cold enough that maybe the contact wouldn't realize that his hands were really up to shield him from the reek, and that his shiver vented his revulsion. "Did I get that right?"

The contact nodded. People gave them room, turning their shoulders against them; now and then someone would cough as he hit the bad air. Gary noticed the kiosk had its board up even though it didn't close for another hour. Then the contact dug into the long hip pocket of his coat and pulled out a small item wrapped in what looked at first like a brown paper bag. It wasn't a paper bag, though, Gary saw, and took it from the claws that just peeked out from under the contact's sleeve; it was some kind of rolled-up parchment. And he didn't like the feel of it.

Gary was about to stuff the parchment in his windbreaker, but the contact detained him with a sleeve-covered hand, then stirred the air in an odd "come on" gesture. It took Gary a moment to get that he should unwrap it.

Inside was a small cloth, drawstring bag on top of which rested a silver skeleton key. The key was filigreed with the whorls of a strange script. When he tried to focus on the tiny characters, it seemed by some optical illusion that certain of them receded while others approached, in apparently random order. He grew lightheaded, stumbled.

The contact plucked up the key and the bag; he demonstratively placed the one in the other, and pulled the drawstring tight, then shoved the affair into the side pocket of Gary's jacket. Gary shook his head and looked dumbly into his hands, which still held the parchment open. A map of some kind swam into focus, at the top of which had been scrawled a note in strange letters—inked, unmistakably, in blood. Did the contact expect him to read this odd language? But no, it was the handwriting that was odd; the note was in English:

Yes. The Renegades seek the drug of your kind. They will meet as said, come from a dream portal to the south—we mark their route below. We thank your assistance in killing dangerous heretics such as these.

A key is here. It is only for Debra Constance. She must not gaze upon it until she has prepared herself with knowledge. She will find the key's secrets in the book given her by the traitor. We seek the return of that book. Three nights hence when the moon is fat, we will meet her in the Chamber of Flame at the border to the dreamland. We will parley for the book's return. The key works but once. Give it to none but her. Show it to none but her.

Will you impart the key to Debra Constance? Tell the courier if you so agree.

—We watch

"I agree," Gary said in answer to the note, unzipped the front pouch of his jacket, and pulled out the brown-paper-wrapped package. The contact licked his lips and snatched it from him greedily, jerking the parchment out of Gary's hands along with it. Gary tried to grab the map back, but too slowly, as the contact turned away and scampered through a closing slot in the milling crowd.

Forty-seven-year-old Homicide lieutenant Joe Stevens waited in the car outside the Burger Palace, watching the rain pelt the windshield as he waited for Gary Tanaka to come back. Gary had said that he was only going down the street to mail a package, but Joe reflected that for all he knew about these DEA guys, Gary was crooked and working deals on the side.

Joe thought about this a bit, then realized that the idea was stupid. He was just letting off steam over his temporary transfer.

About a week ago, the DEA blew into the district on the trail of some big drug ring and requested local help in setting up a sting. The captain had ordered Joe reassigned from Homicide.

"For God's sake, Ron," he'd said. "I'm not a kid you just uproot for a temporary transfer."

Sure Joe had undercover experience, but now was not the time to pull him out of the department, not with all the cannibal shit that was going down. In twenty years he had never seen anything like it: gnawed bones piled in the receiving bin of a meal-grinding outfit, along with the cattle, pigs, and horses—like Sinclair's *The Jungle* all over again, they'd thought. But the company itself had reported the discovery, and the ton of powder that the Forensics guys looked through at the end of the chute came up clean. What a mess, especially after that first match from Missing Persons.

The captain had looked at him suspiciously. "The DEA has its eye on you for some reason, Joe. Why would that be? You courting a job with the Feds?"

"I don't even know anyone in the DEA," he said, confused and pissed off.

"Well, you will now, it seems; this is coming all the way from the commissioner, and he's not telling me much. Be careful. If they're using my people for cannon fodder, I'll have their asses on a pike—but I might not know till it's too late."

On Ron's way to making captain, the only thing he'd applied to anyone's ass was his lips. But all the more reason, Joe reflected, to heed the warning to be careful.

Gary showed up beside the passenger door and rapped on the window. He was dripping wet. Joe reached over and opened the door, letting in a wash of rain and the sounds of traffic.

"Here," Gary said, and took off his dripping windbreaker. "This piece of shit is soaked through." He tossed it onto the seat beside Joe, where it unraveled and slipped onto the floor. "I'm going to go get a burger," Gary mumbled, bending over with his hands planted on his knees.

"You all right?" Joe asked.

"Yeah, I think so. I just got a low-blood-sugar problem. I'll get something to eat, and then we'll cruise the site." He slammed the door. Joe shook his head, reached over and grabbed the jacket, intending to throw it in the back seat.

Something slipped out. A cloth, drawstring bag. Joe glanced up to confirm that Gary was entering the restaurant; then he untied the bag and dropped its contents onto the seat.

It was only a weird key, like some kind of antique. He picked it up and was about to return it to the bag when the key went out of focus. At first he thought something had gone wrong with his eyes but then noticed there were designs etched into the key that created an optical illusion, like those beer shirts with the stippled lettering that looked blurred.

Joe became fascinated and tried to determine just what was causing the effect, but there seemed to be no reason to it. Some kind of fine scrollwork, almost like letters, moved his eyes along the key. He couldn't find a point to focus on.

Suddenly it occurred to Joe that he couldn't focus on the key because the key wasn't really there. Joe was just realizing the strangeness of this thought, when the key began to fade, and as it did, Joe began to forget he'd ever seen it.

Joe was staring at his empty fingers, trying to pick up some train of thought he'd somehow dropped, when there was a rap on the door window. He looked up and saw Gary outside, holding a paper bag and a soft drink. Joe reached over and let him in.

"Sorry it took so long. Those kids behind the counter are real slugs."

Took so long? Joe thought. Gary'd been gone less than a minute.

"Hey!" Gary said, his eye caught by the little drawstring bag on the seat. "The key! Where is it—the one that was in that bag!"

"What key?" Joe said.

Gary's face went blank. He put the heel of a hand to his forehead and grimaced as if struck by a sudden headache. Then he blinked his eyes and gaped.

"What key?" Joe said again. "The bag fell out of your jacket when I moved it to the back seat, but I don't think there was anything in it."

"That's funny," Gary said, as he climbed in and shut the door. "I thought for a moment there was a key I was supposed to keep track of, but I can't remember why. I must be sleeping on my feet. It's probably some errand I was supposed to run that's slipped my mind."

And that was the truth. For both of them the key had completely, and somehow retroactively, disappeared.

Late the next night, dressed in his bum getup in the alley network just a few blocks east of the Bowery, Joe Stevens watched as three teenage Hispanic boys entered the alley's end laughing, just twenty feet away. They caught sight of Joe and grew quiet, glanced at the drift of newspapers against the far wall. When they next looked up past Joe to where Gary stood with the buyer a block away, their eyes went wide and they pivoted and fled. Joe glanced back in alarm, too late.

Gary and the buyer were gone.

Over the spot where the other alley intersected the one he was in, an orange-yellow sodium lamp made a complacent flicker. Gary had been talking to the buyer there, a young guy in dingy jeans and leather jacket, just before the boys had caught his attention.

Joe spoke into the cuff of his sweater sleeve, addressing the backup car: "Tanaka just left with the suspect. Copy." The earpiece was hidden under his knit cap. He bent his head and cupped a hand over it against the hum of traffic from the nearby street. There was no reply. He strained to hear sirens, or maybe the shout of the sniper who was supposed to be covering Gary from the corner tenement. Ten seconds ticked by in his head. Twenty. The lamp at the end of the street flickered again.

"Damn it!" Joe barked. "Answer me or I'm going after him!"

Silence.

He took off running, working his hand up to the holster below his armpit. Most guys couldn't get away with wearing a piece under a sweat shirt, but still, even in his mid-forties, Joe was powerfully built: the gap where his pectoral muscles tented the fabric over his obliques could have concealed small cannons. He drew out the gun, a small five-shot Charter Arms revolver, as he arrived at the end of the wall and then looked around the corner.

Just two blocks away there was bright confusion, a line of cars honked as they pressed sluggishly along, but here it was relatively quiet, sinister. Spaced at odd intervals along the walls at either hand were several doors with no outside handles or locks, the closest about twenty feet away. Gary could have been taken into any one of them.

Joe turned and looked up at the third-story corner window of the burned-out tenement; the DEA sniper was supposedly watching there through the dingy curtains. "Hey!" Joe shouted, waving his gun. "What the hell's going on!" No answer.

Then behind him echoed a muted shriek. Joe spun around. There was nowhere it could have come from, except ...

Joe now saw that midway up the alley a manhole gaped open, its cover lying nearby.

Tense, keeping the revolver up and glancing right and left, Joe sidled over to it. And heard the shriek again. It was just a tone, really, like some mechanical rumor deep in the guts of the city, but it sent a chill up his spine.

"Gary!" Joe yelled, frustrated.

"Down here."

The reply, echoing, almost sepulchral, had come up below his feet.

Crouched in the lightless tunnel, FBI Special Agent Jean Qualls hefted her turned-off mag flashlight, which had once again slipped through her sweaty grip. Around her, the constant background plopping of water was overlaid by the shallow, almost gasping breaths of the ten soldiers. An hour ago they'd all been shown the dead ghoul Delta Green was keeping on ice, the one that had taken Gary Tanaka six .45-caliber slugs to bring down. And now, preparing to meet an entire pack of the monsters, they were afraid.

But they seemed to think they were ready.

Normally ghouls were strictly scavengers, but the Renegades, a young, heroin-addicted faction, had taken to ambushing junkies and dealers to keep themselves supplied with both smack and meat. A year ago, during an undercover drug bust, Gary Tanaka had gotten caught in a fight between a Renegade and a Traditionalist ghoul. Luckily for him, he had emptied his gun into the right one. After that, Gary became Delta Green's liaison with the Traditionalists—the older faction of ghouls who called themselves "the Watchers"—who informed him that the Renegades believed a heroin deal would go down on the street above, here, tonight.

For all the soldiers knew, that deal wasn't scheduled to take place yet, but actually, as Jean was well aware, the time was up. The ghouls were already ten minutes late.

Beside her, Colonel Richard Davis of the U.S. Army finally turned on his handset and called the sniper. "Dennis, what do you see up there?"

Jean's heart sank. This was tantamount to Rick's calling it quits. You couldn't break silence in an op like this—the monsters' senses were too sharp.

The radio's reply cracked a heavy wall of static: "Nothing, Rick."

Rick turned off the handset. "All right, Jean, let's have another look at that map."

Jean sighed as she drew out the blueprint from the back pocket of her fatigues and clicked on the light, startling the nearby soldiers, who almost smacked each other with the barrels of their M-16s. Draping the schematic over her left hand, Jean centered the flashlight where the crazy labyrinth they were in crossed the regular grid of much smaller service tunnels for power, cable, and water lines. They had entered the underground through a hole in the excavation of a construction site a few blocks north, descended a series of ladders down to some steam tunnels at a depth of about thirty feet, reascended a few blocks away through the chimney fissure of a fault-line crack in the dirt and concrete, and finally emerged up into these tunnels closer to the surface. Jean located their position just twenty yards ahead of a place where the tunnel turned ninety-degrees, to the south. According to Gary, the ghouls were supposed to come up that tunnel.

"We're assuming they'd take the main tunnel," Rick said, his broad, black face close beside hers. "What if they slipped up from these smaller tunnels east of us, opposite side from where we came in?"

"No, see the legend? Those tunnels are filled in. I really wish Gary could have held onto that map the contact gave him," Jean said. "There might have been something there we've missed." Actually, it was only too likely; their blueprints were poor. Delta Green had been unable to obtain an official map from the city, because of the many approvals required. Maps were sensitive in this age of terrorism. A few months back, the FBI had obtained the ones Delta Green was using from files on a militia group who had planned to bring down a major Wall Street power grid.

"Well, I'm calling this a no-show," Rick said.

Jean nodded. Playing cloak-and-dagger operations against ghouls was a losing game. They could smell like dogs and move like lightning. When they got spooked, they could bolt off to another dimension. Then, of course, the threat always loomed that some day they'd catch and eat a man in your operation, and thereby steal his voice, appearance, and memories. After that they'd infiltrate your ranks, and lead your whole unit into a perfect ambush. It had happened before; it would probably happen again.

But not tonight. Tonight was a no-show.



"I've got the suspect down here, wounded!" Gary called from below the street, closer to the open manhole now.

"How'd he get you down there?" Joe yelled, heart thumping, but there was no answer. After a second he added, "I think my wire's down. I can't raise backup."

Gary appeared at the bottom of the ladder. "That's what we figured," he said. "My wire's fine, but, anyway, they've got a problem they're dealing with, and they want you to give me a hand."

"What kind of problem?" There had seemed a strange, false note in Gary's voice, and Joe feared the suspect had Gary at gunpoint. However, that fear was allayed a moment later, when Gary came clambering up the ladder and emerged from the hole to his waist. The collar of his sweater was sprung as if it had been jerked hard, and there were streaks of blood down its front.

"Shit, Gary. You all right?"

"This isn't my blood; it's his. I nailed him in the throat with my spring knife. Come on, he's dying on me; I need help carrying him."

Joe was amazed at the agent's composure. "How can you see anything?" he asked.

"There's some light from a storm drain, not much but it's enough. Come on!" And he descended again. Keeping ahold of his gun, Joe reluctantly followed.

"It's just back here," Gary said, moving away as Joe joined him at the bottom. Joe was disoriented for a moment—the tunnel seemed to cross under the street at a crazy diagonal. The concrete floor was damp but not slick. Although it was hard to tell in the dark, it looked like bunched lines of conduit hung from the ceiling at the edge of the tunnel just beyond the manhole. Some thirty feet down, the storm drain leaked streetlight on the wall in a dim, shadow-barred swath, but Joe could only sense the confines of the tunnel by their acoustical effect. An intermittent drip of water disturbed the background quiet, and now and then some ambiguous hollow moan of traffic or industry would conduct down the passage.

"I can't see shit," Joe said.

"Your eyes will adjust."

Joe followed past the storm drain to what felt like a large open space. In the almost total dark, he could just see Gary beckoning to him and pointing furtively to his left.

"What?"

Joe stopped short beside his partner as he came up against a hot, suffocating stench. "The hell, Gary! What've you been eating?" But instead of

dissipating, the smell increased, took on sickly sweet undertones. Joe was confused but suddenly went on his guard.

"Oh, yeah, that smell," Gary said. "Well, it's hard to explain. Just take a look around the corner."

Joe leaped aside as Gary made a move to take his gun away, or at least he thought he had. Gary raised his hands and took a step back. "Whoa, take it easy."

That sense Joe had honed as a kid back in Vietnam kicked in a moment later, telling him he was being approached from behind. He flinched to the side automatically, glancing back.

Someone rushed him out of the shadows, and Joe smashed him in the face with his revolver, sidestepped and kicked out to forestall attack, adrenaline slamming into him, making things slow down. His foot went over a humped shadow that let out an animal hiss, eyes shining like a cat's. As he backpedaled away, he shot it in the same instant that it leapt, the muzzle flash lighting the collapse of something like a huge dog.

"Gary!"

But it wasn't Gary that answered. A confusion of high, rodentlike sounds bubbled up out of the dark after him as he scrambled away. Joe fired again, lighting up a throng of humpbacked freaks glistening a waxy gray-green.

Blam! Blam! Blam! Click— In three poses of lurching advance, monsters strobed forward under the flash of his last shots.

Then he turned and ran.

Jean had just begun to stand up, when they heard the distant sound of a shot.

"Turn off your light," Rick said, but she was already pressing its button.

There was another shot, followed by three more in quick succession. Jean heard Rick click on his radio in the sudden dark.

"Dennis, you there?" No answer. "Dennis!"

The soldiers began to murmur.

"About face!" Rick said. "Everyone except Bates and Iverson. You two follow watching the rear. Come on."

They moved east, retracing their original route into the tunnels, and then came out into the intersection that led to Gary's position. Something was coming toward them from that direction. A clomping herd of somethings—squealing hungrily.

"My light goes on first," Rick said to the men all around. "Fire on my signal."

The noise grew closer.

As he ran, a clattering welled up after Joe over the sound of his own foot-falls and the ringing in his ears from his gun—the sound of hooves.

He rushed past the storm drain, past the ladder to the manhole.

The things in the dark cried out as if with the joy of the hunt.

He ran on wildly, outdistancing his pursuers but losing his sense of space in the pressing dark.

Then it happened.

White light flooded the tunnel. Joe flung up his gun arm to shield his eyes from the lamp as a thicket of smaller lights bloomed behind it. Men were exclaiming all at once: "*Jesus-look at-sweet-holy-shit!*"

"Get down!" a man boomed out.

Jean caught her breath at the leprous press of monsters coming after the man. She had seen them before, of course, but that had been only one at a time. The soldiers swore in amazement but held their fire.

Get down! Jean thought, looking at the poor bastard caught between the creatures and the soldiers. The soldiers wouldn't wait any longer; she could feel it. The lead ghouls clattered to a stop. Some in the rear had already turned.

Jean held her breath for the man.

"Fire!" the Colonel yelled.

Joe went into a crouch and steered into the wall. In a line of flashing explosions from just beyond the lights, automatic weapons drumrolled deafeningly amid the high-pitched complaint of ricochet against the tunnel wall. Joe fell to his knees, jerking involuntarily with each coherent blast.

But he wasn't the one being shot at.

He rolled over, and looked back into the wash of the lights on a scene of carnage. Hoofed, kangaroo-legged werewolves were falling amid gouts of their own dark blood, dozens of them, pitching stark, giant shadows, their shrieking barely audible over the relentless gunfire. Some were being gunned down in retreat, others were scrabbling forward, teeth bared defiantly, black eyes swallowing light.

The soldiers, illuminated by gunfire and flashlight, were visibly operating on instinct and training and not much else as they poured fire down the hall. Joe knew he was not back in Vietnam. He knew it. But he wasn't quite sure where he was. The taut faces and glassy stares of the men were somehow those of his old platoon. Joe had to restrain himself from crazily barking out his old lieutenant's favorite phrase for when the chips were down and the zone was hot: "Give 'em hell and serve 'em seconds!" Instinct and training were what kept a soldier going.

Instinct and training weren't enough.

One soldier began backing up, teeth clenched and brows knitted, taking one lurching step after another away from the ranks. His finger was still

clenched on the trigger, his rifle still firing on full automatic. His eyes were blinking furiously. Joe had seen that expression before: the man had broken under fire.

A voice from further down the hall boomed out, "Cooper!"

The soldier jerked his head back towards the sound, pivoted casually to the right, and kept his grip on the trigger. Bullets thudded into the flak jacket of the man just ahead, who cried out and dropped to his knees. Joe winced. Cooper kept firing, not even looking where he was shooting, and a low wail emerged from his throat. Cooper's head jerked back then, a hole leaking blood over his temple. His rifle clattered to the floor, and his body slumped over it a moment later. Joe saw the young soldier twitch and bleed; then he shook his head to clear his thoughts.

Joe took his first breath since the shooting had started.

On its knees just a few yards from Joe's foot, one of the creatures flinched as a bullet struck it in the eye and sprayed the insides of its head in an arc behind it. It crawled forward nonetheless. Joe drew up his foot as the thing reached for it, and he poised to kick it in the face. It pulled itself up slightly, regarded him blankly. Joe kicked out ... and missed as it fell over on its own.

Then he noticed it was wearing Gary's sweater.

The gunfire tapered off, stopped. There was no movement among the heaped bodies.

He could hear men swearing through the ringing in his ears: "*Oh sweet Jesus. God help us. Ah, fuck, fuck; I don't fucking believe it.*"

"Drop your gun, stand up, and put your hands on your head!" shouted a low voice—it was the man who had called out to Cooper. The big light moved forward on Joe, and he pulled his gaze from the horrific view to obey, managing to shake very little as he stood.

The light half-turned away, and the man holding it shouted at those behind him, "Replace those cartridges! Check the action on those weapons! Bates, take the men and scout up to the end of the tunnel." He paused, then, his voice low, said, "Carnes, get Cooper's body to that manhole up ahead."

Joe caught sight of the man Cooper had shot get to his knees. He gave Joe a grim look and nodded as if to say he was all right; the flak jacket had saved him. Then the beam was turned back full on Joe's face.

"What is this?" Joe demanded, squinting, unable to see much of anything around the light.

A clicking confusion of activity welled up faintly in the near distance and an unseen troop stalked by with a shuffling sound, back the way Joe had come. Just then Joe flinched as he was touched under the arms from behind and someone began patting him down with delicate fingers.

"What is all this shit?" Joe persisted.

The person behind him obviously located the empty holster but didn't comment, and moved on; found the handcuffs, wallet, and extra rounds for his pistol, but didn't remove them.

Behind him a young woman's voice said, "I think he's all right, Rick." She had a southern accent.

"What were you doing down here with the ghouls?" the man with the light demanded.

"The what?"

"Ghouls. Those." The light swung off his face and down the tunnel, over the tumbled bodies. Joe felt he was in some kind of strange dream; it took him a moment to speak.

"Gary—the guy from narcotics they paired me with," he said. "That's him, there; he was one of them."

"What makes you say that?" the man asked sternly.

"Those are his clothes! He called me down here, tried to attack me."

The woman behind him sucked air through her teeth, said, "They've eaten him then, Rick."

"What?" Joe asked.

Rick, the man with the light, answered: "That isn't your partner there on the floor. Your partner was a good man, our man."

There was a hiss from a radio at Rick's belt, and a static-laced voice said, "Colonel, we're about a hundred yards down the tunnel. There's something you've got to see."

Colonel?

The woman poked Joe in the back with a finger. "You can take your hands down," she said. He'd been so shocked, he'd forgotten he'd had them up.

"Follow me," Rick said, lowering his gun and turning away with his light. The woman nudged Joe again, and he followed as Rick waded through the noisome mess.

As they cleared the bodies, the woman came around and took up Joe's right side at a respectable distance, her pistol just visible in the gloom, held across her midsection so that she needed only raise the barrel a fraction to shoot him. Tall girl, blonde. She was about his height, just under six feet. All he could see of her face was the impassive gleam of eyeglasses. "You're holding it together pretty well," she said to him casually.

He grunted. He wasn't about to tell her he was in shock, but he was pretty sure that was the case. Also, he'd begun to feel sick.

Back where Joe had been ambushed—what turned out to be an intersection—Rick shouldered his way past a ring of standing agents (Joe assumed they were agents), clearing a sight path to a tighter ring of men who crouched

over something on the ground with their flashlights. "Let's have a look," Rick said, and a Caucasian and an Oriental man glanced up, and then got to their feet and stepped back.

"Oh, Christ," Rick said softly. "*In pace requiescat.*"

It was Gary. Or part of him, anyway. His mouth was open in silent protest, staring eyes filmed a light gray. The back of his head was gone. His cheek had a hole ripped in it. There was little else: no arms, part of a trailing spine, the left half of a gore-clotted ribcage like the hull of a wrecked ship hung with weeds.

"Aw, shit," Joe said as he felt his stomach about to betray him. He stumbled away a couple of steps, and threw up.

A moment later, Rick was at his side. "You okay?"

Joe nodded, wiped his mouth, but the nausea hadn't gone away. He shut his eyes, and a strange phantom image was impressed behind his lids: a key engraved with odd designs. He grew dizzy, opened his eyes as he felt himself stumble.

Rick caught his arm, steadying him, and yelled, "Jean!"

Joe shook his head, tried to ignore the nausea. "I don't get it," he said. "I thought he was with them."

"Gary was one of ours, Mr. Stevens. These ghouls can assume the identity of people they've fed on. You were tricked, but you helped us turn the tables on the bastards, led them right to us."

The slender figure of the woman arrived at Joe's side, just ahead of a man who said, "Colonel, we found a hole in the floor back there beside a chunk of concrete. Looks like they came up through a substratum."

"Shit. Gary really blew it then, losing that map," Rick said. "Okay, I'll be there in a second." Then he turned and added, "No one goes down!"

"I don't think that will be a problem, sir," the man said as he walked off.

Joe's dizziness was getting worse. "What were you people doing down here?" he asked.

"You thought you were making a bust, but that was a fabrication and Gary knew it. The monsters are addicted to heroin, and the drug deal was a ploy to lure them out of hiding into our ambush. We're an interdepartmental unit pursuing these things."

Then suddenly among all the outrages just heaped on him there was one Joe could face. "Where was our backup?" he yelled, rising in disgust. He could now see by the light reflected up from Rick's downturned beam that he was black, in his forties, a square head perfectly fitted to his field-uniform cap.

"We don't know."

"Colonel!" someone called from some distance down the tunnels. "We've got the freezer truck on the radio. They want to talk to you."

Rick—the “Colonel”—turned away.

“Jean, you take Mr. Stevens up and guide the van. Stay alert, I won’t lose any more people tonight.” As he walked away, he called out, “Jean’s a doctor, Mr. Stevens. Do what she says.”

“Are you hurt?” she asked.

“No, but I feel dizzy.”

“No head trauma or anything? Are you sure?”

Joe nodded.

“Come on, let’s get you out of here.”

The approaching truck, some hundred yards away, killed its lights as soon as Joe put his head out of the manhole. He crawled out and, stumbling to his feet, turned around, hand extended toward the hole to help the woman up, but she was already beside him. He straightened and regarded her, a lean girl who might have been flawlessly beautiful if it weren’t for the thick glasses that shrank her eyes. She was very young.

He studied her face as she turned and began waving the truck forward with both hands.

The truck, a semi with a long-haul trailer advertising Dreamcicle Ice Cream Bars, pulled up just beyond the manhole and stopped. The man on Joe’s side, who was at the wheel, got out, and grabbed up an armload of what looked like body bags from behind the back seat; his partner came around the other side bearing a similar load. Both were dressed in gray coveralls. “We’ve only got ten bags, Jean,” the driver said.

“The truck’s refrigerated, though, right?” Jean said.

“Aw, yeah, but the mess. I can’t keep doing this with my brother’s equipment—”

“Look, we’ll stack the bagged ones on the bottom. Now hurry the hell up; we want to get this wrapped before local enforcement comes.”

“What happened to the DEA guys?”

“I thought you were with the DEA?” Joe said, but they ignored his question.

“We don’t know what happened to them.” Jean said, in answer to the driver’s question. “Rick’ll have a couple of guys up here to check it out in a minute.”

“How about Gary?” asked the second man, who was beginning to climb into the manhole, his load of bags over his shoulder. “Will we be letting the locals collect him?”

“No,” Jean said. “He’ll have to go down MIA. You’ll see why. They did a real number on him. But Cooper’s going to Arlington.”

The man nodded and climbed down out of sight.

“What about this guy?” the driver said, pointing at Joe, his words seeming to echo in Joe’s head. As Joe stared at the driver, the man went out of focus; then blackness seemed to be impinging on the edges of Joe’s vision.

"He's in shock. We'll take him to Bellevue, where Jarway can debrief him and keep an eye on him." The woman's voice seemed far away. Joe turned to look at her, but it was suddenly too dark to see.

He felt himself being pulled down into an enveloping warmth, falling, but he fought against it.

"Help me, damn it," Jean said. Joe could feel her arms around him supporting his weight. He forced himself into consciousness; for a moment the veil lifted, and he was staring into her eyes.

"What's happening to me?" he gasped.

"Calm down. Next thing you know you'll be—"

The next thing he knew, he was having a dream. He stood on the porch of his mother's farmhouse back in Kansas, staring at the door. The sun hung low over the plains behind him, bathing everything in a dim, red light that made the white paint on the nearby walls look pink. He was a little apprehensive because he hadn't visited her since she'd died, but then realized he had the excuse that dreams didn't always take you where you wanted to go. He opened the door, and walked in.

Everything was as he'd remembered it. Rug in the hall; fan staircase with mahogany newel posts. Through the archway to the right came the sound of someone pacing in the kitchen.

"Mom?"

"Joey? Is that really you?" His mother appeared at the archway a moment later, in tan pants with a brown blouse and wearing an apron. She looked good. Her eyes were bright, cheeks wrinkled but not sunken, limbs no longer crooked with the Lupus that had killed her.

He went and gave her a hug. She felt healthy and solid. "I missed you, Mom," he said.

"How's Catherine?" she asked as she pulled away and preceded him into the kitchen. There, she took a tea kettle off the stove and filled up at the sink as he turned out a chair from the table under the far window and sat in it.

"I wish you hadn't asked that, Mom," he said at last.

"I understand. When your father and I divorced—"

"It's not coming to that, Mom. We've just separated for awhile."

"Always a fighter, Joey," she said, as she replaced the kettle on the stove and turned up the burner. "You know I never understood that stuff when I was alive." She turned from the stove, crossed her arms and leaned back on the counter. "The military stuff, and then that awful work in Homicide. But now I think I do. Your father and I trying to divide you kids, then the divorce—it must have been hard on you those critical preteen years. You needed some security, but unlike most kids would have, you supplied

your own security. You were the leader even among your friends on the block, Joe, you remember? You were always upright and uncompromising, a real hero."

"I'm not a hero, Mom."

"You most certainly are. You went in and saved that Foster girl from that maniac, not to mention turning down that promotion to lieutenant detective so you could take care of me. And I just know that whatever it is that's happened between you and Catherine, you won't give up; you'll make it work."

Joe didn't respond. He was beginning to wonder how the dream could seem so lucid. After a long silence, his mother looked out the window over the sink, her face painted a blood red by the fading sun. "Well, I wish this visit could go on, Joey, but it's about time you got down to business."

Joe felt a chill of apprehension. "What business?"

"There's trouble in the basement. Ever since those oneirology researchers set up shop down there, I haven't had a moment's rest." His mother put her curled fist over her mouth as if to hide her troubled frown. Then, seemingly on the point of tears, she said, "It's just not right that a dead woman shouldn't get her rest."

Joe got up and walked over to put a hand on her shoulder. "Hey, I'll take care of it."

"Oh, it's not the researchers that have me upset. It's what they're researching. Those things are down there."

"Who?"

"I think you know, Joey. Before you knocked, I heard one swearing at you through the walls for shooting him."

Joe felt his stomach drop. "Are they ghouls, Mom?"

"That's right, dear. That's what they're called, and they live in dreams."

Joe cast about, afraid that monsters would come lurching into the kitchen right then.

"Not up here, Joey. This is your personal level; they're down in the basement, on the collective level. You've got a strong mind, dear, but really it wasn't smart to absorb the silver key yesterday."

"What key?"

"Why, this key, dear," she said, and pulled out a silver skeleton key from her apron pocket. There were etchings on the key, but before he could study them, his mother dropped the key back into her pocket.

"The key makes you sensitive to the ghouls' gate to the Dreamlands. A normal person would have been sucked right through the gate and had to face them unprepared, but like I said, you're strong. We shouldn't waste any more time, though. They'll get away, and then they'll come looking for you in the waking world—don't think they won't. You need to attack them while you have the advantage of surprise. Come on, we've got to get you ready."

His mother led him back out of the kitchen. In the front hall, she opened the closet under the stairwell and began to rummage around in it. "Here you go," she said, handing him out a thin bundle wrapped in cloth. "That samurai short sword your father got when he was overseas." And she immediately turned to dig deeper into the black space. In the next few moments she produced a motorcycle helmet and set of riding leathers with padding on the joints, a sawed-off shotgun, and a set of brass knuckles.

He had put on the leathers and was just tucking the wakizashi scabbard on his belt, when the tea kettle whistled.

"That's the signal that it's time to go," she said. "If you don't go now, the ghouls will get away."

"What are they, Mom? What are they really?"

"I don't know, son, but I know they're evil. They've killed innocent people and they'll kill again. You've got to stop them. That's all you really need to know."

He plucked up the helmet and followed her to the door at the end of the hall, which had a brass lock plate around its knob; she took the key from her apron, unlocked the door, and then opened it, saying, "Now, it's seventy steps down to the Cavern of Flame. There are two old Egyptians down there, and they may try to stop you from taking your weapons any further. Don't take any shit from them. Just keep going down the stairs at the end of the chamber. It's a long way down those to the forest. That's where the ghouls will probably be—in the forest. There's only three of them, but don't underestimate them. When you're done in the forest, come straight back; you'll be awake before you reach here, so take care." She took the helmet, whose visor was up, and seated it on his head, and then gave him a hug. "I love you, Joey. Now you go kick some ass for your old Mom, okay?"

He wanted to ask if he would ever see her again. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her. But he believed her when she said that time had run out. "Okay, Mom," he replied. "I will." And he turned into the dark stairwell, and picked his way down toward a light far below.

In the alley a few blocks from the ambush site, Jean got into the idling cadillac next to Marine Sergeant Carlos Rivera, who'd replaced his fatigue jacket with a Knicks sweat shirt, and after looking at her for a moment, he pulled away from the curb. She felt silly having him take her to the hospital to check on Mr. Stevens after he'd just driven the guy there, but she had just eaten something that didn't agree with her, and the colonel, knowing she wouldn't be any good for awhile, had ordered her to go. The colonel was sympathetic to her special digestive problems.

Stevens had seemed to have fallen into a coma. His pupils had looked good, but that didn't rule out much. It would be too bad if he was perma-

nently messed up. Delta Green had taken an interest in Mr. Stevens when he started investigating the ghoulish boneyards a couple of months before. All his profiles suggested he might make a good recruit someday: he was a battle-tested veteran good at investigation, level-headed, idealistic but not naive, and not prone to discount the evidence of his senses.

At the end of the block, Rivera came to Ludlow St., honked his horn, and screeched out into heavy traffic. "That doctor who met me in the parking lot at the med center—what's her story?"

"She's a friendly, someone I've been working with on a special project. She can debrief Stevens when and if he comes around."

"So she knows about this op?" Rivera asked, glancing over wide-eyed.

"No, of course not, but she's got general experience. By 'debrief' I meant that she'll encourage him to develop amnesia about anything unusual he might have seen if he wants to save his career. The rest will be up to him to keep it together and play it cool."

He nodded. At the next light, he turned back to her and said, "You don't look so good, Jean. You sure you're not going to lose it?"

"No," she replied, "I don't have a vomit reflex. I'm physically incapable of it, like a rat."

"Really?"

"Really. That's part of the reason I want to get to the hospital."

"I could take you to Beth Israel if—"

"No, but thanks, Carl. I can wait. It'll probably be okay anyway."

Rivera nodded again, turned his attention back to his driving and honked his horn at the cab in front of him, where the driver was turned around talking to his fare as the light changed, then asked, "So what did you find out when I was gone? What went wrong?"

"Christ, Carl, you'd think *you* were a goddamned cab driver," she said. Then after a minute, "All right. Well, we were right that Gary really messed up losing that map. The ghouls came out of the Dreamlands into a cave complex far, far beneath the city. The stuff they saw on the way up was amazing: cobblestone byways maybe five hundred feet below the surface, carved lintels with Mayan-looking petroglyphs ... We were really barking up the wrong tree expecting them to just materialize down that side tunnel. Anyway, the physical gate to the Dreamlands was created by a weak spell; it's probably closed by now."

"Wow, and you found out all this by— Never mind. How did we lose Gary and the DEA guys?"

"The ghouls came early, split up, and cased the neighborhood just as we arrived. They followed the DEA sniper up into that room, and ambushed him. When he made his last check-in, it wasn't him. A ghoul had eaten his larynx and stolen his voice. From the sniper's brains, the ghouls found out

where the unmarked backup car was. We found what was left of all three agents in a dumpster.”

“How’d they manage to get the backup car?”

“One of the agents left his post to take a leak. The ghouls got him first; then they used his identity to approach his partner. After that, they headed back to the tunnels. They’d decided to play with Stevens last, it seems, and have a little fun with him.”

“Jesus.”

“As far as Gary was concerned—well, I should have put my foot down. I should have gone in his place.”

Poor Gary. Jean had warned him that the bait on the hook would most likely get chewed. Thank God Rick hadn’t told him there was going to be a full strike team; otherwise, the ghouls, having eaten Gary’s brains and thereby stolen his memories, would have realized their danger and gotten away, and then the ambush would have been for nothing.

As it turned out, the ambush was not for nothing. Delta Green had killed seventeen Renegade ghouls in this operation, seventeen serial killers with supernatural powers who would no longer be terrorizing the streets. But Gary had been Delta Green’s only contact with the Watchers. It was a sore loss.

“You can’t blame yourself for what happened to Gary, Jean,” Rivera said.

“It’s not only that, Carl. I’m afraid now, for all of us. You see, three ghouls managed to escape.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure. My stomach doesn’t hurt from eating twinkies, Carl.”

Ten minutes ago, Jean had applied an uncanny analysis to the brains of three ghouls killed in the ambush, thereby determining facts normally beyond the reach of forensic science. There was a very good reason Delta Green had enlisted Jean Qualls to fight the ghouls—she had been one herself for five years.

It was a secret known only to Rick and Carl and a few agents outside the ghoul squad. In 1989, the woman who was to become Jean Qualls, twenty-eight-year-old psychiatry resident and Ph.D. candidate Dr. Debra Constance, had been investigating the work of a peculiar psychopath. Debra ascertained that the subject—whom detectives had nicknamed the “Ghoul”—suffered from the delusion that he could gain immortality by consuming human corpses. He had started out relatively innocuously, robbing graves, but after having eaten a night watchman who surprised him at his work, he developed a taste for fresher meat.

The case had followed a string of murders from Pennsylvania down to New Orleans, where the Ghoul had contacted a cult dedicated to a strange,

chanel god named Mordiggian. As it turned out, the case ended anti-climatically: the Mordiggian cult, unimpressed with the Ghoul, detained him and turned him over to the police.

Debra had been in New Orleans at the time of the Ghoul's capture, and had met with members of the cult to gather information for her thesis on abnormal psych. Their god, they explained, was a scavenger, not a hunter, and did not condone murdering for food. Her interview with the lank, unhealthy-looking cultists had left her troubled, though; at every turn they hinted that they were cannibals.

That night, over dinner at Bella Luna in the French Quarter, she confided her suspicions to Ted Morse, an old college friend now working as columnist on the society pages of the *New Orleans Spectacle*.

"A graverobber cult, huh?" he said as he smoothed back the hairs fringing his bald crown. The glow from within the table's glass-chimney candle holder was reflected off his eyeglasses, making his attention literally ardent. "I wonder what attraction these loony cults hold for people, you know?"

"Well, according to the Ghoul's notebook the followers of Mordiggian could commune with the dead. What's more, they're immortal and can turn back the aging process."

"That would be a nice trick," Ted conceded.

"I don't know," Jean said, looking out the window at someone stumbling along the riverfront train tracks just past the flood wall. "These guys I interviewed looked more like they were on their last legs, not exactly a recommendation for a diet of human flesh."

"Still, it's interesting," he said.

The next week he'd given her a call asking where the cult was located and who its contacts were.

Was he working on a story? she'd asked. No, he'd assured her, his interest was strictly personal.

A month later, Ted Morse disappeared.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Dr. Constance, her work on the Ghoul case had attracted the attention of a certain covert government organization, and she began to get strange assignments far afield from home. First, she had been asked to assemble a psychological profile of cattle mutilators in Texas; then she had been called to the scene of a bizarre murder in the Southwest, where an entire family had their brains surgically removed, apparently while they slept. There had been no trace of drugs in their systems, no sign of a struggle or restraint, no suffocation. They had expired, while they slept, and apparently due to nothing else but the surgery.

It was on that case that she'd seen strange creatures in the night sky with the other agents she'd been teamed with. She thought at the time that the others had followed her lead to keep it a secret because of her convincing

arguments—not knowing that they were assessing her own reaction to the event with keen attention. They were people in the know. And because of her performance on the case, they made her a person in the know as well shortly afterward.

Debra had been a member of Delta Green for two years, when Ted Morse reappeared to her. Or at least Ted Morse was who he claimed to be.

Late one night, she had returned from work to her home in West Philadelphia, unlocked the front door, went into the kitchen and turned on the light with a start. There at the table in front of the sliding glass doors was a young man she didn't recognize, holding a large and ancient-looking book.

"Hello, Debra, it's me, Teddy Morse." But it wasn't. Ted Morse had been in his forties, balding and undistinguished, whereas this man couldn't have been more than twenty-five, and was stunningly handsome. There were the glasses, however, and an undefinable resemblance. The voice, too, was similar.

"Yes, it's me," he continued. "I've been with the Mordiggian cult all this time, and they've taught me amazing things, a new way of life."

"What sort of way of life?" she asked, but he ignored the question.

"At first I went to see them out of curiosity; when I learned more, I went hoping they could restore my youth. Finally, they showed me greater things than I'd ever imagined. When I joined the cult, I had some vague desire to be attractive to women, but the cult introduced me to much deeper sexuality, the energy at the heart of nature—male and female, joy and horror, and even life and death." The man got up from the table and closed the distance between them. Debra experienced a thrill of danger, but her inclination to flee was checked by a sudden lust. The man was gorgeous.

She allowed him to tilt her chin up with a long, soft finger, but at the last moment shied away as he tried to kiss her.

"Debra," he said, "I've loved you since college, but not until now have I felt worthy of letting you know; I've gone through hell to get back to you. You can't imagine how hard it was to convince them you'd be worthy of their secrets."

"You're not Ted Morse," she said, but she was unsure.

"I can't appear to you the way I was," he said, drawing back. "I discarded that form forever, but I can pass any other proof. Also, I was not lying when I said that I had learned a deeper sexuality." The young man stepped back. And began to change. Debra gasped as his jaw retracted, his hips expanded, his breasts swelled, and then she cringed, appalled, as a well-endowed, beautiful young girl stood in the man's place. "I could teach you to enjoy the intimate attentions of this form as well, dear Debra," the girl breathed huskily. And she flashed a luxuriant smile.

But Debra hadn't liked the trick. Her heart was thumping, and she felt ill. "What has this cost you?" she demanded.

The girl frowned, and her features reformed themselves once more, until the young man had retaken her place. "There's a cost, Deb, but it's small. A change of diet and religious affiliation. You won't have to commit any felonies."

"If I know what you mean by a change of diet ... forget it."

"Really, Deb, I know this must be a bit much for you; I've just been living with this for so long that I've lost touch with what it's like to be new to it all. Don't decide now. First," he said, walking over to the table where he'd left the massive tome, "first read this." He picked it up and brought it back to her.

Debra recoiled from touching the suspiciously fine leather binding, but then accepted the book at last, and turned it around in her hands. Its wrinkled pages were of parchment, and on its spine were external hinges of yellowed bone. She opened it to find that it was all handwritten in a decayed brown ink, which was almost too thin to read in places; the words were English, but the spelling was extremely archaic, as was the script, which buoyed a plethora of "fs" as it flowed along the page.

"Please don't show it to anyone," the man said, as she continued to flip through the pages. "The consequences could be dire for both of us."

Debra immediately became absorbed with some autopsy diagrams she'd found in the book, and barely heard him as he said, "I'll leave you alone with it, and call on you in a few days." When she looked up—only a moment later, it seemed—he was gone.

She put the book down, and walked through the kitchen into the hall. The front door was open. She hurried to it and looked out, but there was no one up or down the street.

For an hour she paced the kitchen trying to decide what she should do. Delta Green would find the book very interesting, but she reflected on the warning not to show it to anyone. Certainly she should evaluate it before deciding how to involve them. On the other hand, her superiors had warned her repeatedly about the dangers of merely perusing certain paranormal texts. The *Necronomicon* was one name she'd been specifically told to watch out for; several DG researchers into that accursed book had gone insane. (As a psychologist, she had been skeptical at first, but the extensive documentation on their cases had convinced her.)

At last it was simple curiosity that overwhelmed her. She put on a pot of coffee, took out a pad of paper and pencil from the drawer under telephone, and sat down to read and take notes.

After the first couple of paragraphs, her apprehension eased, and she almost laughed. The book seemed to have been written by a child trying to

affect Tarzan diction. It was very imaginative, and immediately swung into a fantastic description of a place called the Dreamlands, which could be accessed from many different planets by experienced dreamers. Earth's Dreamlands were generally reached from a stair that ran from a person's dreams down to an enchanted wood. In this wood was a stone slab that covered another stair that led to a terrible underworld, where carnivorous giants with huge, vertical mouths stalked an immense city. Outside this underworld city were mountains where the ghouls dwelt, and beside the mountains was a thousand-mile trench the book named "Thee Vayl of Nath," through which giant wormlike monsters called Dholes swam on a sea of human bones.

Debra wished she knew something about the young person who had invented all this. The book contained some compelling psychological symbolism, and she would have liked to place it in the context of the author's life. Such a morbid imagination! But ingenuous too, and there were touching passages where the upper Dreamlands were described. Cats figured prominently, and there was even the clever conceit that they would jump from the roofs of a place called Ulthar and land on the moon.

As she progressed further in the book, however, it became uniformly darker and dwelt on such topics as how to dig tunnels beneath graveyards so as to not cause them to collapse and which parts of a corpse are best eaten rotten and which fresh. Mordiggian was mentioned often, and there were several formulae for performing magic, among which were spells for inducing dreams, for swapping minds with another person, and for assuming the likeness of a corpse.

As Debra arrived at the last page, the sun began to come up, which was a relief. The unrelenting morbidity of the book was starting to wear on her. She hurried through the last chapter, which ended somewhat perfunctorily with advice to new ghouls on how to avoid detection among mortals, and then got up to fix breakfast. From the refrigerator she took out a tube of uncooked sausage and went to the window. The sun was just cresting the huddle of skyscrapers in the distance, and it made her eyes water to look anywhere near it—apparently they'd been sensitized by all her close reading.

She closed the blinds and stared at them. Ghouls, she thought, corpse-eaters. Was "ghoul" a synonym for corpse-eater? What about New Guinean cannibals feasting reverently on their dead relations. That, surely, wasn't ghoulish. It was spiritual.

Debra scooped a small handful of sausage from the end of the tube and put it in her mouth. Chewed. Swallowed. She scooped up some more but stopped and stared at it.

For God's sake, she was eating it raw!

After putting away the sausage in disgust, she went to her bed to try to get some sleep, and immediately fell into a dream of joining a group of Polynesian cannibals at a feast. She sat before a big, broadfaced man with feathers in his hair and a crescent-shaped bone, like a great mustache, inserted through his nasal septum, watching her own satisfaction mirrored in the man's expression as they both munched away greedily. After stripping the last bit of flesh from a femur with his teeth, the man plucked up a pale white arm lying on the ground and bit into it greedily.

Debra awoke with a scream to find she had clamped her teeth in her own flexor muscle.

It was a good thing she did not have to report for work that day, nor the next, because all her mental power seemed to drain into this new obsession. What a waste it was that millions of pounds of human flesh went into crematoria every year! How stringy the models in that catalog looked—how unpalatable!

At first, the lust she felt overpowered all ethical considerations; like a burning sexual obsession, it seemed fundamentally natural and fundamentally private. This, she knew, was what the psychopaths she studied thought, but she was different. Her human sensibilities were still intact, and she had absolutely no more desire to hurt anyone than she did before. She had merely added a certain aesthetic insight, a scavenger's point of view, to her other capacities.

By mid-afternoon Sunday, after having eaten all the meat in the house raw, she knew she was kidding herself—she would not be satisfied until she'd eaten from a corpse.

She tried to remain calm. Something had infected her and was building like a fever. Perhaps, like a fever, it would burn itself out if she could just be strong and hang on. Again she thought of bringing in Delta Green but told herself that she couldn't risk Teddy's "dire consequences." The truth, however, was that she feared what conclusions her superiors might draw about her condition. She wanted to put off their scrutiny for the same reason she'd put off taking that pregnancy test in college—she was trying irrationally to bargain down the unknown stakes of a terrible error.

The next day, she called in sick, put on dark sunglasses to shield her sensitive eyes, and drove off to stock up on meat at the supermarket. Just before she reached the bottom of the small hill, however, she spied a large golden retriever dead by the side of the road, and pulled over to load it into her trunk while people slowed past to watch. As she wrestled the bundle over her bumper, she stopped to hold the eyes of a woman who was gaping brow-furrowed with pity. "No, lady," Debra said under her breath, as the woman lowered her head and sped away, "it's not my poor doggie. But you know what they say, finders keepers."

Three days later, the crisis reached its peak. She had been in a fever of hunger all day long, but could hold down no food except the last of the dog that had been ripening in her bathtub, and even that seemed as bland as collard greens. The image of the walk-in refrigerator at the coroner's downtown was so clear in her imagination that she felt she could transport herself there merely by closing her eyes, but she suppressed the thought, concentrating instead on bleached skulls lacking meat and marrow. In the late afternoon, having defused the tension somewhat with masturbation, she fell asleep in total exhaustion.

According to the report given to police by the desk clerk at the medical examiner's office, Dr. Debra Constance appeared to have been drunk when she came in off the street late that Thursday evening. She had moved quickly and urgently toward the door to the lab but swayed with her arms held out as if off-balance. She did not return the clerk's greeting. Still, as she often had official business with the coroner, the clerk did not stop her.

A few minutes later, Dr. Constance came running out of the lab with a hand over her mouth; it was then that the clerk, noticing that Dr. Constance was barefoot and had tracked dirt and blood over the floor, turned to the phone to call security.

Debra had awakened from a dream of feasting on a corpse in the dark refrigerator adjacent to the coroner's autopsy room to find it wasn't a dream. Like ripping into a bag of candy, she had torn open the crude Y thorax stitch on an elderly male and begun to wolf down his cirrhotic liver. The meat was so sweet, so perfectly satisfying of her long craving, that it shocked her awake after her first swallow.

The refrigerator light was off, but the open door leaked enough light into the room to see by. Debra backed away from the gurney in disgust, the partially eaten lobe slithering into the body cavity under the force of the liver's weight. Her feet, stung with lacerations, clung to the concrete floor, and she had a dim recollection of walking barefoot for miles. She snatched a bloodied apron hanging over the end of the gurney and wiped her hands, her face ... She stopped as she patted her face. Her jaw felt protuberant; her teeth seemed to crowd her mouth. To her left sat an unoccupied gurney, and she tilted it up to catch the light of the door, but all she could see of her reflection was a dark, backlit silhouette.

Debra walked to the door and groped outside it until she found the light switch. Then, blinking under the irritating glow of the fluorescents, she stalked back toward the gurney, heart pounding. She stopped before it. She looked down.

At first, her reflection revealed a face that was merely swollen around the mouth, but when she grimaced and her lips split back over a nest of

pointed teeth, she began to laugh and cry. She seemed to lose control of her mind then, and later—whether because laughter wasn't enough or maybe just to escape the sight of those rows of bloody spikes gaping with hilarity—she ran. Out of the refrigerator, out of the lab, past the clerk, through the front doors, and into the night.

When she at last arrived at her porch after miles of side streets, she knew by a sudden sensitivity to the drama she'd been cast in that Teddy was waiting inside.

She did not bother to turn on the light to the kitchen. Her eyes were changing—she could see him well enough.

"I'm glad to see you've read the book," he said, drumming his fingers on it. He lounged in the chair, seated on its very edge, one arm flung back over his shoulder—an attitude that was no doubt calculated to unnerve her. Instead she felt pissed.

"What's happening to me?" she asked.

"You read the book; you ate human flesh; you're becoming a ghoul."

"Why have you done this to me?"

"I love you, Debra. Eventually, you'll thank me. The physical changes are only frightening at first; soon you'll develop an appreciation for them. You'll grow stronger and faster; your senses will be more acute. And with all this you get immortality."

"But you're not a monster. Why am I changing?"

"But I am a monster. Haven't you figured out that this is just a facade? I stole this body from a young man who died in a car wreck. My true form, the one I'm most at home in, is nothing like this."

"Show me, Ted. Show me what I'm turning into."

And he did. What rose from the chair was a waxy gray-green, like fat changed to soap by the ions of a damp grave. It was muscular and hunch-backed, balanced forward on crooked, doglike legs as if poised to spring. Green cat's eyes glowed in a wolflike face.

And the smell. Rancid, yet with a musky, sexed quality. The paradoxical stench of a vital dead man.

It was not unpleasant.

"You're not afraid, are you, dear Debra," said the ghoul (it was not a question). "You've come a long way. But there is a long way yet to go, so many wonders to explore, and I will be your guide, through the dark, interstitial necropoli of the Between Realms, to the moonlit cemeteries of Ulthar and down to the benighted ledges above the Vale of Pnath, where our people feast and sing songs of dark longing. Your heart will ache at the beauty of it, Debra. Come with me. Now. Tonight."

Trembling between fear and a desire she refused to own, Debra shouted, "Change me back, Ted! Now! If you love me like you say you do, change me back."

"No."

She removed a large knife from the cutting block on the counter nearby, and advanced with it held in front of her. The ghoul retreated a few steps. "Goddamn it, Ted! Change me back! You know I ate a fucking dog because of your book!" She pointed at the tome only a few steps away. "I'm a human being, Ted."

"Not anymore."

"Change me back!"

"That's enough! I am disappointed you can't see the virtue of your condition yet, but you will. And some day I'll accept your apology. For now, though, you have to set aside your feelings and come with me. The unripened fruit won't tolerate you, Debra; you must eat corpses to survive. First they'll cage you, and then you will starve."

"Unripened fruit? That's all people are to you?" But the anger had gone out of her. She didn't know what to do; she pulled her gaze away from the ghoul and stared at the book that had trapped her, infected her like a virus. Maybe that was it; maybe it was a virus, somehow expressed in language, triggering latent strands in her DNA. If so, she would need it to create an antidote. She had to get both it and herself to Delta Green. She grabbed the book, still holding out the knife.

"You think I have nowhere to run to, but you're wrong, Ted. You expected me to be overwhelmed by all this weird shit and fall cringing in your lap, but I'm not and I won't. You say you love me; you don't know shit about me or you never would have fucked with me. You see, my friends in the government and I know about the fish men in the sea and the god they worship; we know about the Dark Man of the witch cults; we know about all that shit." Then she decided to try a bluff. "You're small time, Ted, you and your ghouls. I bet you've never even read the *Necronomicon*."

"That's right," she continued, gratified at seeing him draw back. "I've read it. I've practically memorized the fucker. Do you know that there's a spell in that book for turning a ghoul into dust?"

"You're lying."

Uh oh, she thought. And it was going so well. Think, she told herself; what was it they'd said about the book? It had been written in Greek first—no, it'd been Arabic, originally titled *Al'Azif*. Did Ted know Arabic? All she knew was some rote traveler's Arabic, and her pronunciation was bad, but maybe it would be enough. "*Kaem ael taeman gorfa lishakhs limmodit yom?*" she said in the most hollow, ominous tone she could muster. (She was asking for a hotel room.) The ghoul glanced from side to side as if nervous. "*Azonn 'aennaekae askta't fi hisaeb haezihi ael fatura.*"

"Stop!" the ghoul yelled, advancing on her.

She held out the knife, and backed away. “*Min ... fadlak,*” she spat, slowly, emphasizing each word with a shake of the knife, as if reaching a climax. “*Aenae ... marid ... Aeynael—*.”

With an anguished howl, the ghoul turned and leapt through the plate glass door beyond the kitchen table, which exploded with a deafening crash in a cascade of fine fragments.

“... *twaelit?*” she finished.

Teddy had fled at the sound of her Arabic inquiry as to the location of the nearest toilet.

Jean dropped the knife, tucked the book under her arm, and ran to the bedroom for her purse.

Minutes later, as she was speeding out of her driveway, the gun from her purse braced on the steering wheel, she glanced back to see someone aborting a sprint behind her on the dark road.

The change set in fast then. Her back and legs became so deformed that she could hardly drive. Just out of town, she found a closed gas station, and at the payphone outside, turning her back to the headlights of the distant turnpike, she dialed the encrypted router.

The phone picked up after two rings. There was no greeting.

“Quentin?” she said.

“Sometimes,” the man replied, sounding tired.

“This is Dr. Debra Constance; I’m in trouble ...”

The agent’s reaction to her story over the phone was inscrutable, and he didn’t say much beyond assuring her they’d have a van out to pick her up. Maybe Delta Green had a policy of euthanizing people this happened to? Maybe it had been a mistake to call?

She held onto her gun.

When the van arrived with her friends from the brainstealer op in Arizona, though, she knew it would be okay.

And it was. As okay as it could get. In the time it took for them to arrive, Delta Green had already activated a safe house to take her to, protected by an armed guard. They had even managed to get an FBI agent out to her own house to recover her notes on the *Ghoul Manuscript* (as they came to call the book Teddy had given her). Delta Green was nothing if not efficient.

Researchers met her at the safe house to go over the book and study her condition. And they brought her food.

A week later, Delta Green had managed to acquire the corpse of an L.A. party girl who’d overdosed on heroin at the home of a celebrity basketball player. The girl, a runaway with no family ties, had been kept by various wealthy boyfriends, among them the sports star, who turned to the Mob to cover up the girl’s death. The Mob contact, however, had been an undercover agent with the IRS, keeping tabs on a criminal syndi-

cate rumored to practice black magic. The IRS agent was, of course, working for Delta Green.

And so, with the aid of a knife and fork, two bottles of relish, and a spell from the *Ghoul Manuscript*, Dr. Debra Constance assumed the countenance of a girl fifteen years younger, to whom a new social security number was given, under the name Jean Qualls.

Jean was feeling better by the time they arrived at the end of the receiving area of the hospital. The huge room was like a second-rate train terminal in a third-rate city, all warm air and cold colors. People milled about on a field of white linoleum, jaws clenched against the echoes of bawling kids. Plastic armchairs were bolted in place up against the walls, all of them occupied. To one side of the glassed-in receptionist station, a woman in street clothes was trying to help up an intoxicated, well-dressed white guy from the floor; nearby, an old man gripped a wad of bloodsoaked paper towels to his own wrist.

While Jean had the receptionist page Dr. Yona Jarway, Rivera plopped down in a seat with a copy of *Sports Illustrated* he'd located on the nearby coffee table. The seat had just been vacated by a young boy, who was now whining at the side of his harried mother. Carl seemed absorbed in reading, and Jean admired his adaptability. She herself still kept thinking about the escaped ghouls, about how they were most likely in the Dreamlands and beyond their reach.

Working with Dr. Jarway, and taking cues from the *Ghoul Manuscript*, Jean had managed to find in dreams what she thought was a Dreamland entryway—a portal that variously appeared as a door or wrought-iron gate—but there was always a lock. And no amount of dreaming or meditation seemed to be getting her any closer to finding the key.

Less than half a minute later, Dr. Jarway, a short round woman in a lab coat with a dark Grecian complexion, opened the door beside the receptionist station and looked through the crowd. She seemed distraught.

"Jean, thank God you're here," she said as she made eye contact. "Come with me." And she turned and hurried back the way she'd come.

Jean glanced to Rivera who raised an eyebrow before rocking out of his seat.

When they caught up to Yona in the main hall, Jean asked her, "What's going on?"

"It's that patient you brought in. I've got him down here," she said, raising her hand toward a door as she approached it.

Inside the room, she steered them past a curtained-off bed where a young girl could be heard moaning. In the next station over was Joe Stevens, in a hospital gown, sound asleep.

"So what's wrong, Yona?"

"He seems quiet now," Dr. Jarway said, "but earlier he was talking to himself. You wouldn't believe the things he was saying."

Just then, Joe Stevens turned his head and said something that bristled the fine hairs on Jean's neck: "With all due respect, Kaman-Thah ... but Nyarlat-Hotep, whoever he is, can kiss my ass. I'm taking the gun."

"Carl, get out your cell phone," Jean said. "We've got a situation here."

The Cavern of Flame was a series of flickering vaults separated by colonnades of joined stalactites and stalagmites. The source of the flickering could be readily seen. Here and there, a short section had been removed from a column and a censer bowl, lashing smokeless yellow flame, placed on its stump. The fuel for the flame was evidently supplied by a dark pitch or bitumen that bled from cracks in the bone-white limestone ceiling and oozed along the curve of the dome to collect at the end of the interrupted columns. Every now and then a dark, gooey strand dripped down from above, and the censer would flare up with a sound of air forced through clenched teeth.

It was in the largest of the central vaults that Joe Stevens, still in a not-entirely-lucid state, held his audience with the bearded old priests Nasht and Kaman-Thah, the keepers of the antechamber to the lands of dream. Each wore long golden robes and a kind of tiara figured like a rearing cobra. They had met him moments before at the foot of the stairs, bobbing in greeting (which, Joe noticed, made the cobras seem to strike toward him), and then asked his business, which he gave.

The two Egyptians seemed to approve of his hunting the ghouls, and things were friendly enough, but then they told him that he could not take his modern attire and armaments beyond the chamber.

"For," said Kaman-Thah, "on the level of the Dreamlands, the human psyche has not integrated such conceits. Their function would be unreliable. Besides, Nyarlathotep has threatened the Great Ones with censure if they should allow anything of the kind in their realm, and the Great Ones have passed the proscription on to us."

"With all due respect, Kaman-Thah," Joe said, "but Nyarlat-Hotep, whoever he is, can kiss my ass. I'm taking the gun."

"This is not a request, Mr. Stevens," said Nasht. "But we were not going to leave you defenseless. Here—" Joe drew away as the priest tried to touch him with the back of his hand. "You must trust me," said the priest. "Remain still."

The priest first wiped his hand along the side of the helmet, and Joe noticed that it felt heavier on his head and that the open visor hanging over his brows, instead of being plexiglas, was opaque and scored with holes. Then the priest touched the shotgun, and it flowed in Joe's hands,

its weight shifting forward. Joe looked down to see that it was now a cocked and loaded crossbow. His riding leathers followed, becoming a chainmail hauberk, and leggings with greaves. His gloves became gauntlets, the one that had worn the brass knuckles now girded with spikes, and he shook his hands involuntarily as the metal flowed and formed itself around them.

"The sword I cannot change," said Nasht. "It is a light weapon to accompany such armor, but its identity is consonant with the Dreamlands, and therefore beyond my skill to reshape."

"Whatever," said Joe.

Then the two priests led him across the chamber to a cave that was the head of a round, steeply raked, and claustrophobic stairwell whose upper curve was banded with alternating shallow humps and valleys, like in some canal of the human body.

"There are seven hundred steps to the Gate of Deeper Slumber. Since the passage of Randolph Carter sixty years ago, it has remained unlocked, so you will not need another key. After passing the gate, you will find yourself in the Enchanted Wood; then you will have only your sense to guide you."

"Thanks—" Joe began, taking the first step, but Nasht detained him.

"A few words of advice, Mr. Stevens. Do not harm any creature in the Dreamlands, except in self-defense. The Zoogs can be especially spiteful if they feel they are wronged, which may prove to your advantage: there is a rumor that the neophyte ghouls have been cruel to the Zoogs, and to cover their crimes have borne false witness against them to the cats, who are their masters. The Zoogs may help.

"Finally, be warned that this is not a dream as you know it. You will not awaken from hurts in the Dreamlands as from a nightmare. If you die, your earthly body will die, unless you are a far greater dreamer than you appear. Good luck."

"Thanks," Joe said again, and then waited a moment to make sure he was thoroughly dismissed before beginning his long, long descent to the Gate of Deeper Slumber.

While Rivera called for the colonel to bring some soldiers to the hospital, Yona and Jean unhooked Joe Stevens' IV needle and monitors and then loaded him onto a gurney. Then they took him three wings down and up in an elevator to the second floor, where the sleep studies lab was located. There was a more comprehensive lab in the psychology department on the NYU campus, but the hospital lab was near at hand and especially dedicated to in-patient studies. However, as Jean opened the door ahead of the gurney, she got a nasty surprise. Over the partition of the last of three bed stations, twenty feet down the room, a heart monitor blipped steadily.

"What in the hell, Yona?" she said. "There's a patient in here."

"I know; I meant to tell you. He's comatose, from a car accident. The administrator talked to the family and they agreed to move him up here to save on costs. In exchange, we get a research subject for meeting a provision of our grant. It's ridiculous."

"Goddamn it, Yona, then you've got a nurse on standby."

"Well, of course, but she never has to do anything; he's on auto-drip feed, cath—and perfectly stable. Never so much as an arrhythmia."

"We've got to move him out. It could get dangerous in here for him."

"Jean, we can't. There's nowhere to put him. Getting him moved would take half an hour; I'd have to notify the nurse at the end of the wing that the equipment is going offline."

"All right. All right. Let's get going."

They wheeled Joe into the far station opposite the occupied one, removed his gown, and transferred him into the bed. Then Yona took metallic paste and a razor from the bedside table while Jean and Rivera sorted out the fine tangle of multicolored leads to the EEG. Within five minutes, the many contact points on his scalp were shaved, all the instrument leads were secured to his head, ear lobes, upper cheek, and chest, and the heart monitor was online, showing a stable, if slightly elevated, heart rate.

Then they moved to the other station, which contained the experimental equipment that Yona had the engineering department develop to spec during her dream-work with Jean—a computerized music synthesizer, which converted signals from an EEG into a pre-programmed range of pan flute notes. It had taken Jean and Yona some time to figure out how to set it up.

In the *Ghoul Manuscript* there was a complex passage of formulae for inducing dreams with notes on a flute—complex because the formulae were not fixed musical pieces but merely a list of notes, each corresponding to a fleeting emotion. To play the right tune, you would have to have someone interpret your deepest emotions and sound the notes corresponding to them in the book while you slept; interpreting a sleeping person's mood, the book advised, was the work of "onlie the most eksput and sensatif dreemur." For some time, Jean had tried to make sense of the formula for reaching the gate to the Dreamlands, first by merely experimenting with a pan flute and a tape recorder, which got her nowhere, then later by biofeedback. After much experimentation on herself, Jean correlated the frequency and amplitudes of an EEG with notes on the flute, and a brilliant young woman from the music department was given a workstudy job to "play" Jean's EEG to her as soon as she passed into D sleep.

Within two weeks, the music student had a nervous breakdown and quit school altogether.

However, Jean consistently arrived at a gate or door in her flute-inspired dreams, and Jean and Yona knew they were on to something. Shortly thereafter, Yona had the inspiration for the synthesizer apparatus, and they were able to obtain similar results without abusing any more musicians.

Jean and Yona had tried making recordings of dream music and playing it back to a sleeper, but, just as the *Ghoul Manuscript* suggested, this was fruitless—the music was necessarily dynamic; it had to be produced through feedback. As it turned out, though, this did not mean that dreams could not be shared. The two women had found that they could meet at the same dream portal if they were simultaneously listening to music generated by the other's EEG, thereby, assumably, giving each other indirect feedback.

Once Rivera and Yona had finished pasting leads to Jean's scalp and had her situated in the bed, Yona removed two sets of special, em-shielded earphones from the stand under the synthesizer, plugged them both in, and ran one set over the wall to Joe's bed. Jean carefully inserted the other set of earphones into her own ears.

After giving Rivera a minute to check the hookup to the synthesizer, Jean flipped the switches and leaned back into the odd, dissonant strains from Joe Stevens' mind.

Seven hundred sixteen. Seven hundred seventeen. Joe had begun counting stairs after about the first twenty. For an hour it seemed, he had groped his way in complete darkness down the stairwell tunnel without encountering a single landing. There were supposed to be seven hundred stairs. It was probable that he'd started counting on the wrong number of stairs, but he couldn't have misjudged by a whole seventeen, could he? He was beginning to get extremely claustrophobic. Maybe there weren't seven hundred stairs; maybe the staircase was infinitely long. Sooner or later he would misstep, and then he would quickly break his neck tumbling to the center of the earth.

Seven hundred eighteen. Seven hundred nineteen. Sev— There was solid earth in place of the next step. Cautiously, he probed his foot farther out, his hauberk tinkling faintly as he stretched. Earth again. So this was the bottom at last. There were seven hundred and twenty steps, counting the first one he took when he said goodbye to the priests. Either that or, when he started counting, he had taken only that first step where he had been sure he'd taken a score. What would have happened then if he'd never started counting? Would he have descended forever without making progress?

To make sure that he hadn't only hit a landing, he probed out with his foot before committing to each step. He had gone maybe five feet when at last a twilit cave mouth resolved out of the dark about fifty feet ahead. Silhouetted against it was a wrought-iron gate.

Just as he started for the gate, though, he caught a faint sound from behind up the stairway, a piping. It was oddly hypnotic, and he felt drawn back, but then he steeled himself against it and strode resolutely forward. He had work to do.

As he approached the gate, the strange piping was subsumed by the purring, cheeping, and hooting night sounds of the forest, sounds at once boreal and tropical and appropriate to no place on earth. Just beyond the cave was a moonlight-dappled clearing overarched by the boughs of ancient, twisted oaks, whose immense and portly boles were hung with togalike growths of phosphorescent moss. Lush sword ferns fawned before the oaks in the gaps between them, while across the clearing a fairy ring of mushrooms, each a foot wide, hugged itself together on the floor like a dwarf delegation to a court of giants.

Joe caught his breath at the aura of weird antiquity and deep mystery that brooded in that wood, and at the same time he realized he no longer felt asleep; no longer felt that odd compulsion of dreams to drive forward to the ordained conclusion, even as he had in the Chamber of Flame. With a chill up his spine, he realized this was because his mind was not supporting this place at all, did not create it.

It was objectively, frighteningly real.

As he gripped the gate, it swung inward with a creak, and he lifted his gauntleted hand from its rusted surface, studying it really closely for the first time, amazed at the finely articulated plates and mesh sleeve, the wicked knuckle spikes. Then he looked over the crossbow in his right hand. The quarrel in it was held firmly in place by some kind of ingenious wire arrangement that attached to the long trigger lever arm; pulling the trigger would release the quarrel a moment before releasing the taut cord. In the weapon's nose, there was a cocking stirrup, and set in its butt, a stout winch with a foldout handle. He couldn't be dreaming this; he'd never conceived of such a thing. Then, of course, there was the forest.

He swung the crossbow up on his shoulder and gazed out into it again. Where was he? What was he doing? If it had been anyone but his mother who'd set him after the ghouls, he'd be going right back. This was ridiculous. Only a couple of hours before, he'd had his entire world view turned upside down by what he'd seen in some tunnels, and not just his world view, his view of his country. Colonel—that's what they'd called that guy. If the U.S. government was now fighting supernatural monsters, he was farther out of his reckoning than he had been as kid in Vietnam. Hell, here in this fairy wood he was farther out of his reckoning than he would be fighting aliens on Mars.

But as his CO had explained to him back in 'Nam, back when he was discussing his doubts amid the too-quiet village with the palm-tree trunks

stripped bare by Agent Orange, it wasn't a soldier's job to understand the political situation farther than the immediate moment. You held onto your morality; you held onto what your gut told you, and you tried to be fair to that. If you came up against a fundamental problem in the moment—say if your sergeant was ordering you to rape some village woman or shoot someone who couldn't shoot back—then your duty to God came first, even if it meant a court-martial.

"They're evil, son," his mother had said. "That's all that matters." He guessed she was right. He opened the gate and stepped into the clearing.

It was hot and muggy outside the cave. Even with his visor up, his head almost immediately became uncomfortably warm. Unlike the medieval headgear that he'd read about, which was worn over a quilted cap tied under the chin, this helmet had its padding somehow attached to its inside, just as the motorcycle helmet had; he removed it with his free hand, baring his head.

The undergrowth on all sides of the clearing became agitated, rustling and whispering, as if the ferns had woken up and were about to go on the offensive. Joe dropped the helmet and went into a crouch, bringing the crossbow up and aiming it from side to side. The rustling and whispering stilled, and he lowered the crossbow until its cocking stirrup came to a rest in the grass. Were these the Zoogs the priest had talked about? He had only been half-attentive to the old man, which he now realized was a mistake.

The fern directly in front of him trembled faintly as if with the stealthy approach of something small, and Joe checked his impulse to jerk up the bow and send a quarrel into it. A moment later, the fern's occupant emerged, a small dark creature like a short-haired opossum but with a fringe of pale squiggly tendrils below its nose. It reminded him of a kind of mole he'd seen on a nature show, a star-nosed mole, except that this thing had longer front legs than a mole, and its black eyes were as round and big as a lemur's.

The creature cooed and burbled at him, sounding like a contented dove, but something about it seemed earnest.

"Are you a Zoog?" Joe asked.

The creature cocked its head up attentively.

"Zoog?" he repeated, pointing at it, and the thing nodded. "Joe." He pointed at himself. "I'm hunting ghouls." Again keen attention, on the word "ghouls." He repeated, "Ghouls," and then raised the crossbow with one hand and sighted along it into the distance. "Pow. Dead."

The creature nodded very vigorously at this and shouted from side to side, evidently addressing cohorts in the ferns. Amid its cooing and burbling, Joe caught only two coherent sounds, "ools" and "knecht," which he took to be a reference to the ghouls on the one hand and himself on the other.

From all sides, the ferns hatched Zoogs, dozens of Zoogs. They padded up to him and caressed his armor with little monkey hands. Three rolled his helmet over and stuck their heads inside, each in turn. One took a tentative nip at his greaves, exposing a carnivore's fangs, and was immediately swatted on the head by a partner. The envoy (or perhaps leader) of the Zoogs, who had addressed Joe, sat patiently by, watching.

At last the Zoogs seemed satisfied by their examinations and moved off back into the underbrush. The leader pushed itself onto its haunches and gestured for Joe to follow, and Joe recovered his helmet as it turned away into the wood.

At first, it seemed the Zoog had taken off into virgin terrain, but as Joe pushed by a waist-high fern, he saw a threadlike track wending its way through the undergrowth and circumventing hanging boughs. As he went, a constant rustling of brush and whispering of Zoogs attended him in the near-distance. His guide did not wait for him, and Joe only glimpsed him now and then up ahead as the twisty trail passed a bare patch of dirt.

A curious snag, like a pointing finger and bathed in moonlight, appeared some twenty yards off as Joe rounded a gnarled old oak—or at least he thought it was a snag, but as the trail brought him close, he saw that it was some kind of stone monolith deeply scored with mossy hieroglyphs and hugged by creepers. Spaced a yard apart, two huge iron rings were set into the stone near its top, eight feet up, and around the stone's base lay a crude ring of pale, fungoid humps.

The sight of the monument made him uneasy, and its peculiar rotting-vegetable smell uneasier still—*were those creepers on the stone slowly moving?* he wondered—but it was not until he saw the staring, vacant orbits in the humps, and realized they were actually skulls, did he quicken his pace.

After the monolith, the forest grew closer and darker and the trail more uncertain, and Joe knew he would have been lost if it weren't for the scuttling sounds of the Zoogs.

Several minutes later, Joe almost stepped on the first of the many Zoogs gathered on the trail. He had to squint to make them out. The leader stood on its hind legs in the center of the furry mass, hissing and glancing from Joe to an impenetrably dark bower that it pointed to, just off the trail.

"Through there?" Joe whispered, pointing in the same direction, and the Zoog nodded. "All right, then. Thanks for your help." And after seating his helmet on his head and hefting his crossbow, Joe stalked through the ferns and into darkness once again.

Jean had grown drowsy quickly. Just before she succumbed to the strange piping from the synthesizer, she opened her eyes and saw Yona and Rivera at the end of the bed, talking with Bates and some other soldier in

plainclothes, whose name she couldn't remember. They seemed casual enough, and she let herself ignore them.

The next thing she knew she was standing on the covered porch of some ranch or farmhouse. It was deep twilight; the sun had set, but the sky still glowed behind her. She turned around and saw the fading purple on the skyline. The house, it seemed, was in the Midwest. Rolling plains stretched to the horizon under the just-breaking stars. A wind stirred the verge of tall grass along the driveway road.

Just then she heard the door open, and she spun back around.

"Oh, it's you," the late-middle-aged woman said with a scowl.

"Excuse me?" Jean said.

"I know what you are," said the woman. "You're one of those girls. First your easy virtue gets you to the family planning clinic, then the next thing you know ..."

"What?" Jean said, her ire rising.

"The next thing you know you're eating human corpses in the city morgue." Jean was completely at a loss at how to respond to this. Who was this weird old woman? "Well, don't just stand there gaping on the porch. Come on in. You came to help my boy and you better get on with it."

"Your boy?"

"Joe. I'm Mrs. Stevens—his mother. No, I know what you're thinking; I'm not a threat to your little cloak-and-dagger operation. I died of Lupus years ago."

"What are you then? A ghost?"

"Well, you might say I'm a complex, or even a personalized imago from the collective unconscious. Really, though, that's all coming from *your* head. It's *your* dream. I don't know about such things. You're the psychologist; you can decide. But decide later, please. My boy's gone down to the forest after the ghouls, and if you want to catch up with him, you'd better hurry."

The old woman held the door open and Jean caught it and followed her into the house. Mrs. Stevens led Jean down a hall to the right of an impressive, balustraded staircase and to a door at its far end. The door was ajar.

"Down the steps. Count them as you go—I forgot to tell Joey about that. But he knows now, and so do you. There are seventy steps to the Chamber of Flame; the Egyptians will give you directions after that."

"'Nasht' and 'Kaman-Thah'?"

"Yes."

"They were mentioned in the *Ghoul Manuscript*."

"Hmm." Mrs. Stevens shook her head in disapproval.

Torn between amusement, annoyance, and fascination, Jean regarded the woman for a moment before turning away.

"Just a second," Mrs. Stevens said. "I'm going to shut this door after you so that nothing nasty from the forest can come up into the house, but don't worry, it always opens from the other side into the waking world. Anyway, though, when I shut the door, it's likely that I won't see Joe again, so could you tell him that it doesn't matter, that I'll always be with him, anyway? Will you tell him that for me?"

"Sure," Jean said and stepped down, trying to suppress the thought that Joe Stevens might find that idea as uncomfortable as she would. She certainly wouldn't want her own mother living on in her head.

The door closed behind her, but her way was faintly lit by what looked like a firelight glow at the distant bottom, and she was able to pick her way along without difficulty.

About halfway down, where the wooden ceiling gave way to some kind of white stone, her legs felt wobbly. With the next step, her upper and lower teeth didn't seem to meet up quite right in her mouth. With the step after that her back began to hunch.

No, she thought, this can't be happening.

But it was. She was reverting to a ghoul.

Joe found that going into the bower was like passing through another cave. Small, unseen creatures hopped around in the ceiling of thick branches overhead. Once, he recoiled as he brushed one of the many hanging tendrils of vine from his path and it slithered up and away from his touch.

A dim glow of moonlight ahead resolved itself out of the phantom flares dancing before his light-starved eyes. He raised the crossbow and crouched, taking the slow, high steps he'd adopted in the jungles of Southeast Asia to keep from stirring leaves. Before planting his foot, he'd roll it ever so slightly to feel for—and then pass his weight over—larger twigs.

After fifty yards or so, he grimaced at the first hint of a terrible reek, and then heard a faint sound that made his guts cold: the low cry of a ghoul. He pressed forward, faster and less concerned with stealth as the volume of the ghoul-speech increased, interspersed with pained cries: "*Fuck, oh fuck it hurts.* I'll pull the bastard's nuts off and chew them in his face. I'll pull his intestines out through his ass."

The light, he soon discovered, was not moonlight, but a greener glow emanating from a bed of fenestrated, morel-like fungi around a huge stone slab resting halfway over a gaping pit. Upon the slab were two ghouls, one squatting over another who lay in a pool of blood.

The monsters were so hideous, especially under that decadent green light, that Joe almost lost his nerve: tall and humpbacked and with evil werewolf faces, slick and rotting-looking but well muscled and full of feral vitality. He would much sooner face a troop of bears. Suddenly the stand-

ing ghouls' pointed ears twitched; it sniffed the air and cocked an eye back in his direction.

Joe brought up the crossbow, and fired it into the ghoul's midsection with a terrific twang, the recoil almost pushing him over, then tossed the crossbow aside and frantically drew his wakizashi sword. The quarrel jutting from its guts, the ghoul rushed forward and he chopped down, glancing the sword off the creature's back as it piledrove into him, flattening him and knocking his helmet askew. The ghoul pressed the hilt of the wakizashi against the ground with one hand and punched him in the helmet with the other, crumpling it into his cheek but knocking it straight so he could see. Bracing his left hand against the ghoul's chest, he dislodged his gauntleted right hand from under the sword hilt, and then punched back.

The ghoul jerked its head away too late, the gauntlet spikes puncturing its neck. With a gurgling howl, it jumped up, blood fountaining away from the line of holes, and Joe flailed behind him to recover the sword. The ghoul hopped to one side as if judging the best way to attack. Joe's hand closed on the hilt. The ghoul leapt in, just as Joe brought the weapon to bear straight out from his chest.

The blade popped through the ghoul's sternum; and the sword pommel was thrust into his own. As it hit the back of the monster's ribcage, the hilt twisted half out of Joe's grip. The ghoul's hands were at his throat; it pushed itself off the blade, choking him, an inch, two inches, and then fell forward on him heavily.

Joe gagged at the stench of the flesh pressing at the holes of his visor as he shrugged the ghoul off. He got to his feet, gasping and stumbling, pulled out the blade from the corpse, and looked up.

The other ghoul had left the slab, which was streaked with blood. Joe glanced from side to side. A twig crunched behind him.

Something heavy smashed onto Joe's helmet, bringing him to his knees. His vision went blurry; he tried to raise the sword. But a spreading pain at the back of his head numbed his arms. They shook. And then fell to his sides.

A ghoul leapt over him and landed in a crouch, a big rock clutched to its chest. Blood ran from its midsection over its splayed legs; through them, Joe could see another ghoul clambering out of the pit by the slab.

"I was just talking about you," the ghoul standing over him said with wry malice. It raised the big rock for another blow.

The rock came down.

"You are not expected for two more days, Debra Constance," said the priest Kaman-Thah, after introducing himself. Half of each priest's bearded face was in shadow, the other half ruddy with firelight, and each half seemed to bear a different expression: disapproval and anger on one side;

polite inquiry on the other. "We warned the Traditionalists that we would suffer only once to have ghouls in the Chamber of Flame."

"How do you know my name?"

"The Traditionalists bargained with us for the right to hold a meeting here with you two nights hence," said Kaman-Thah. "They explained that you were a ghoul living among mortals, and they told us to expect you. There are few ghouls living among mortals, and none has ever taken this route to the Dreamlands, so we naturally—and, it appears, correctly—assumed it was you just now descending the stairs."

"Look, mister. I've never had anything to do with the Traditionalists," Jean growled, feeling uncomfortable (her shoes had fallen off her cloven-hoof feet; her blouse, pulled up by her humped back, had bunched up under her armpits; and her bra was too tight). "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm looking for a man named Joe Stevens."

It was Nasht who replied then. "Mr. Stevens departed more than half an hour ago for the Enchanted Wood, in pursuit of renegade ghouls. Rumor of their misdeeds has reached us before, so we were happy to lend him assistance."

"Assistance?"

"We replaced his armaments with ones more suited to the Dreamlands. I would not pursue him; he is quite formidable."

Debra shook her ungainly head. "Listen, to be honest, I don't know much about Mr. Stevens. I thought I did, but apparently I misjudged him. Who is he?"

"We have no idea, beyond what he told us," said Kaman-Thah. "He is a policeman in the waking world. He was attacked by ghouls and he came to track them down before they escaped to the underworld."

"How did he gain access to the Dreamlands?"

"Presumably he had a key," said Nasht.

"From where?" Jean asked.

"We have no idea, Ms. Constance. He had never passed the Chamber of Flame before, and there has been no rumor of his ever being in the Dreamlands."

Jean thought for a moment about this before deciding to switch the topic. "What did the Traditionalists want from me?"

"They refused to say, but the envoy was supposed to discuss it with Mr. Tanaka and give him a key to pass along to you," said Nasht. "Did you not receive the key?"

"I don't think so ..." Wait a minute, Jean thought. That was it! If Gary was given a key, he could have passed it along to Joe. But when? Why didn't Gary say anything about it?

"You don't think so?" said Nasht. "It is possible that you have forgotten. If you do not absorb a silver key correctly with your mind ..."

"... it can fade from your memory and the memories of all who ever saw it," Jean said, paraphrasing the end of a quotation she remembered from the *Ghoul Manuscript*. "That's what happened. Gary must have been careless with the key and Joe got ahold of it. He stared at it too long, and then they both forgot about it. Joe must be going off half cocked. I don't think he knows what the hell he's doing."

"Frankly, Ms. Constance, that was our conclusion, but we thought it best not to provoke him, lest we discover we were wrong."

"Damn, I better go find him and bring him back."

"Are you certain about entering the forest? It could be most dangerous; you have no weapons, and at best the Zoogs will treat you with suspicion."

"No, but it's partly my fault he's gotten into this."

"Very well. This way, Ms. Constance," said Nasht, and the two priests turned with a neat double swirl of their robes and led the way across the flickering chamber.

A minute later they had just given her directions on how to descend the stairs, and Jean had just nodded and thanked them, when Nasht said, "It occurs to me that the Traditionalists promised that your key would function only once. If Mr. Stevens used the key that was intended for you, he may have exhausted your one chance to enter the Dreamlands. Therefore, when you have retrieved Mr. Stevens to this chamber, you may send him on ahead and wait out the time until the Traditionalists arrive. Certainly they would want this."

"Yeah," Jean said with a sigh, hating the idea, "I may have to do that. Gary's dead, and he was our only contact with them."

The priests nodded, and Jean turned down the stairs to the enchanted wood, counting the steps as she went.

Joe had been unconscious for some time before he felt the rough, clawed hand slapping his cheek. "Wake up, meat," said the ghoul.

And he did. He was hanging painfully from his arms, bare naked, his back to cold stone, and the ghoul was crouched right in front of him, holding its midsection as if in pain. On its legs and arms blood was smeared, dark in the moonlight. Behind it crouched another ghoul, apparently uninjured. Joe craned his neck, and saw that each of his arms were tightly wrapped by some cord or vine that had been secured to an iron ring ...

He was lashed to the monolith! He did not have to look down to confirm this; he could feel the ball of his right foot just brushing the dome of a skull. His feet, too, were secured, bound at the ankles and held to the stone, perhaps by a rope run around it from behind.

The ghoul leered. "You're that cop who shot me in the tunnel and then led all our people into that ambush. Lucky son of a bitch. And I smelled

Zoog all over the trail, which means it looks like you even got them to help you out. Well, we'll fix those little fuckers, you can count on it. But first I'm going to fix you."

Joe didn't say anything. His heart was thumping hard in his chest. These monsters were going to torture him to death. It was his worst fear. In 'Nam, he'd thanked God and his M-16 at the end of every day that had seen him uncaptured; he'd known what the VC did to prisoners. Even after he'd returned to the States, he'd been haunted by the possibility that his life would end with torture. To some extent, that phobia had driven his arduous weight workouts as a bargain with that potential fate, or at least a preparation for it. Now it seemed he'd been right to be afraid. And he didn't feel prepared at all.

The ghoul turned to his partner, who, after their brief, meeping dialogue, held up the short samurai sword, and then handed it over.

"Remember this?" said the ghoul, turning his attention back to Joe. He lowered the blade and caressed Joe's testicle with the edge. He felt a sting as it scratched him just the slightest amount. "Shall I open up your little bag right now?" Joe shut his eyes and clenched his teeth. The blade withdrew.

There was exploding pain that made Joe open his eyes and yell out.

The blade had been rammed through his left shoulder. Joe clenched his teeth, pressure building in his head as he fought to draw a breath. When he finally did, it was to yell again as the ghoul gave the sword a half twist and then jerked it out. "Look at me, meat!" the ghoul breathed in his face, choking off his already shallow wind with its stench. "I'll tell you what. I'm not going to use the knife on your nuts. It's too sharp. I'll just pluck them like berries ... after I let you catch your breath. It's so good to hear meat scream, and the adrenaline will give your flesh such a tang." The ghoul raised the wakizashi as if to slash Joe across the face, but then doubled over and groaned. It stumbled away, and then dropped onto its side, rocking and cursing. Its partner came up to it, but it waved him off and got unsteadily back to its feet, still holding its midsection with one arm.

"You know, you shot me in the belly," it gasped. "That hurts. But I'll live. You, on the other hand ..." The ghoul looked down at the sword, then threw it away with a snarl. It drew near on hooved feet.

Jean was in the clearing outside the cavern, recovering from the claustrophobic descent and marveling at the forest. Her ghoul's eyesight washed out the contrasts of light and darkness to a pastel gray, but she could see even into the shadows among the ferns and among the great reaching roots of trees, and everywhere small creatures were watching her from their various shelters: insectlike seahorses with thin limbs and dragonfly wings; a hideous long-fanged monkey the size of a cocker spaniel, hairless

and with diamond-shaped pupils. But the most unsettling creatures were the ones the size of small cats whose tentacled noses wrinkled up at the sight of her as if in loathing. She recognized them from their description in the *Ghoul Manuscript*. They were Zoogs.

"Hello?" she said.

The unanimous hiss from the surrounding ferns was like the breaking of surf. Jean could feel the hatred building to a critical tension.

"I'm looking for Joe Stevens. I want to help him."

Some perfunctory hissing, but mostly a low querulous bubbling, like a conference. It seemed she'd said the right thing.

Jean glanced around, trying to determine a route to proceed along. She was surprised to see that the cave emerged from a small tight mound that was surrounded by trees on all sides—there was no mountain or structure of any kind through which the stairs she descended might have passed. Apparently they did not exist here at all.

The conference of the Zoogs was reaching a higher pitch, when Jean heard the distant scream. The ferns rustled with the turning of a hundred small heads, and everything went quiet. At the next scream, the Zoogs all took off in a stampede.

"Hey, wait!" Jean yelled, and went loping after them, but the Zoogs had exploited small byways that she could not, and the sound of them faded into the distance.

Almost a minute later, during which she'd repeatedly tripped and barked the cuticle of her hoof on hidden stones, Jean found a small path. It seemed the Zoogs had hopelessly outdistanced her, but also that the trail followed the general direction of the yell, and she took off along it at a faster pace.

Only a few seconds after that, she had begun to round a huge tree when the scent of ghouls brought her up short and made her proceed with more caution. Then she heard a familiar voice, a voice out of her nightmares, and came into view of the whole terrifying scene.

"But I'll live. You, on the other hand ..."

At the opposite end of a clearing, Joe Stevens was hanging nude from rings set into a high tongue of stone. One ghoul looked on as another repeatedly punched Joe in his washboard stomach. Joe's abdominal muscles rippled under the blows as he gaped, eyes bulging, in a silent scream. Even from this distance, Jean recognized Joe's assailant.

"Ted!" she yelled, running forward.

The ghouls spun around and faced her, heads tilting in a simultaneous expression of confusion, but where the nearest ghoul seemed to remain nonplussed, Ted Morse limped forward to greet her. "Debra! You've come!" Behind him, Joe Stevens retched and heaved deep, rattling breaths.

Jean stepped back as the ghoul drew near, his eyes shining and fevered. "Dear God, Ted, what have you become?"

Ted Morse's beetling brows furrowed for a moment and his eyes grew keen; then that ecstatic, fevered look, which Debra recognized even in a ghoul's countenance as insanity, crept back into them. "He's got it coming, Deb. Look"—Ted spread his arms to reveal his blood-smeared shoulder and midsection—"he shot me. And he's a murderer. He led our people into an ambush!"

"You're one of them. The Renegades. You've been killing people."

"Of course, Debra. Do you expect us to starve ourselves until we're dotting and feeble like those idiot old conservatives down along the cliffwalls of Pnath? Those aren't ghouls; those are frightened old men. Mordiggian is even worse. Nyarlathotep will choose one of our number to replace that cowering fool, one day, if I have anything to say about it."

"Ted, we were friends. We—"

"We are savage, vital! That book, Debra. My commitment was incomplete, like yours, until I read that book. I can't understand how you can still be blind to your true destiny after reading it!"

"What book?"

"You know—the *Necronomicon*. Our leader, Isaiah, took us to the Plateau to obtain a copy from the satyrmen of Leng after you goaded me with its secrets. We lost three of our brothers in that expedition, but what we gained ... *it's beautiful*."

At first, Jean had felt shocked and sad, but now her outrage was building. "It's bad enough you're a monster, Ted. So am I. But I'm dealing with it. You—you've become a fucking lunatic!"

Apparently Ted had no reply for this. Jean stared at him a long time. He seemed to be torn between anger and confusion. From the corner of her eye, she caught sight of activity on the monolith, but managed to keep her gaze from straying to it and thereby giving it away to the ghouls—it was swarming with Zoogs, silently climbing with the mechanical, tentative movements of sloths. Two had already reached the top of the stone side by side with a short samurai sword clenched in their teeth.

"And this rotting piece of crap," Jean said, pointing to the ghoul behind Ted, which she then turned to face full on. "Who the hell are you?" The ghoul tilted its head, confused. "Another crazy fuck, looks like to me."

That had been the wrong thing to say.

Jean caught sight too late of Ted advancing from the side, and he slapped her across the muzzle so hard she reeled, eyes watering. Blood flowed into her mouth from a cut on her upper lip.

"That's our leader, Henri, you rude bitch!" Ted gasped. "He doesn't speak English." She stumbled, regained her balance, and glanced at him

sideways to find him doubled over. Apparently his effort to discipline her had hurt him just as badly. No, Jean thought as he continued to cringe, it had hurt him much worse. "Oh fuck. Oh ..." Ted toppled onto his side, writhing.

The other ghoul took a step toward Ted but stopped. With an ululating cry, Zoogs swarmed up out of the undergrowth all around, brandishing sticks. A dozen surrounded Ted and began prodding him, and he lashed out, mashing one into the dirt. Henri glanced around in slack-jawed confusion.

Feigning surprise herself, Jean looked down at a spot just right of Henri's feet while watching the monolith in her peripheral view. Almost immediately, she understood the ruckus for what it was—a diversion.

The other Zoogs had freed Joe's feet and right hand, and were even now lowering a sword to him through their paws. Joe dangled from his one secured arm and tried vainly to gain purchase on the stone with his feet; then he looked up at the sword, grabbed its hilt, and, as the Zoogs scampered away, hacked the cord binding his other arm.

The sound of skulls being scattered as Joe fell attracted Henri's attention, and Jean ran forward and leapt on his back just as he spun around, catching his arms in a double reverse-nelson. But the ghoul was too strong for her. With a grunt, it hunched over and began to press its arms forward, steadily loosening her hold while Joe scrambled to his feet.

Jean saw Joe get into a crouch, arms held wide, just as Henri cast her off. She rolled over, grabbed onto the ghoul's hoof, and pulled at the same time the ghoul lunged.

The Homicide agent expertly flipped the sword down into a reverse grip and swung it two-handed into the middle of the ghoul's back as it fell flat on its face. He leaned into the hilt, twisting.

The ghoul bucked and flopped, shuddered once, and lay still.

As Jean got her hooves under her, she watched Joe pull the blade free of the corpse and bring it up, blood drizzling off the end.

The Zoogs had ended their cry, and the only sounds now were the hissing of a small knot of them around Teddy Morse and his curses as they tormented him. Joe was fixing Jean with a wary look, and she was also aware of the keen attention of dozens of Zoogs gathered about them in a wide circle.

"We need to be careful," Jean said. "Three renegade ghouls escaped from the service tunnels. There are only two here."

"I already took care of the third," Joe said, and then after a long, tense silence, asked, "Whose side are you on?"

"Yours," Jean replied, trying to keep her eyes fixed above the man's waist. "We've met before, Mr. Stevens. I was part of the assault team that

ambushed the ghouls in the tunnel. My name's Jean Qualls. I'm a forensic specialist working with a covert government task force called Delta Green."

"You're a ghoul."

"I was turned into a ghoul from reading a book written here in the Dreamlands. Delta Green has been helping me try to find a way to reverse the transformation." Just then Teddy Morse cursed loudly, and Jean's gaze was drawn to him for an instant; she looked back a split second before Joe did. "That ... that thing over there was once a friend of mine," she said. "He tricked me into taking the steps to become a ghoul myself. But unlike him, I didn't embrace the change. I don't like being a ghoul, Mr. Stevens."

For a long time, Joe didn't respond. When he did, he was perilous, inviting challenge. "I'm going to kill him."

Jean lowered her head, heaved a deep sigh, and nodded.

The gathered Zoogs made way for them both as they approached Ted Morse, who was still lying on his side, clutching himself together and swearing.

Jean held Joe's shoulder back as he stooped toward Ted with the sword. "Ted, can you hear me?"

The ghoul nodded. "*Oh shit, it hurts.*"

"You've gone too far, Ted. I know you got in over your head, and I forgive you, but I can't let you go on hurting people. Make your peace with God, Ted. Right now. I mean it."

Then, unexpectedly, the ghoul broke out laughing. Joe started forward again, but Jean touched his arm and shook her head. Ted Morse choked on his laughter, grew quiet for a second, and then said, "Dread Azathoth, blind and idiot, churning at the center of the universe. Nyarlathotep, his brutal avatar. That's your God. One day, you'll see. You'll all see."

"You're insane," said Joe.

"What do you know?" Ted gasped. "You stupid meat. You didn't look so smart with that sword to your balls."

Joe opened his mouth as if to respond, and then shut it, his eyes going blank with a look of remembered fear.

It was then that Ted Morse made his break.

The ghoul leaped up and dashed off down the trail, back the way Jean had come. Startled, they took off in pursuit. The whole mass of Zoogs went into motion after them, chirping and squeaking.

Joe, Jean soon realized, did not have the benefit of enhanced eyesight, and she had to wait for him often to catch up with her on the trail, but even so, Ted's groans and the sound of his thrashing run through the forest became more and more audible, and she knew they were gaining on him.

At last they broke out into the clearing of the cave to the Chamber of

Flame, and were met by the gazes of hundreds upon hundreds of Zoogs gathered there. Almost all in unison, the Zoogs looked from them to the entrance of the cave and then back again.

"In there?" Jean asked, pointing, and a sea of small, tentacle-nosed heads bobbed in assent, before the Zoogs parted to give them a narrow file to pass along.

They entered the cave warily, two abreast. Jean was certain that Ted would make a stand inside and not risk the Chamber of Flame, but he was not there. Counting the steps together, they ascended.

Perhaps ten minutes later, they found Nasht and Kaman-Thah waiting for them at the top. The Renegade had run across the cavern moments before, they explained, and ascended the stairs to the waking world.

Jean and Joe redoubled their pace.

Bo Leeds had had many dreams during the long sleep since he'd rolled his Ford pickup that night coming home from the bar, but most of them had been indistinct and fevered: snatches of color; now and then a tree; a cracked windshield. But then he heard the distant music.

Bo found himself walking a stretch of highway through a thick fog under what seemed to be winter light, though it wasn't cold out. The gravel shoulders sloped away steeply into impenetrable banks of mist, and not wanting to fall into some smelly ditch, Bo kept to the tarmac. Besides, the road was taking him toward the flute music, and he was powerfully curious about what was making it.

He hadn't gone far, when the mist cleared off to his left and he could make out a gas station less than fifty yards away. No, it wasn't a gas station; it was the garage where he worked, and the piping seemed to be coming from inside. It got louder as he approached the open bay where a pickup was up on the lift.

The pickup was totaled, engine sticking half into the cab, roof smashed in, at least one busted axle. Now what was his partner thinking, putting up a piece of crap like that in their garage? It didn't take no rocket scientist to see the thing was—oh. That's right; it was his pickup. He must have had it towed in after the accident.

The piping was coming from the door to the office at the back of the garage, which was slightly ajar. Its window looked in on complete blackness. Even with the light off, it shouldn't be that dark, Bo realized. Puzzled, he walked over, and opened it, the piping flooding out as if coming from just a few feet away. He couldn't see what was making it, though. The doorway was filled by a thrumming black pane, like a television set that's been turned off but still has some juice left in its transformer.

Bo stood there a minute scratching his head. Then, faint, as if through a

thin wall, a voice called out: "Help! Is anyone there?"

"What's wrong?" Bo said.

"Oh, thank God," replied the voice. "I need help, and I can't get out."

"What are you doing in the office?" Bo asked.

"I've been shot, and I need a hand out. Give me your hand."

"Just a second," Bo said, and cast about until his eyes landed on a crowbar leaning against the pop machine. He retrieved it, and stuck it slowly into the unresisting darkness.

"Here, grab hold of this." Bo braced his feet against the door jamb as he felt someone take its other end and gently pull, and then was jerked forward unexpectedly, through the veil of shadow, and into someone's arms at the head of a long stairwell, dimly lit from below. He scrambled to get his feet under him, as the crowbar went clanging down end over end.

"Calm down!"

Bo looked at the young guy who eased him back onto a step, and was amazed that such a skinny fella was holding him up. Bo weighed over two fifty, and it wasn't exactly compact weight either.

"You all right now?" the guy asked. The piping, Bo noticed, had stopped.

Bo nodded, and looked down as he felt something sticky on his arm. It was blood. The plain T-shirt of the guy beside him was soaked with it.

"What happened to you?" Bo asked.

"Never mind that," the skinny guy said. "Just look at me for a second, in the eyes."

Bo frowned, feeling silly, but did what the guy wanted; he always could stare down anyone who wanted to give him trouble.

It was really too dark to tell, but the guy's eyes seemed to be a deeper brown than he'd ever seen before, almost black. There was something soothing about them. Bo felt himself growing tired.

"What's your name?" the guy asked.

"Bo Leeds."

"How did you get here, Bo Leeds?"

"I don't know. I heard the flute music and came through the garage. My crashed pickup was on the lift, and then I heard—"

Suddenly there was a noise of someone clomping up the stairs from down below, and the skinny guy started mumbling in a foreign language.

As he raced up after Jean, his injured shoulder screaming pain, Joe had to take her word for it that there were two figures ahead. Seemingly his eyes weren't adjusting as fast as hers.

"What's going on?" Joe asked.

"I think it's Ted," she panted. "There's some fat guy with him."

"You think?"

"He's not in ghoul form. Be ready with that sword."

They had gone almost halfway, when the clomp of Jean's hooves abruptly stopped, causing him to look up. She was still ascending, but now on a pair of delicate, human feet. This was not entirely good, he realized, if they had to face a pair of men, especially men who had the benefit of high ground. He raced up to her side. She was once again the young woman from the ambush.

"Stop!" Jean yelled. "Get away from him. He's trying to hypnotize you!"

Joe could see them now, more or less, sitting side by side on a step twenty feet or so up ahead, a thin figure and a fat one.

"What?" said the fat man, pulling his gaze away to look at Jean for a moment, and then turned back to the other. "What are you trying to do to me, asshole!" He gave him a shove. The thin man groaned, doubled over, and slid down a step.

Sure enough, the thin one was Teddy. There was a spreading darkness around the side of the T-shirt he was wearing that was obviously blood. The fat man got to his feet and backed up the stairs, hands held up. "What's going on?" he asked. "Who are you? Why's he naked?"

Joe raced up with the sword out. Teddy tried to gain his feet.

"Finish him!" Jean yelled, but it was unnecessary. Joe gained a step just below Ted, reached up and grabbed a handful of his shirt, and pulled him forward onto the sword. They tumbled backward together, but Joe hopped aside and managed to land on a lower step as Ted, head-down, sword jutting from his chest, fell beside him, choking. Joe rushed forward, jerked the sword free, lifted Ted's head up by the hair, and deftly cut his throat. Ted clutched air, his eyes glazing over as the blood pulsed out of his neck and onto the stairs, and then went limp.

"What are you doing here?" Jean was yelling. Joe released the body of Ted Morse, and then ran up to join her, still carrying the sword.

"How did you get here?" she said again to the fat man, waving what seemed to be a crowbar, as Joe took up her side; he decided not to ask how she got it.

"Ted's finished, Jean," he said. And she nodded but kept the crowbar up and her eyes locked on the fat man, cringing in the corner between the wall and the primitive plank door at the head of the stairs.

"I don't know," the fat man replied. "I heard the flute music; then I came through the garage. My pickup was totaled. I think I wrecked it."

"You were in an accident?" Jean said.

The man seemed to consider, then nodded, and Jean heaved a sigh and lowered her weapon; her shoulders, which had been drawn up tight, relaxed. "We got here just in time," she said to Joe. "This man is a comatose patient in the sleep lab where you and I are. Yona said he was in an acci-

dent. The flute music is something Ted wouldn't have known about."

"You can tell me about it later," Joe said, and took the last few steps up to the fat man. "Come on."

"I've got to stay for awhile, Joe," she said. "If I leave, I'll miss an opportunity to meet with the Traditionalists."

"The what? Just a second. You"—he pointed at the fat man—"can go." Joe grabbed the door's iron handle and pulled, and the passage was suddenly filled with antiseptic light, but there was a mist beyond the door that Joe couldn't see into. The fat man watched Joe's sword for a moment as if considering something, then hesitantly he stepped through and disappeared. Joe shut the door halfway.

"Now what is this?" he asked.

"The Traditionalists are a faction of ghouls that Gary was bargaining with. They're the ones who set up that ambush for us. Supposedly they don't kill—it's against their religion or something. Anyway, they want to talk to me, and now that Gary's dead, Delta Green doesn't have a contact. I need to stay."

"Are you sure?"

"I think it'll be all right. Nasht and Kaman-Thah told me that they're expecting me in the Chamber of Flame in two nights. When you get back in the lab, tell the soldiers not to disturb my body; tell them I should wake up within three days if all goes well."

Joe nodded, turned away. Then turned back. "Hey, thanks for coming after me." He lowered his head, tried to think of something casual to say. "Won't you get kind of hungry being down here for so long?"

Jean glanced down the stairs. All that was down there was the disguised-ghoul's corpse. Joe winced, pushing a thought from his mind. "See you later," he said, opened the door, and went through the portal.

Dr. Yona Jarway and Carlos Rivera had been watching Joe Stevens' monitors for the last half hour. Several times his heart rate and breathing had increased alarmingly, and they were afraid he might go into cardiac arrest.

But as it turned out, the monotonous whistling of a heart-monitor flatline came instead from the last of the three bed stations, the one occupied by the car-accident victim Bo Leeds. Yona sprinted to the bed, just in time to see the fat young man sit up, pull off the heart-monitor leads, and abruptly change into something unhuman. Yona backed out of the sleep station, gasping, as the ghoul rose naked from the bed, pulling over the metal tree that held the IV drip-feed bottles, the catheter spraying urine as it flopped out of the thing's distended penis.

"Where's Stevens?" it growled.

Yona ran back around the partition and jumped past the soldiers Bates

and Iverson, who drew Beretta nine-millimeter pistols and assumed a shooting crouch before even seeing what was coming. Colonel Richard Davis caught her by the arms and tried to calm her down. Carlos Rivera left the side of Joe Stevens and went out to investigate.

A moment later, the thing came lurching into view, and the soldiers opened fire.

When Joe Stevens awoke in the laboratory bed, leads stuck to his chest and scalp, the room was in chaos. A door not far away was opened and a woman in a nurse's uniform was shrieking and looking over the arm of the Hispanic man who detained her. At her feet something humpbacked and gray-green struggled to rise from the blood-slicked floor. The corpse of a man in uniform lay next to it, and more blood was spattered all over the far wall.

The thing grabbed at the end of Joe's bed for support, wiping four parallel streaks of red over the clean, starched sheet—and pulled itself up.

Somehow, it was Ted Morse, Ted Morse the ghoul.

"Look into my eyes, Stevens, you piece of shit," he gasped. "Face me like a man."

Joe was cornered in the narrow bay. There was nothing at hand to fight with. But his shoulder no longer hurt, and the monster didn't look in great shape; it had obviously been shot many times. Joe drew his legs under him and tensed for a fight, meeting the ghoul's dark eyes. It leaned forward, staring.

Ted's new eyes seemed to pull the light out of the room. Joe felt a tugging, as if his soul was separating from his body. He tried to look away, but couldn't; tried to bring up his hands, but his arms had gone slack and nerveless. Joe felt his mind being drawn into the ghoul.

Just then someone reached over the partition with a pistol, stuck it against the side of the ghoul's head, and pulled the trigger with a curt bang, spraying brains over the far wall.

Joe felt his consciousness thump back into his body and looked up to see a black man in green fatigues—Rick, the Colonel—whom he'd met in the tunnels.

"Hello, Mr. Stevens," Rick said, and then reached over the wall with his free hand to shake. "Welcome to Delta Green." ▲

A member of the original playtest group that spawned Pagan Publishing, thirty-five-year-old artist/writer Blair Reynolds is known in the game industry for his excellent, meticulous, and unnerving paintings and illustrations. Blair has done work on MegaTraveller for Game Designers' Workshop and Digest Group Publications, as well as on Call of Cthulhu for Chaosium and Pagan Publishing. Recently, he established Room 308 Publishing, which has produced one ("Yeah," he says, "okay, one, shuddup!") horror graphic novel entitled Black Sands. He recently illustrated the entirety of The Realm of Shadows for Pagan.

More than any other piece in this anthology, this effective story emphasizes the hazards of being a warrior against the entities of the Mythos. Be advised that this is a very explicit story.

OPERATION LOOKING GLASS

BLAIR REYNOLDS

DELTA GREEN EYES ONLY

<<< BLACK CARD MEMORANDUM / TOP SECRET >>>

CENTCOM

HEADQUARTERS 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA, USA

SUBJECT: HEARING/DEBRIEFING RECORD, OP LOOKING GLASS

1. WHAT FOLLOWS IS A TRANSCRIPTION OF NOTES TAKEN BY CAPTAIN DARRIN DICAPRIOT AT THE HEARING/DEBRIEFING OF MAJOR WALTER J. GREYMAN CONCERNING GREYMAN'S CONDUCT ON 18JAN69 DURING OPERATION LOOKING GLASS. THE

HEARING WAS AT THE REQUEST OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, AND DELTA GREEN REGIONAL ACTIVITIES DIRECTORS, FOLLOWING THE DEATHS OF NEARLY 70 U.S. MILITARY AND POLICE PERSONNEL.

2. OP LOOKING GLASS INSERTED INTO THE MITU VAUPES REGION OF COLOMBIA, SOUTH AMERICA, ON 18JAN69 AND COMPRISED 45 ARMY RANGERS OF THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION, AND 23 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY FIELD OPERATIVES OF THE TEXAS, LOUISIANA, AND FLORIDA DISTRICT OFFICES. FOUR MEMBERS OF LOOKING GLASS WERE FULL-TIME DELTA GREEN OPERATIVES, INCLUDING MJR GREYMAN, WHO HEADED LOOKING GLASS OPERATIONS.

3. ALL 68 PERSONNEL WERE KILLED DURING OPERATIONS OR ARE STILL MISSING AT THIS TIME, EXCLUDING MJR GREYMAN.

4. THE HEARING WAS INTENDED TO ESTABLISH THE SPECIFICS OF THE OPERATION AND THE EVENTS SURROUNDING IT, ESPECIALLY AFTER AN ADMISSION BY MJR GREYMAN THAT SEVERAL TEAM MEMBERS WERE KILLED INTENTIONALLY BY HIM.

OFFICIAL:
MIKEWORTH
G3

SAMUEL GREARE
GENERAL, U.S. ARMY
CG, CENTCOM

ANNEXES:
A - OPERATIONS DEBRIEF

CENTCOM
FIELD HEADQUARTERS
308TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

REFERENCES: LDCAAK 7-21, NHC-9N, Edition 12, 1:2,000,000

TIME ZONE USED: ZULU

SUBJECT: Debriefing dialogue, Operation LOOKING GLASS, deposition of MJR Walter J Greyman, U.S. Army Rangers, 17th Cav Reg (Delta Green)

TEXT: 202330Z JAN 69

LOCATION: —

Opening notes

Operations debriefing and deposition of Major Walter Greyman. In attendance are Colonels Barnes and McCullip; Majors Butler, Pearson, Juarez, Windrow, and Verier; and Captains Piper and Guthrie. Also attending are Special Agents Torrence, Clarke, and Damian, representing the Central Intelligence Agency. The panel numbers thirteen, including myself. Armed guards have been posted in the corridor outside.

All persons attending this review have Delta Green status, or have been granted temporary Delta Green clearance for this occasion. In the cases where clearance has been granted temporarily, the individuals have been informed that the account they are about to hear may be exceptional in the extreme, and possibly even beyond belief. Colonel Barnes has instructed them concerning the nature of Delta Green and asked that they keep an open mind.

This record is being made at the request of Col Barnes, in order to provide any psychological observations and evaluations of Mjr Greyman as may be required, prior to Greyman's possible return to the Colombian site. Following the events of 18 Jan, certain archeological evidence from the site has come forward, establishing a connection with the events described by Mjr Greyman. It has been suggested that Greyman be sent to direct any further investigative activity. It has been stated that the Major's current state of mind is in question, however, and that his psychological stability may be at risk. A general psychological evaluation is therefore warranted.

Initially, Greyman appears calm and even-tempered, detached from the activity in the room. Several cuts on his face have been stitched. Eyes are red, slightly swollen. Complexion is poor, despite a deep tan. He insists on sitting where he can face the door. He has been provided with cigarettes, and smokes one after another. Hands shake when he lights them. Stares constantly, looking directly into the faces of myself and the others.

Dialogue:

PANEL: Major, can you first tell us the general nature or intent of the LOOKING GLASS Operation?

GREYMAN: LOOKING GLASS was a reconnaissance mission. The purpose was to covertly penetrate the Colombian border and investigate conditions in the Vaupes Valley on 18 January, 1969.

PANEL: By “conditions,” you’re referring to Hurricane Mendez and weather conditions in the valley—the devastating rainstorm, winds, flooding—last week over northern South America.

GREYMAN: Yes. The hurricane and associated phenomena.

PANEL: Reconnaissance for what purpose?

GREYMAN: The usual. To collect any and all available intel concerning paranormal activities in that area, and to engage targets of opportunity as was necessary.

PANEL: You received no permission from the Colombian government? You made no advisory to the Colombians that you were coming? No advisory at all? Is that correct, Major?

GREYMAN: Correct. No sales and advertising.

PANEL: This was a Black Card clearance level mission, Major?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: You took precautions not to demonstrate U.S. involvement with the operation, Major?

GREYMAN: Of course.

PANEL: Your personnel’s uniforms, weapons and hardware, etcetera, were sterile? You’re certain there were no existing insignias, tabs ...?

GREYMAN: Of course.

PANEL: “Associated phenomena,” Major?

GREYMAN: Yes. Odd meteorological conditions not commonly associated with rainstorms of even this caliber.

PANEL: Major, what is the relationship of LOOKING GLASS to the USS *Eldridge*? I see here your preliminary report mentions the Philadelphia Naval Yard and several other associated, uh, matters.

GREYMAN: Bullshit.

PANEL: Major?

GREYMAN: *Eldridge* was the ship the U.S. Navy was using for testing back in '43. They were testing Einstein's Unified Force Theory. Tesla and von Neumann were brought in on it, and they were supposedly the boy geniuses behind the whole deal. All of it fell under something they were calling "Project RAINBOW." The Navy wanted to make the ship invisible to radar—and invisible, period, for all intents and purposes, if they could. That was the purpose of RAINBOW—invisibility. They were all really doing humanity one big fat fucking favor, if you know what I mean. Fucked us all. During testing in August they ended up burning a hole through the barrier of our own reality, burned a lot of good seamen in the process. The USS *Eldridge* and its crew slipped outside that hole. They lost track of it for a time and couldn't get it back, and they couldn't close up the hole after they'd opened it. There was a great deal of bad shit that happened after that. Anyway, when the dust settled, our government, in its infinite wisdom, gathered all the records and materials together, shoved it all into a box, and put it on a shelf rather than abandoning the project and destroying all the existing documentation. We think they turned the entire thing over to a private research entity years later, and as far as we know that entity has been conducting studies and experiments of their own ever since—presumably with supplemental federal funding. But no one knew for sure what they were doing. At least not until two days ago.

PANEL: U.S. federal funding? Are you certain?

GREYMAN: No.

PANEL: What is the name of this entity?

GREYMAN: We don't know.

PANEL: Do you know where the entity's facilities are located?

GREYMAN: No, not for sure.

PANEL: Well, do you know who's involved? Who's heading it?

GREYMAN: The only name we have belongs to a professor formerly with the Language Studies Institute in Naples. We really don't know much about her—nothing important—other than she was helping to translate cuneiform from some very very old, very very valuable clay tablets while she

was there; the tablets were apparently out of Assyria. That was 1953 through 1957. She also had something to do with the Osoyra Laboratories in Amsterdam in '58. Doctor Jessica Helene Kurghaine. We think she got involved with the RAINBOW projector—whatever they're calling it now—sometime after that. She supposedly died three years ago. The tablets she'd been helping to translate conveniently disappeared around the same time.

PANEL: That's all?

GREYMAN: That's enough.

PANEL: What does Osoyra do?

GREYMAN: Physics and technologies.

PANEL: So what has this to do with LOOKING GLASS?

GREYMAN: LOOKING GLASS went into Colombia because we suspected there was something going on much like the disaster in Philadelphia in 1943—something which involved space-time physics. Dimensional burning. None of us fully appreciated the nature of the involvement until we were inside the DZ, however. Evidence at the DZ suddenly made a lot of things uncomfortably clear.

PANEL: I'm not sure some of us are following you.

GREYMAN: We were monitoring the hurricane. Delta Green was monitoring the storm. Once the intensity of Mendez became apparent, we began monitoring conditions in Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, arranging for aerial observations of the storm front and surrounding areas. After examining photographic and spectrographic data we discovered indications of elements of a metaphysical nature. These elements were localized in the Vaupes Valley region, and everything suggested a certain relationship to conditions involved with Gate mechanics and planar travel, or astral travel—the same mechanics which allowed Tesla and the other stupid bastards to step out Beyond in '43. The existing conditions in the Vaupes Valley met the criteria. We initiated the recon after the evidence became undeniable, and we knew we needed to move quickly.

PANEL: Why quickly?

GREYMAN: There was a fire that needed putting out.

(pause)

GREYMAN: We realized that if another hole had somehow been opened—like the hole in Philadelphia—that it needed dealing with, immediately, directly. There wasn't time for a congressional luncheon and debate.

(pause)

PANEL: And you made this conclusion based on data from the photos.

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: So LOOKING GLASS was put together.

GREYMAN: Thrown together. Yes.

PANEL: You were selecting mostly field personnel, correct? The initial report shows men and equipment coming in rapidly from several locations, and activated personnel were reassigned or rerouted in some instances. And I also see a number of officers.

GREYMAN: Yes. We wanted people who were field-capable: players, not suits.

PANEL: LOOKING GLASS enabled on Saturday, departing from Guantanamo Naval Station at 1445 hours.

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: You enabled with two C-130s, Major?

GREYMAN: Yes. The Hercules performs well in shitty weather. The lead aircraft was loaded with unit one, designated "Mad Hatter," and had a five-minute head start; Captain Dennis House was in command. I was in charge of unit two, designated "White Rabbit," and we followed in the second Herc.

PANEL: Why two, Major? Why two aircraft? Why split your team into separate groups?

(pause)

GREYMAN: In case one group didn't make it.



House was shouting at him, but Greyman couldn't hear him for the engine noise and the rain and wind against the fuselage. Outside the observation window there was another violent pulse of lightning, seemingly at arm's length. Another explosion of thunder came, and it reverberated like a shockwave—powerfully, painfully—through the metal compartment; the strength and volume of it was so physical you could almost see it.

It sounded like the aircraft was losing; the storm was winning.

Everything was coming apart.

"Say again! Say again!" Greyman shouted into his mike, pushing his headphones hard against his head with both hands. Captain House, in the lead plane, had broken radio silence only minutes before unit two was preparing to go to jump green-light. By now, unit one should've already overflown the site and jumped. They should have already been in the drop zone. But something had happened. Something had gone terribly wrong, and House had broken communications silence in order to radio Greyman and unit two, to warn them. Greyman knew he must've had a very good reason. It could only mean things were suddenly very, very bad.

"Repeat," came the captain's voice again, distantly. "Repeat: Mad Hatter is washed! Team one is washed, unit one is washed! We're going down, Walt! Do not proceed into the zone! Hostile airborne forces in the area—heavy resistance! Repeat: hostile airborne forces in the area! *They've got something up here with us!*"

The connection was cut off and Greyman's bowels abruptly filled with ice water. A dozen different images from previous missions gone wrong entered his mind. Insane images. Images in shadow and darkness. Images in blood. He threw his headphones down, looking up as he stepped toward the center of the compartment and slapped the jump light, realizing that there must be a look of absolute horror on his face. But it didn't matter. It was too late now; the warning had come too late. The drop zone was already somewhere below them. Whatever it was outside that had taken out unit one and their plane would be coming. It would be on them in moments. Greyman understood that his own aircraft and flight crew were forfeit, but there might still be time for some of the rest of them to make it out. There might still be time.

His voice nearly broke as he shrieked: "*GREEN LIGHT! GO! LET'S MOVE! GO! GO! GET OUT! GET OUT NOW!*"

His shriek, backed by the raging cacophony of wind and thunder, was adequate motivation. The men were immediately on their feet, scrambling up from the floor between the wings where they'd been sitting, and piling toward the back of the aircraft. Already the tail ramp was dropping, admit-

ting an air of tropical ozone, and the sound of propellers, wind, and rain. Few of the men were Delta Green. They wouldn't understand the horror and panic in the voice of their commanding officer. They'd have no idea how bad things were right now, at this very moment. They'd have no idea at all.

Greyman turned to look out the observation window, at the same time pulling his semi-automatic and thumbing the safety. Then, abruptly, the aircraft lurched sideways and there was a single, tremendous crash on the fuselage's exterior wall. Greyman's face slapped the bulkhead, a bright, phantom spark flashing before his eyes. A second later he heard the engines throttle up as the aircraft pitched, started to slowly roll over.

When he turned back, fighting to focus, it was to gunfire and screaming at the back of the plane. He blinked, shook his head. The trunk of an enormous tree had been uprooted and had wedged itself into the opening in the tail of the plane, blocking the exit. His men had freed their weapons and had them trained on the tree, firing all at once. They were straining against the static cords and the weight of their parachutes, harnesses, and gear, unable to move back from the opening—gravity and the plane's pitched momentum pinning them toward the tail. Their weapons were chewing out pieces of the plane's interior, but the tree seemed untouched. Greyman's mind insisted that it was a tree, against other evidence. Wet and rugose, the giant roots reached and flailed inward, like elephants' trunks, diseased and sloughing, flecked with barbs and arachnid bristle.

One of the roots easily pushed a soldier onto his back, continued its pushing until the soldier popped and blew innards onto the metal floor. Several other tongues were stretching the soldiers, pulling at them like a boy pulling the legs off of a grasshopper.

Greyman saw the phantom spark once more, once more felt the ice water in his belly. When he could see again, he saw his two arms stretched out away from him, holding out the pistol, smoke drifting lazily from the barrel. The slide of the gun was all the way back; the weapon was empty.

He swallowed, felt blood running down along his jaw, and his head seemed to clear a little.

Greyman pulled his arms in and thumbed the release with one hand, dropped out the spent magazine. With the other hand he found a fresh clip and smoothly seated it into the hollow of the semi-automatic. The movement was comforting. It was familiar and friendly. He touched the weapon's slide release and the action snapped forward.

Through a haze, he abruptly realized that he was lying with one shoulder against the observation window. The aircraft was turned nearly ninety degrees now, with the port-side wing pointing downwards at the jungle. Absently he noticed a staggered line of yellow paint along the window's

border, and a red lever, and distantly, sluggishly—like a drooling retard—recognized the emergency exit.

In the darkness in front of him the lurid dance continued, seemingly in slow-motion. It was a scene from a hellish abattoir. Now and again the vision was illuminated by the terrible, flashing light from outside. Explosions of gun-fire continued to mingle with explosions of thunder.

Greyman yanked an incendiary grenade from his harness.

PANEL: And how many of the others made it out with you?

GREYMAN: Initially, I think ten or twelve actually cleared the aircraft. I'm not certain.

PANEL: With the aircraft in a rolling attitude as you've described, how could any of them gotten out at all?

GREYMAN: I really don't know how. I really don't fucking know. Poor bastards. I don't even remember exactly how I got out, let alone how the rest of them managed. Like I said, after I hit my head, things were fuzzy for a long time. I was in-and-out.

PANEL: What is the next thing you remember?

(pause)

GREYMAN: Being under silk.

PANEL: Okay, but you yourself weren't rigged for a static-line jump. You've already made some statement to that effect.

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: You would've needed to have the presence of mind to pull your own chute, but you've described being "fuzzy."

GREYMAN: Yes. I don't remember pulling my parachute. I don't know ... how.

PANEL: This was a low-altitude, low-opening jump, Major. The rest of your men were rigged static-line. Why not you?

GREYMAN: Personal preference.

PANEL: Major, did you see the lead C-130 anywhere in the area? Was unit one's aircraft visible at all?

GREYMAN: No.

PANEL: Presumably, they'd already packed it in by then?

GREYMAN: Presumably.

PANEL: And were you able to see your own aircraft?

GREYMAN: I remember spotting it after I'd looked up to inspect my canopy. It was west of me, pitching over into the jungle. The tail section was in flames.

PANEL: Did it appear that the flight crew might eventually regain control?

(pause)

PANEL: What happened next?

GREYMAN: I noticed several other parachutes around me, below me. I saw the valley and the river, and the DZ. There was an object ... a sphere.

PANEL: In the drop zone?

GREYMAN: Yes. A black sphere. Sort of semi-solid. Sitting low in the valley, nestled down in the trees. It was big.

PANEL: Describe it.

GREYMAN: Black. Glassy. Reflective. Semi-solid. I could see portions of the jungle canopy pushing up through the edges. The trees surrounding it appeared to be bent inward to some extent. It was big. It was fucking big.

PANEL: One hundred yards? Two hundred?

GREYMAN: It had to be nearly a mile in diameter. As I was descending and getting closer, I realized it was more like a huge, dense vapor bubble than anything else. I watched a few guys drop down into it; their parachutes passed right through, but the bubble maintained its solid appearance the entire time. Even the rain was penetrating it.

PANEL: Didn't the sphere show up in the aerial reconnaissance?

PANEL: Yes, something of that size should've been obvious.

PANEL: Walt, let me jump in here.

GREYMAN: (gesture of assent)

PANEL: Gentlemen, these are some of the high-altitude reconnaissance photographs ... Will you please pass them around? Major Greyman and myself and others scrutinized several dozen of these, along with other available data, in the hours prior to mobilization. As you can see, the object—the sphere—did show up in most of them. At first we didn't know what the hell it might be, and take my word for it when I say we wanted very much to write it off as some imperfection in the film. The very central region of the photos is mostly obscured, anyway. But when we picked out the dark, circular shape, it indicated a certain relationship to rift elements observed during testing in the RAINBOW Project. Eventually, after some checking, we saw how the shape and general nature of the object did in fact resemble certain “burn” patterns that had existed during the *Eldridge* disaster. Everything suggested another hole having been opened by someone or something in the Vaupes Valley. The sphere and the accompanying meteorological phenomena are both indications of space-time rift physics—Gate mechanics. Don't ask me the specifics. We don't even pretend to understand how any of it actually works; we never will. I don't think we're intended to. And so there was no way to prepare for something like that. That object—the sphere, the hole—was the main reason we sent Major Greyman and LOOKING GLASS in the first place.

(pause)

PANEL: What were the specs on the imaging, Colonel, if I may ask?

PANEL: I think most of the material that came back was at 400 res by 8200? Does that sound right, Bob?

PANEL: Yes, I think so.

PANEL: I'm sorry, please continue.

PANEL: Didn't you consider dropping to one side of the bubble, Major? Beyond it?

GREYMAN: I couldn't maneuver out of the way. I was dropping too fast; the rain drove me straight down on top of it. I passed through like the others, dropped down into the interior. There was a brief sensation of vertigo, and all the blood seemed to rush to my balls, but that was all.

PANEL: What was going on inside the sphere?

As he crouched in the jungle with the five remaining men, Greyman could hear automatic weapons-fire coming from the haze of mist and foliage ahead of him: intermittent, sporadic rattles from M-16s; the deeper, heavier clatter from a lone SAW. There were shouts, voices calling back and forth. A scream now and then. The rain was relentless, causing the landscape to seem surreal. Floating and dreamlike under the sepia-colored light. Otherworldly.

Greyman found himself wondering at the odd color and texture of the air. It was seemingly filled with near-invisible columns of drifting smoke, or dust, yet there was only the warm odor of the rain and the jungle. In the moments while he'd been descending toward the sphere, he'd envisioned it completely dark inside: a black cave that even the lightning could not penetrate. But the strange light inside had proven to be just as bright or brighter than the muddy afternoon outside. Aside from the sepia color and odorless smoke, there was practically no indication at all that they were in belly of the enormous, alien aberration.

Pushing the thought away, he glanced at the men crouching in the bush next to him. Each of them was intermittently scanning a different portion of the jungle, watching in all directions. Greyman pointed at himself and then pointed ahead. The five of them nodded, understanding that Greyman would take point once they began to move. All five of them were survivors from team two, and Greyman was more than a little surprised that a single one of them was still alive. All of them were bloody. Lieutenant Ellwood's sleeve was missing, had been burned off or torn off; blood ran the length of his arm, covered his knuckles and the plastic grip of his weapon. Captain Parrish, the officer closest to Greyman, was missing half of his left ear. His cheek and neck were bright red. His eyes were dark, unblinking, beaded with rain.

Greyman gestured again, this time at Parrish, holding up two fingers and waving them in front of his eyes. Parrish nodded, understood: he was to take up the rear and watch that nothing got in behind them.

Greyman motioned one last time, and the six of them began to move from cover.

It was a miracle they'd found each other at all in the confusion following the conflict over the drop zone. It was a miracle they hadn't shot one another in panic and fright after making it to the ground. Some very con-

fused people had dropped into that zone. Greyman had come upon Lieutenants Ellwood and Cross in the jungle not far from where he'd landed, each holding the muzzle of his pistol straight-armed into the other man's cheek. Sometime after that, he'd found Lieutenant Connor hacking frantically with a machete at boulders lining the river and cursing them, telling them not to make Baby Jesus cry. Some very fucking confused people. There had been some tense moments, but they'd eventually squared shit away and calmed down. Got to business. Everyone had taken orders. Training and experience had paid off. They'd continued.

Later, once it had become apparent that six was the best they could hope for, they'd settled momentarily in a thicket, spent a minute or two regrouping and reorganizing. They rapidly stripped away and discarded any damaged gear, shed absolutely anything and everything that was compromised or might get in the way of finishing the job. Everyone discarded more equipment than was truly necessary, and it was uncomfortable to watch; it was an unaccustomed sign of things to come, another tense moment, yet, in a way, somehow calming. Sedating. There was a shared sense of resignation after that. They didn't expect much now. They expected only to proceed in, to carry on—but nothing after that. They expected to go in and to investigate and to report, as per their instructions. Complete the mission. But nothing more. The radio suddenly became the most important piece of hardware. Connor and Cross took charge of it and protected it like a case of fine vodka.

All they needed to do now was make it all the way inside, make some observations, and radio the information out. All they needed was a little luck. The information would allow Delta Green to take the next step, whatever that step might be. If it meant a second mission and a second group of men, then hopefully those men would be luckier.

All they needed now was another miracle.

They were heading down a slope, in the direction of the center of the sphere, Greyman continually watching ahead of them. He walked slowly, deliberately, taking his time. Ahead of them, the clatter of weapons-fire had ended, but the crash of the rain on leaves and branches easily filled any gap. It was like a loud epitaph. In addition, a more subtle, more unnerving sound began to reach them, a thrumming sound, like a single sustained note on a pipe or flute, low and almost imperceptible, resonating through the saturated ground and undergrowth. Greyman felt it more than heard it—it was almost impossible to hear anything over the tumult of the rain. The vibration ran the length of his body, coursing from his feet and into the tips of his fingers, into his teeth. The six of them halted several times, straining to listen, to identify the sound: to call it out of shadow and give it a name. It defied them. And gradually it began to intimidate them.

"There's a rhythm to it," Greyman heard someone behind him say, over the rain. "A rhythm, man, like pebbles in calm water." (The light and the vibration were obviously beginning to affect them.)

Moments later the slope leveled out, and they abruptly came to a wide clearing. The humming was all around them: a forceful choir of diffuse, disembodied voices, out of which Greyman began to distinguish the pounding of a thousand distant drums beating in unison. Gradually, slowly. The drums became part of the choir—the humming—and after some moments, he perceived an approaching crescendo.

His little band never hesitated or stopped once they reached the clearing, not even after they began to comprehend what they were seeing, but kept walking, slowly. Those in back moved up and began to fan out.

They stepped carefully now.

This was unholy ground.

For Greyman, the scene was reminiscent of Southeast Asia. The forest floor was strewn with corpses. The large clearing was littered with them. There were bodies everywhere: mutilated and burnt, twisted and shapeless. Asia had always been just like this. If you looked up the word "Asia" in the encyclopedia, there would be a color photo of a jungle clearing just like this one, choked with of corpses. Corpses to your heart's content. Face-down in mud and leaves. Butchered. Chewed up and spit out.

Only here, the corpses were all naked. Greyman looked around two or three times to make certain. Yes, every one of them. Completely naked. They were the corpses of unit one. Mad Hatter. Greyman was certain he recognized some of the faces. There wasn't a stitch of uniform left on one of them. Every bit of personal equipment and gear was missing. No helmets, no weapons. No boots or socks. Not even a ring or watch.

Madness, Greyman thought. Madness. Yes, professor, most certainly and quite positively mad.

Mad as a hatter.

What was worse was that the genitals of unit one were missing too. It took a minute or two to pick out this single detail, but after Greyman had rolled one or two of them over, the fact was undeniable. Each man displayed a grisly hole between his legs, everything there having been scooped out cleanly. In every case the corpses of unit one had been relieved of their genitalia, along with a heaping helping of surrounding flesh. They were all like that. All of them. And the wounds were not accidental. No stray piece of shrapnel or random gunshot had done that—certainly not in every case. The wounds were all precise, surgical.

Greyman tried to recall if anything like this had been mentioned in the Philadelphia report from '43—when the seamen there that day had gone Beyond.

He couldn't remember anything like this.

"... *so have a heaping helping of our hospitality* ..." the tune came into Greyman's mind. Unconsciously, he began to hum the show theme song, mumbled through the lyrics.

He looked up, bringing his M-16 around as he did so, began strolling casually up the short incline of a broad mound, toward the precise center of the clearing, and of the sphere. He knew it had to be the precise center, because at the top of the mound was a vessel.

A proud sailing ship.

GREYMAN: I'm told the clean-up crew never found it.

PANEL: Is that right?

PANEL: Yes, uh, when we conducted the follow-up yesterday, the ship didn't turn up. The storm and the jungle eradicated any existing evidence that might've confirmed it had been there. And, of course, the sphere and all other associated phenomena were gone as well. We recovered the bodies, though, and we've since been able to identify them positively as Captain House and various members of both units one and two. How they got there we just don't know. The wreckage of the Hercules aircraft—both of them—has been located, but only the bodies of the flight crews were among the debris. There may have been a spatial shift.

PANEL: Was Parrish or Ellwood among the dead?

PANEL: No. They're listed with the missing. We have about eleven missing.

PANEL: What about the pelvic wounds?

PANEL: Autopsies indicate a sharp, metallic tool of exceptional craftsmanship. So exceptional, in fact, that it left no trace metals in the cut tissue.

(pause)

PANEL: Luke, will you tell the MP outside to have another pot of coffee brought in?

(pause)

PANEL: Please continue, Major.

GREYMAN: As I said, I think it must've been a 130-footer. A cabin cruiser. A yacht . . . of some kind. I'm not really acquainted with yachts, you understand. It was lying on one side. There wasn't any damage that I could see. It seemed mostly intact, but there was a lot of brine residue and scoring along the waterline, and scoring on the keel. It was rigged for sailing; I remember seeing the sails hanging off one side. In fact, now that I think about it, the sails were the only thing that seemed torn up. The rest of the boat seemed in good condition.

PANEL: How do you mean "scoring," Major?

GREYMAN: The hull was scraped up.

PANEL: Any idea what could've caused it?

GREYMAN: Lots of things could've caused it. But I think it was ice.

PANEL: Ice?

GREYMAN: Pack ice, like the kind you find at the Poles.

PANEL: What made you think of pack ice?

GREYMAN: There was plenty of it all over the top of the mound, under the ship's hull. Large blue chunks of it.

PANEL: You're saying there was arctic pack ice?

GREYMAN: I said pack ice—you said arctic. And, yes, there was lots of it all over the ground at the top of the mound. Everything had to have been there a while because a lot of the ice was melted, and later when I felt the ship's hull, I discovered it was air-temperature.

(pause)

PANEL: Did you notice any name or registration on the bow?

GREYMAN: *Templo Mayor*.

PANEL: Any other identifying markings?

GREYMAN: None.

PANEL: Are you pursuing that?

PANEL: Yes, we're looking into it.

PANEL: So, as you were proceeding up the hill, you were still feeling this vibration?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: Did you determine then that the vibration was in fact coming from the ship?

GREYMAN: It seemed to be. I put my hand out as I was walking, and ran it along the length of the hull. We were walking down to the end, in the direction of the rudder. There was a strong, constant tremor in the metal. I was going to climb up onto the deck when we came around to the other side, to see if I could get inside and find out what the humming was.

PANEL: What stopped you?

Vomiting.

They all stopped as they were moving past the stern. Greyman turned, watched as LaSalle, one of the lieutenants, vomited onto the top of a large slab of unmelted ice. All of them watched stupidly for a several seconds, uncomprehending, standing in the driving rain, and Greyman considered a loud reprimand for puking during operations recon.

But in a moment Greyman smelled it too, or perhaps his mind only just now acknowledged it, and he turned back.

An incredible rotten odor was finding them, coming around from the opposite side of the ship. From around the rudder.

Greyman stood exactly where he had stopped. Accompanying the odor, he'd caught the unmistakable sound of movement.

This was it.

Before anything else, before they took another step, they needed to report in.

He put an arm out, jerked it at Connor and Cross. The two men set immediately into motion: Cross rotating so that the radio pack hanging off his back was facing Connor; Connor yanking out the handset and initializing the call. All six of them had by now detected the sounds coming from ahead of them, and rapidly they were beginning to focus again.

The decaying stench that had found them came welling up slowly into Greyman's eyes and nose, and Greyman adjusted his breathing so that it

was slow and shallow, avoided taking in lungfuls of air. The odor was becoming overpowering. He couldn't imagine not smelling it until now.

LaSalle had succumbed to uncontrollable nausea. His being sick was unlike anything Greyman had ever seen.

LaSalle couldn't stop himself. He was gasping for air and choking, his hands twitching, his legs shaking, but fluid continued to force its way out of him. It was like watching some living thing inside him trying to wriggle free, crawl out through his throat.

He'd been instantly crippled by the reek, as surely as if having been shot. In a minute LaSalle was on his hands and knees, the others only watching in horror. Greyman realized that LaSalle wasn't getting up again.

Greyman eventually identified the smell—at least for the most part. Called it out of shadow and gave it a name.

Tuna.

Fishy, but not ocean-fishy.

It was the kind that men all over the world know well.

But this kind was wrong—really, really wrong. It was decayed. Festering. It was diseased. It smelled of jungle heat and rot, fungus and insects. The severe, rancid stink of it was burning Greyman's eyes, causing his gorge to lift. He blinked, shut his eyes tightly. A barrage of images had begun to stream into his brain, invoked by the unnameable exhalation. Images of stagnant lakes of filth. Lakes of nightmare. Lakes filled with corpses floating on peels of scum, steaming loops of shit, clots of pus and hair, maggots and vaginal blood.

With an effort, Greyman opened his eyes again, put his head back, letting rain fall into his face. He wanted so much for the sun to shine. This part of the country could be so inviting and generous when the sun was shining. It could be like heaven, with brightly colored birds, lizards, and monkeys, and a warm, saturated breeze.

Greyman put his head back down, adjusted the reassuring weight of his rifle in his right hand and pointed it at the corner of the rudder where they had to go. He was now sharply aware that they needed to go soon. They had to move very, very soon.

"Wonderland, Wonderland," Connor was saying, talking daringly loud, to be heard above the rain. "This is White Rabbit—radio check, over."

A diffuse, static voice came back: "White Rabbit, this is Wonderland. Standing by, over."

"Tell them everything you see," Greyman said without turning. "Tell them everything you can, then get out. Try to get to the extraction point."

With that, Greyman walked forward, hearing Connor behind him giving Delta Green their final words: "Wonderland, Wonderland, we have arrived at designated sector whiskey-alpha-king. Conditions report is as follows ..."



PANEL: Typically, you want to stay with your radiomen, Major, give them some cover and time to work.

GREYMAN: We were past that. Anything could've happened in those last moments, and I felt we were running out of time. The rest of us needed to get in and create whatever distraction we could while Connor and Cross made a report to mission control.

PANEL: You jumped the gun, Major.

GREYMAN: No, sir.

PANEL: The element of surprise was still on your side, but you pissed it away.

GREYMAN: No, sir. Any surprise we'd had was taken away when LaSalle became sick. He was very loud.

PANEL: You didn't know that.

GREYMAN: I was convinced of that.

PANEL: Nevertheless, you should've remained with those men.

GREYMAN: No, sir.

PANEL: What, did you somehow decide that they'd be safer behind you, Major—out of harm's way?

GREYMAN: In a way.

PANEL: Explain that to me, Major.

GREYMAN: I was giving Connor and Cross something the rest of us wouldn't have in the next few minutes.

PANEL: And that was?

GREYMAN: A chance. A chance to run.

(pause)

PANEL: That's the last you saw of LaSalle, Connor, and Cross?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: And Captain Parrish and Lieutenant Ellwood followed you around the back end of the ship.

GREYMAN: Yes. I still intended to get into the ship if I could, see what was causing the vibration.

PANEL: Major, had you concluded by then that this "hole" that you've talked about did in fact exist?

GREYMAN: Yes, a hole had been burned through at that location. But I think what we were seeing in the Vaupes Valley was the *exit* location for that hole. The ship, or whoever was aboard it, created the hole—the rift—someplace else and then passed through it, into Colombia.

PANEL: From?

GREYMAN: Anywhere. From the chunks of pack ice I'd guess somewhere near a polar region.

PANEL: Seems like a lot of trouble just to get from the pole to the equator—point A to point B.

PANEL: Where they started and where they ended up isn't nearly as important as where they were in between.

PANEL: What the hell does that mean, Ray? That they were making pit-stops along the way?

PANEL: As many as they wanted. In theory.

PANEL: For what?

PANEL: We don't have anything on that just now—it was nothing in our best interest, you can bet. But I'm not convinced that what they were doing was entirely successful. The evidence and Major Greyman's description of the site suggests that they may have run into problems somewhere along the way. Something went wrong, just like it did in Philadelphia. They lost control at some point.

PANEL: But originally they were hoping to use the yacht in much the same way that RAINBOW unintentionally used the *Eldridge*: to get through a hole, get outside, and then follow up on some agenda of theirs ...

PANEL: We think so. Someone was using that ship as a vehicle to burn through. Kill the barrier and get Beyond. Only they fucked up.

PANEL: Then the sphere was a by-product of the radiation from the hole, like the storm. It was only an emanation of some sort.

GREYMAN: It must've been some type of manifestation thrown off from the open end of the Gate. I noticed the quality of the light was changing. The odd color was fading.

PANEL: It was collapsing.

GREYMAN: The Gate had become unstable somehow—fortunately. It was winding down. The collective force was dissipating.

PANEL: LOOKING GLASS came in at the tail end, then.

GREYMAN: (nod)

PANEL: The hole was already closing in on its own?

GREYMAN: Apparently.

(pause)

PANEL: Then why kill Ellwood and Parrish?

The nightmare that greeted him made everything else seem like a nursery rhyme by comparison.

There were women in this nightmare, however. Beautiful women. At first that inexplicable fact seemed to make it a little better. There were half a dozen of them or more, thinly veiled in white fabric. Slender. Young. Interested. A feast for the eyes. Greyman noted an Asian woman with short hair and trim features, and then another, taller woman of Scandinavian descent. Near them he saw two women with honey-colored hair, the filmy, gauze fabric clinging loosely to their shoulders and breasts, beaded rainwater glimmering on their cheeks. Closer-at-hand was a woman whose skin glowed warm and ruddy; her legs stood out willfully from the meager

white fabric gathered about her waist, went on forever. Her hair was long and black, falling nearly to her hips with delicate curls along the length. The expression of awareness on her face and in her eyes was intoxicating.

They were entertaining the men of unit one.

Walter Greyman was transfixed. His subconscious was abruptly falling blindly over its own feet, and he suddenly felt as though he'd never walk again. He'd never again find the use of his legs. He'd never again move from that spot. Though his eyes were giving him the facts, the plain truth, his head hotly disputed them. Some of the men from unit one had survived. Even now Greyman watched as the soldiers stood naked amidst the veiled women, arms outstretched, basking in the women's caresses, delighting in their attentions. Greyman watched as the veiled women serviced them, knelt in front of them or half hung by supple arms around their necks. The soldiers were soaking it up like a sudden, unexpected grant of shore leave at some wild port. They didn't seem to care about the rain, or about the choking stench or the bodies of companions lying amidst the deadfall around them. They were overcome with lust. They only basked; they only delighted.

The veiled women had noticed Greyman watching, and they seemed to approve. With the arrival of their new audience, the women increased their efforts at the work they were performing upon the men of unit one. Shamelessly, they cavorted with greater enthusiasm, playfully removing folds of their flimsy wraps for Greyman to see more. They were anxious and impatient to show Greyman their willingness. Their appetite. They wanted to show him everything. They slipped their hands and lips, tongues and teeth over the men, all the while gazing again and again at Greyman. They moved slowly and obscenely, their hips rising and falling. They licked their fingers. They came up for air, held their breath and went down for more.

The thousand distant drums beating in unison was more apparent now. It was a blanket being pulled over the top of the jungle, rushing over the tops of the trees like a great bird.

Greyman's brain was on fire. He struggled to breathe. He'd lost the feeling in both his arms, could no longer feel the weight of his rifle. He wanted very much to use the rifle right then, but he could no longer tell whether his right hand still clutched the weapon, or where it was pointed. He couldn't even be sure that he was still alive. He shouted. To himself or to the veiled women, he didn't know. The shout was unintelligible. It was hardly a word. It was guttural. A cry from an ape. It was a noise.

It was a noise.

A noise for a party.

PANEL: Major? ...

PANEL: Major? ...

PANEL: Major Greyman ... Walt ...

It was a party.

It was an orgy. A Goddamn Coke-Induced, Turned On, Tuned Out, High-As-A-Far-Out-Fucking-Monkey, Freakin' Good Time Orgy.

The men of unit one didn't care because they hadn't survived after all.

There were no survivors.

Only marionettes.

Puppets.

There was a wide, dark, burned-out wound at the nape of the neck of the soldier nearest Greyman. The color of the skin of most of his upper torso was black and brownish, like burnt cardboard. Scapulae and spine were stripped of skin and meat, and shown out brightly from the cavity. Yet the soldier was standing, arms out and palms turned upwards at the sky. An entreaty to heaven. Rain pelted his burned lips, his unseeing eyes, and he gently tossed his head in awful rapture. Now and again he gazed down into the face of his tormentor.

The veiled woman. The woman of ruddy, vibrant complexion and raven's hair, whose delicate ankles now tensed in the mud and leaves as she poised in front of the soldier, pressing close to his chest and kissing him.

There was a harsh, wet, peeling sound, like a thick rind was being removed from a grapefruit, and the veiled woman brought up her hand from where it had been between the dead soldier's legs. The severed member was still rigid, still twitching wantonly. Spilling seed. In the woman's other hand, Greyman glimpsed the reflective

reflective shining four obsidian faces angles polyhedron concave

Device.

The soldier fell like a bag of wet sand.

Greyman yelled wordlessly again.

(... and have a heaping helping of our hospitality!)

Where was his rifle? What had happened to his rifle?

The veiled woman didn't bring the Device over to him as Greyman feared she was about to.

Not yet.

"Oh, man, that is some righteous rhythm!" Ellwood said. "Goddamn, what a rhythm! That's science! That rhythm is science! Rhythm down into my bones!"

The veiled woman took the throbbing morsel to the nearby edge of the jungle where, somehow unnoticed until now, the enormous, gall-covered ban-

yan tree stood on fat goat legs behind the table of rock, an octagonal block of darkest stone. The woman placed the morsel atop this altar, amidst a pile of other bleeding morsels offered to the tree. But of course it wasn't a tree. Within its rugose bulk, below the tentacle branches, Greyman thought he could discern the vague form of an immense, eyeless female face, passive and complacent, and, below that, her random mass of breasts and fissures. The mammoth abortion which had until that moment been motionless, unmoving, like a temple colossus, suddenly took breath. Several of the enormous vaginas covering Her bulged outward momentarily to inspect the new addition, malignantly slavered over it, exuded more of their hateful stink. Her mass of immense, corpulent tentacle arms swaying together in the dimness and far overhead wavered and rattled for a second, then settled. Rows of slick and distended teats quivered and bobbed from the motion. The enormous, bristled, cloven-hoofed legs that extended from between and within the vaginas shuffled once, were still again. The insane face went on expressionlessly, like the face of a serene Buddha.

Greyman hadn't wanted to look at It—at Her—again; he didn't want to see Her, acknowledge Her, as he had only seconds earlier, but his eyes had followed the lithe figure of the raven-haired woman like two traitors. After he had initially glimpsed the apparition the first time, immediately after he had rounded the corner of the ship, his mind had at once ignored it. In that single moment, Greyman had successfully blocked out that end of the scene, that corner of the nightmare. He'd successfully cheated once; he couldn't do it again. Now he was caught. Now he couldn't look away. The abomination filled his sight. The thousand drums were sounding.

He had hoped with all his heart, might, mind, and strength that this day would never come for him. He'd hoped that somehow he'd continue to avoid it, cheat it. There had been times in the past during his stay with Delta Green when he'd believed that the cheating was over, that the day had finally come. He was finally going to have the experience that no Delta Green operative wanted, one that precious few had survived to tell about. Walter Greyman would finally have his chance to look truly Beyond and understand. He'd finally hear the words. He'd see them. He'd come to understand their meaning. But he'd always somehow managed to escape at the last moment. Escape without contact, his mind intact. He hadn't seen. He'd hoped the cheating would last forever, but had somehow known that the hope was in vain.

This day was inevitable.

The day he fell amidst the personal and profound company of a Great Old One. Welcome to the party.

PANEL: Shut up! Shut the hell up!

PANEL: To hell with this, Bob! This is bullshit!

PANEL: Sit down, Harry.

PANEL: Gentlemen, please, let's try to get through this.

PANEL: Sit, down, Harry.

PANEL: We have no evidence to the contrary.

PANEL: That's right: we've got no evidence to deny or confirm—

PANEL: Major Greyman, tell us again, was it only an impression, a guess? Or in your own mind were you convinced of this particular deity's participation?

PANEL: *Deity?!*

PANEL: Deny or confirm, my ass.

PANEL: We shouldn't do a knee-jerk on this, Harry. We don't necessarily know.

PANEL: For God's sake.

GREYMAN: (Fuck.)

PANEL: Major? Please answer the question.

PANEL: Will you sit the hell down?!

GREYMAN: Deity, epiphany, avatar, congressional representative—whatever—yes. Yes. She was there, if only as a manifestation. Yes. Ramera Cabra. Canon Meretrix. The Lady Harlot Superior. The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young. Shub-Niggurath.

The veiled women—the priestesses—were offering the still-living penises to the goat lady. As Greyman continued to watch, he became numb. Every minute he watched, he became weaker. He tried hard to shut his eyes, and without warning he was suddenly successful.

It was heaven. The numbness and the dark was like a slice of heaven. For a time he was alone and far away, and in that he searched for his missing rifle, searched for the sensation of the trigger.

Eventually, though, the rain and the thunder and the odor brought him back to the nightmare. He opened his eyes.

To his horror he saw Ellwood standing ahead of him, facing away from him with arms outstretched. He had undressed, all of his clothing and gear gone without a trace. His head was tilted back painfully, pointed at the sky. A voluptuous woman was standing beside him, one hand stroking Ellwood's ass, the other hand intimately in front of him, out of Greyman's view. She was gazing at Ellwood, smiling vampirically with eyes half closed, her blonde hair shimmering, her heavy breasts swaying. Ellwood was reciting or singing as the veiled woman worked at him. "A rhythm out here on its own so long, so long, and so far, so far ... yellow and shining, man, shining ..." Greyman heard him saying, but it was all he could catch.

Then Greyman jumped, for a soft arm had slipped up from behind and soft fingers were grazing his chin and the collar of his shirt. The raven-haired woman stepped around beside him, and with her other arm she cupped the back of his neck and brought her face up close to his. She did not embrace him fully, but made certain to stand away an inch or two, in order that Greyman might gaze down at the length of her. She wanted him to see all of her. And he did. It was like looking directly into the sun. Her eyes were green and brown at the same time, heart-rendingly beautiful, astonishingly deep and clear.

Her cheekbones were high, carefully and perfectly sculpted. Her mouth, and the skin of her neck and shoulders, was sublime. Milky, beaded nipples stood out high on breasts of pearl, accenting the healthy, reddish glow of her hips and legs. She was more appealing than Greyman could ever have imagined, asleep or awake, and he trembled. He caught the scent of her, and the enthralling bliss of her perfumed flesh pushed out the jungle and the stink and the rot and everything else. Her splendor was crippling, her absolute brilliance undeniable. Greyman found himself wanting to tear his own eyes out from the sheer pain of it.

He felt a stirring between his legs. The veiled woman smiled affectionately, put a warm, gentle hand under his load-bearing harness and past his shirt, into his breeches.

"Science!" Ellwood shouted just before a dwindling flicker of lightning, and again there came the wet sound of a thick rind being torn away from fruit.

Thunder followed, but only after several seconds.

Greyman was still staring at the sun, burning tears mingling with rain on his cheeks.

God, she was beautiful.

How could he have gone all these years without her? How had he survived without the radiant warmth of her care and attention? Her nurturing, her approval? What had possessed him to seek or desire anything

other than her? What had possessed him? He'd been a fool before now, his life wasted on cheap and meaningless pursuits. He'd been aimless, unproductive. Worth nothing.

In front of him, the blinding enigma of true love stared back from inside a black mane, wordlessly and warmly embraced him, calmed him. Cupped him. Fondled him. Told him how good he felt.

Yes, he felt fucking good. Didn't he?

Of course he felt good; he was still staring at the sun.

Only now his left hand discovered something familiar, friendly.

She nuzzled him, softly bit the fold of his ear and whispered, telling him to lie back into Her arms. She told him to let it happen. Told him to enjoy the sensation of her hands on him, her breath on him. She was there for him. She cared for him. She understood. She'd *never* go away.

She'd always be there.

She'd always be right there.

Greyman was flushed, enraptured.

He was breathing easily now, the panic and the abject horror was draining from him. Anxiety and apprehension were being rapidly washed away, were being replaced by limitless satisfaction. He was weightless, floating. The paralyzing fear was gone, and an unnameable exhilaration filled him as he was set free. His chin gradually tilted toward heaven, toward immortality.

There were explosions of sound.

Greyman stumbled back.

The raven-haired woman was on the ground in front of him, an ichor of yellow and red discharging from her limp body. Greyman had fired repeatedly. The .45 in his left hand was empty, smoking.

He glanced down at his other hand, saw that his rifle was no longer there. They had taken it from him, thrown it Beyond and let it burn.

He looked up as he began to collect himself, dropped the spent magazine of the .45 and reloaded.

Ellwood was still on his feet, his arms still outstretched. Greyman stepped up quickly beside him, saw that his eyes were still staring and wide. Conscious. Aware. Staring toward heaven, staring at the sun. Between his thighs, Greyman observed the distinctive, scooped wound. Ellwood was trembling, his legs shaking in effort and pain, his entire body convulsing uncontrollably.

Ellwood was basking. Ellwood was Delighting.

Mad as a hatter.

Greyman stepped back behind the soldier and straight-armed his pistol into the space behind Ellwood's left ear.

GREYMAN: I found Parrish the same way, a few yards back.

PANEL: Naked?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: Arms extended?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: The same type of wound, but he was still alive, conscious—?

GREYMAN: Yes, yes, yes. Yes.

PANEL: And you executed him as well, in the same manner, with the pistol.

(pause)

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: What happened to the women?

GREYMAN: I don't know. I didn't see them. I didn't really look back at all. I was running.

PANEL: And you don't remember seeing Connor, Cross, or LaSalle on the way out?

GREYMAN: No.

PANEL: You never tried to get back to the ship, get inside.

GREYMAN: Not that I remember. Investigation and observation was no longer much of a priority for me.

PANEL: Do you remember anything from between the time you left the site and the time you arrived at the extraction point?

GREYMAN: No, not really. There was a lot of jungle, a lot of dark fucking jungle. I remember ... I think I remember ... um ... checking my compass once or twice maybe. I don't know. I was running.

PANEL: Major, I have the flight crew's report here, the helicopter flight crew that met you at the extraction point—do you remember the extraction point?

GREYMAN: Yes.

PANEL: The crew's report states that you were incoherent and apprehensive, and that you insisted no one besides you was still alive; you apparently said—I'm quoting the report here—"The rest of them are ground beef." You also ordered them to lift off immediately, instead of waiting to see if anyone else was coming out. The report further states that upon entering the helicopter, you attacked one of the gunners, pushing him away from his weapon mount, and then opening fire with the '60 from the door, "firing without regard into the forest surrounding the LZ." Do you recall any of that?

GREYMAN: Uh, yes. Yes.

PANEL: Any comment?

(pause)

PANEL: Are the actions described here accurate?

GREYMAN: Yes.

(pause)

PANEL: You were returned to base operations at Guantanamo and placed in the secured wing of the naval hospital. Do you remember that?

GREYMAN: I remember the hospital.

(pause)

PANEL: Is there anything else you would like to add, Major?

(pause)

041230Z MAR 69

Closing notes/Summary:

The debriefing panel of 20Jan69 found Major Walter Greyman innocent of any wrongdoing, impropriety, and/or reckless endangerment of the men under his command during the reconnaissance mission LOOKING

GLASS. Greyman was subsequently cleared of any and all charges of misconduct concerning the events of 18Jan69. He was declared psychologically fit and returned to duty shortly after.

Greyman has since returned to Colombia and has accepted command overview assignment for Delta Green's covert monitoring of civil anthropological and archeological endeavors currently ongoing at the Vaupes Valley site. Recent excavations at the site conducted by a joint Colombian-American expedition have revealed the existence of an exceptionally large and intricate temple, of seemingly Olmec or Toltec design, with extensive adjoining megalithic courts and antechambers. The temple's time of construction has initially been dated at approximately 350 B.C., though the architecture and general style of the temple is overall inconsistent with Intermediate Andean cultures predominant in the Amazon valley regions of that period. Intercepted communications from the site have also revealed that many of the seals of the temple entryways remain unbroken, the contents of the great temple presumably left undisturbed.

As of this date, however, the exact nature or ceremonial purpose of the temple has not been satisfactorily explained or specified, nor has the temple's patron god been identified.

They're calling the new-found temple and surrounding earthworks *Casa de Xibalba*—House of Xibalba. Xibalba is the name of the ancient Mayan underworld; it was the place through which all people must travel in order to achieve regeneration.

Delta Green and Major Greyman's surveillance of the expedition's efforts continues.

Captain Darrin Dicappriot, U.S.Army

As a personal note, Walter confided in me just before departing for duty assignment in South America. Walt Greyman has been a friend of mine for some years. At that time he lifted the shirt of his uniform and pointed out a small, dark marking or tattoo on his stomach, directly above his navel. The mark was a solid black trapezoid with a black flame centered near the top. I was unable to identify the symbol, never having seen anything like it before. Walt told me that the mark hadn't been there before the day Looking Glass had gone to Colombia. He said it had appeared sometime during that terrible afternoon, and that he'd only discovered it afterwards while in bed at the Guantanamo military hospital. He intentionally omitted it from his testimony at the debriefing, not knowing what it was.

But then he told me that he knew now what the symbol meant, and that he was returning to Colombia to watch and to wait. He wanted to prepare a proper reception.

"They marked me," he said. "I'm the one that got away. The *Templo Mayor* was forced to leave without me; they ran out of time. But they'll be back. They'll be coming back for me. This mark is a promise. It demonstrates a pledge and a covenant. It's a promissory note from Beyond." ▲

▲ ▲ ▲

▲ ▲ ▲

“I UNEARTHED A DOG-EARED COPY OF
ALIEN INTELLIGENCE FROM BENEATH
THE STAINED PILLOW OF A HOOKER
IN HUEHUETENANGO.

SOMETHING PULLED ME INTO THE PAGES,
AND AFTER A LONG NIGHT OF IGNORING
THE WOMAN, READING FEVERISHLY,
I EMERGED WITH MY MIND ON FIRE,
FILLED WITH THE IRRESISTIBLE IMPULSE
TO SHOOT ANYTHING THAT LOOKED
THE LEAST SUSPICIOUS.

AS A TRAINING TEXT FOR YOUNG MUTANTS,
I CANNOT ENDORSE IT TOO HIGHLY.”

— LUCIUS SHEPARD

VISIT DELTA GREEN ON THE WEB AT

WWW.DELTA-GREEN.COM

TOP SECRET

THIS IS A COVER SHEET

FOR CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

ALL INDIVIDUALS HANDLING THIS INFORMATION ARE REQUIRED TO PROTECT IT FROM UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURE IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES.

HANDLING, STORAGE, REPRODUCTION AND DISPOSITION OF THE ATTACHED DOCUMENT WILL BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH APPLICABLE EXECUTIVE ORDER(S), STATUTE(S) AND AGENCY IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS.

(This cover sheet is unclassified.)

TOP SECRET