# HORROR RECOGNITION GUIDE



# HORROR RECOGNITION GUIDE

I don't know what happened to them.
Dead? Gone? Can't say. But this is their record. These are the things they encountered.
Use it well.

-Michael Moryken,
Task Force: VALKYRIE



Alicia.

Fine. You've got me by the balls here. Your information better not disappoint. Let me reiterate the terms of our deal in writing, just so we're clear.

I hand over the entire contents of the Hahnemann cell (they meet, generally, in a nondescript brown building on the Hahnemann University Hospital campus, though they simply refer to themselves as "The Support Group"). In return, you give me:

*First: Financial support. Yes. The economy is in the shitter. Yes, our agency is suffering as a result. The election made it very clear what's important to the voters, and so money's trickled away. Given that everybody needs their heartburn meds and antidepressants, I assume your company continues to have the overwhelming resources, and we appreciate any spillover that occurs. No, this deal is not something I'm kicking up the chain. More and more, we're forced to act independently from the larger organization (the files within are perfect evidence that one hand does not know what the other is doing anymore), so I'm making this call. If it bites me, it bites me.*

*Second: Any information you have on the ENE known as "the Driver." I understand your files are extensive, and I hope the trade will be full and without equivocation. These files for that file.*

*Those are the terms of this deal. Now, a few things about what waits within.*

The Hahnemann cell ("Support Group") went missing three months and two weeks ago. Our mole on the inside showed up for the meeting one night and found the room empty of all its furniture. Room was spotless, cleaned of all fingerprints except for what we found on the center of the floor, comprising the length and width of a single square of linoleum tile. There, "written" in fingerprints, was a Sator Square. (SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS; roughly, "The sower creeps and holds the wheels with effort.")

Their apartments were left untouched. One of the cell, however, had been a "compiler" for the group, keeping tabs on all their encounters - what he occasionally referred to jokingly as a "Horror Recognition Guide." We took the files and have gone through them, but have not yet had the time or resources to follow up on them. They are your problem now.

If the files are a little confusing, too bad. We've taken some notes, and I'm including them in here. Also, the cell took its own notes. Again, it's your job to filter through it to make sense of it all. I admit to a bit of self-satisfaction on that point.

Good luck, Miss Mangum.
Michael Moryken, Unit Commander
Liberty Unit

KEYSTONE PHARMA LLP
A SUBSIDIARY OF THE CHEIRON GROUP

Michael:

Glad you finally accepted our deal. I knew if we dangled the right carrot, we could work together.

Thanks for doing all the heavy lifting. Somehow, this cell got hold of a number of sensitive documents from our organization and a number of other…lesser groups. Not to mention what they had of yours. Concerning, but informative. And we have no idea what happened to the cell? They've gone off radar entirely?

Perhaps we can score some allies out of this. Then again, maybe not. If only we can get them to sign on the line that is dotted, right?

Hey, remember. The offer's still open in case you want to grab that drink sometime. Your call. Don't be such a cold fish. We're friends now, right?

Sincerely,

Alicia Mangum,

Alicia Mangum

Senior Associate Director of Biotech

Keystone Pharma, LLP
Division of TCG

Files not in proper order: send to Schiffman, have him reorder according to chronology, not to File tab names (which are ill identified, anyway — no wonder these small-time cells so often implode or get dead).

Then again, they had a number of informants — one of which had to be TFV or Cheiron? Can't be sure. Had access to sensitive Files (included). Doesn't make any sense.

After Schiffman, send to the Gigrun team in D.C.: Rosewood, Mahanadu and Wicznewski can look this stuff over, try to make better sense out of it than I can. Notes below.

## 1: BLOOD DOLLS 11




Eddie Ford? Wasn't part of cell? Someone in cell got hold of his work?
Where'd they get parts of a Cheiron manual? We kept an eye on some of this; more fingers in this pie than we'd realized.
Alexis=TFV informant? Check VI-GRID records, or have Schiffman check them.

## 2: THE CAT LADY 23



Bryan Rafferty. Total fuck-up. Amazing he lived through all this. Was journo major. College dropout.
Looks like "Jess" and "Ian" (aliases?) compiled his notes.
Not TFV. Third party? Not part of Hahnemann cell?
Cat Lady=???

3: OLEG CHERNENKO 35

Marko Kradzic: Yuri Zhivkov? Gone from hospital. Cameras show nothing.

Revivified ENE?



4: CITY OF GHOSTS 49

Emails between Greg Gendack (YA/child author), "Ernie Fish" (jazz musician)? Standard ghost-hunter bullshit. Why is it people always go nuts hunting for specters?

Notes from Jack Bleak — occult cult wackaloon — how is he involved in all this? Did someone in that cell communicate with him? (If so, that explains a lot; JB's tied to a number of strange disappearances.)



5: CLOSE ENCOUNTER 73

Bryan Rafferty again. Jess, Ian do the compiling. Confused as to their identities. I know they're not Null M, can't be Mangum's people.

Who is iofthepyramid71@ufology.net? Unknown; cannot track.

False extraterrestrial encounter. Photos surely doctored. Someone's just messing with Mr. Rafferty. Surely.



## 6: FROSTBITE GIRL 85



Rafferty again. Jess, Ian's compilers, whoever they are. Carol transcribes some of it.

Shakes since abandoned job at Food Lion. Whereabouts unknown. Searched locker at store, found only a pair of rotten apples and a little burlap satchel of thorns.

## 7: GILLEN, EMILY 99



Andy Kaplinski. Philly native. Bank teller. Also: who is GreenLight? Officer Rodriguez — a uni officer with city police. Ends Gillen. This what sets her on the vigil? Gets her in with the cell?

Gillen's compare files with VASCU — similar to Dr. Belinda Gooding?

## 8: GNOSOPHARM 121



John goes off rails, leaves wife (?) — wife is Janice, no last name. Brother Scott, comatose.

Who is Smith, Logos? Cultic activity; false possession case? Hypnotic suggestions? Could be real. Yes, we have people to ask about this, but cross-ref with Alicia. She'll know who to ask.

Check system; Martin ("Victor") reports to somebody, obviously doesn't like him. We were all over this cell for how long? And I didn't know about it? One hand doesn't know what the other is doing. (That email address for "Major" goes nowhere; just a dump addy.)

## 9: THE MARKET 169



Andy Kaplinksi again — ? Also see "Emily Gillen," but I think this occurs <u>before</u> the Gillen situation. GreenLight again. Member of the Hahnemann "support group" cell? Or sideways informant? I suspect a plant. Then again, I always suspect a plant.

No conclusions. Close File on this: too much speculation. Market location unknown. Kaplinski fever dream?

## 10: THE OGRE 191



Jacob= Null M? Emma= fake name, actually a Netzo man, real name: Mike. Companion of Emily/Mike's — Tracker, Netzo, deceased, killed by ENE. Not sure who compiler notes are from. "M"? Cross-ref with Martin ("Victor"), see if our hands are on this one, too.

Bulldog, Shakes — know each other? CCTV footage outside Wawa indicates such.

## 11: SHY'S KILL 209



Hickman= another Philly PD with Rodriguez, a "forensic acctnt." Not really a hunter? Satanists: Linda Chatzi, Alton Strader, Darren List, Gabriel Church (perhaps an alias), Skye McMahon. Bill Beck is "Regular Joe." Compiler= M again?

Emails between Rafferty and Rodriguez.

"Gray Wolf of NO Philly" — been trying to bring her in for a year now. Check out Shy's Kill. Put a van on it, eyes and ears.

## 12: SNAKE VS. BIRD 227

Ernie Fish — musician again (he plays Khyber, Tin Angel). Transcripts with Robin Garter? Unknown. The shift from Robin to Theresa — a mistake in the transcript, plainly.

JB again. How is he bound to this cell? He must be from Philly area.

"Man in the coat"? Whole thing reads like a hallucination. Known that carriers of Vigil develop mental disabilities (schizophrenia common); may begin to "invent" details to justify what they do.



## 13: TEN PHOTOGRAPHS 247

Doug O'Neill — disappears before the Hahnemann cell? "Marcie," too? She the first disappearance, long-time ago? Did the rest follow? Run search: David Kitchen.

No idea what to make of this. Like Snake vs. Bird, tempted to ignore it, move on.

The memo concerns me: is it TCG? Mention of MIBS; not us; must be Mangum's people. Or VASCU?

Does this story give a clue as to where this "support group" goes? (Cross-ref: Philadelphia Experiment.)

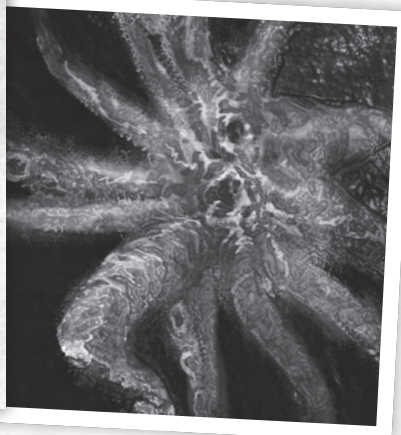


## 14: THING FROM THE DEEP 263

B. Rafferty. Not sure about Satanists. Cross-reference with "Shy's Kill" file when time allows. Probably same cabal. Also: keep eye on Fenstermacher. Possible AKD, but probable reality deviant ENE.

Jess and Ian again. Wondering: run a search in the ABE area? Unlike Philly, ABE has lots of unaffil. cells.

Sgt. Rebworth thinks ultra-dimensional ENE; I say terrestrial, biological born of pollutants, not unheard of. Check files: Alisha [last name unknown].



## 15: THE VIVISECTION 277

Officer C. Rodriguez, again, to boot. Would love to ask her some ????s, if only the whole damn cell hadn't gone missing. (Ref: "Ten Photographs.")

Who is the informant here?

No indications of this being Cheiron lab, but wouldn't be the first time.

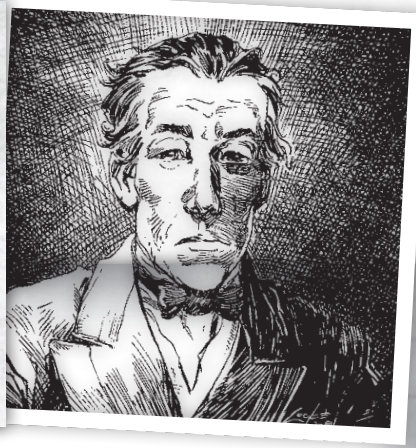


## 16: THELEME AND MAMAN 299

Track down SD, Susan Doyle (post-grad, English). Gone off reservation. CDW= ours. HDI= ours, the prick. Part of Skinfaxi surveillance team. Transfer to Hrimfaxi on-the-ground squad? Put with Gabreski.

Last in order (despite alpha inconsistency) — the Chevalier (PT) is a big fish, deserves the attention. Big asterisks here. Exclamation points. High priority.

He could answer a lot of our questions, I think.

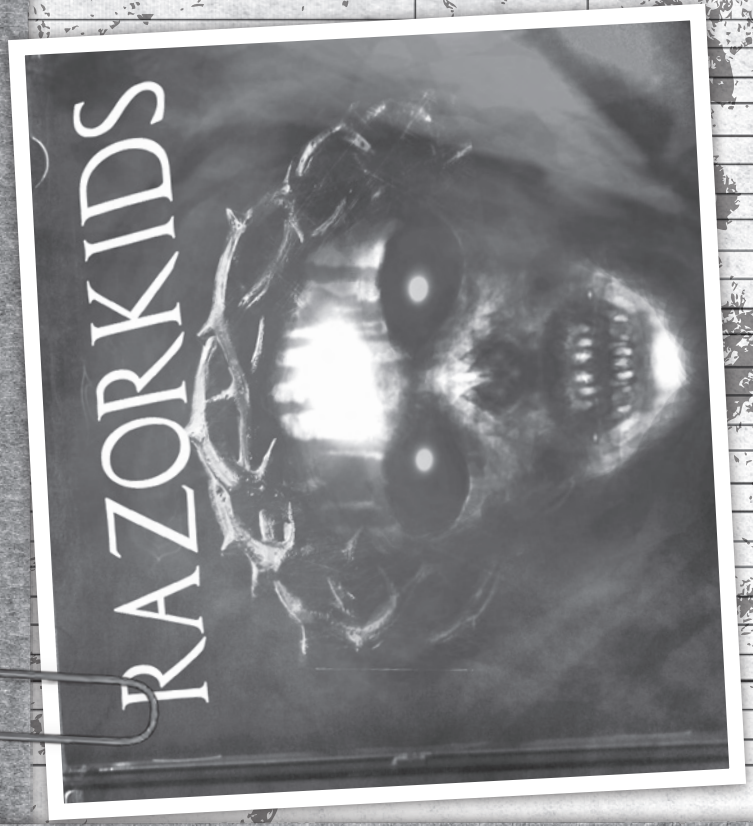


This is a sad ship, sprung many a leak. How they get hold of sensitive TCG and TWILIGHT documents? Patch leak. Tell Wicznewski (The Wiz) to devote all his attention to finding the source. Patch leak with a bullet.

CASE FILE HRG 00001

# BLOOD DOLLS

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



**From:** alexis@romanus-law.com
**To:** pa.nj.de.md.msa.inbox@domops.projects.tfv.mil
**Date:** Mon, Apr 21, 2008 at 8:40 AM
**Subject:** Fwd: Fwd: Blood Dolls

FYI.

Make payment the usual way.

A.

**From:** editorial@thephillyalt.com
**To:** alexis.priority@romanus-law.com
**Date:** Mon, Apr 21, 2008 at 8:02 AM
**Subject:** Fwd: Blood Dolls

Alexis,

It's what you thought. I'm forwarding this to you to see what we can salvage or change, and how much to pay Eddie (or otherwise deal with him).

Naturally, we won't go with the article as written. Call me via our batphone ASAP. While you're at it, I'd like to set up my next treatment. It's been 21 days.

Peter Goldfinch
Editor in Chief | The Philly Alt
Email editorial@thephillyalt.com
"The Incestuous Side of Brotherly Love. Music and Cultural Mayhem since 1991"

**From:** e.ford@thephillyalt.com
**To:** editorial@thephillyalt.com
**Date:** Sun, Apr 20, 2008 at 10:40 PM
**Subject:** Blood Dolls
---------- Forwarded message ----------

Hi Pete,

I'm putting this article in the email text because I know you'll reformat anyway (and to be perfectly frank, I hate the software you use in the office).

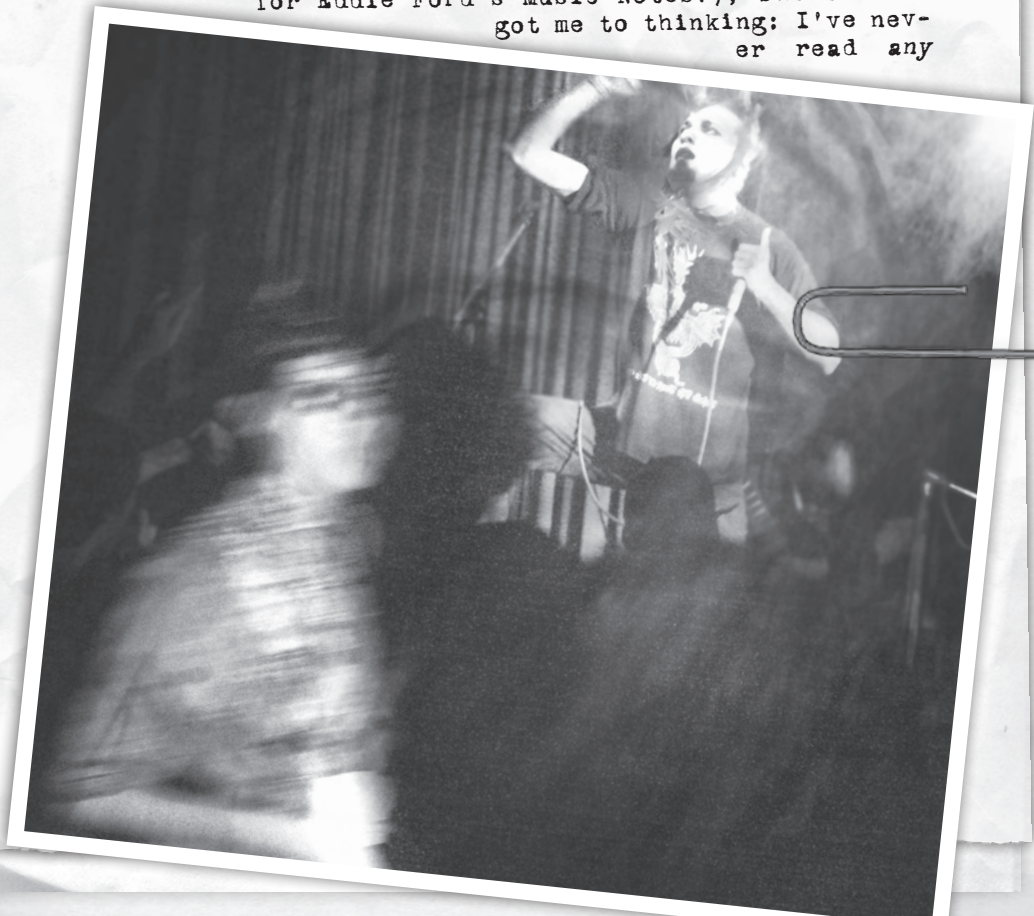
I think it's hot — really hot. We're going to be the first weekly in the country to talk about this scene. So without further ado…

# BLOOD DOLLS

**Secretive, Eccentric and Rich: Meet the Post-Goth Underground**

Talk to older Goths in the Philly scene, and you'll hear a lot of bitching. There aren't as many good club nights as there used to be. The subculture has fragmented between Rivetheads, Darkwave fans, 1980s retro and whatever else your informant can define and, in all likelihood, condemn. The kids are too young; the corporate Goths are too old. Outsiders may think the dour mood at venerable institutions like Nocturne is natural, but anybody who's been around knows that some of the old enthusiasm has worn down a bit. The black-clad set hunch over their tables; cliques keep to themselves.

That only seems to change when there's a big event, like it did on Saturday, when the Razorkids came to town with half a dozen supporting acts in tow. Billed "The Biggest Indoor Festival in Dark Music," the Kids and their support came with all the trimmings of a mid-size rock act, down to hairy roadies and a big black tour bus. They cruised in on Friday. Originally, this article was going to be an interview with them, but they never returned my call. That pissed me off (shouldn't *every* band passing through town spare a moment for Eddie Ford's Music Notes?), but it also got me to thinking: I've never read *any*



interview with them. My name's not Darke RavenAngel or anything, but I like to think I'm pretty well informed for an outsider. I made some calls, sent some emails - and the results intrigued me.

The Razorkids didn't *ever* give interviews. In fact, most of their PR is word of mouth. Their albums are available by email only. There isn't even an official web page. In other cities, music scenesters all told the same story: the band rolled into town with some expensive gear, played to half-full clubs, sold a few CDs and shirts and moved on, without a thing to indicate why they can blow so much money on touring expenses.

This led me to my second idea, a how-dare-you-refuse-my-interview revenge piece called "Trust Fund-Powered Darkness." It seemed to me that the band was a rich kid's hobby; some CEO was pouring cash into his son's or daughter's pet project. Unfortunately, that didn't pan out. I couldn't find a thing about three of the six Razorkids. The rest seemed to be typical middle-class types; Mom and Dad would be too busy with mortgage payments. So after a few hours of wasted research, I dragged my sorry ass to Nocturne for some old-fashioned legwork.



I was pretty ashamed by the matter-of-fact response. "Oh, them," said bartender Angie Stairns. "The Kids are a Blood Doll thing. The Dolls pay for everything."

It was time to get out the fishnets and pouting.

**It's Good to be King**

His name was Dan. The first thing I learned about Blood Dolls is that they use a mutant version of the 1990s Goth Name trend, but where those kids used to (and, sometimes, still do) use names like Auric Everdark, Blood Dolls go for the generic: Dan, Jennifer, Bill. They don't have last names, fake or real.

"We like privacy," said Dan, "though we do want to make a bit of money this time around." Dan dresses like a Corporate Goth: all business attire, save for some fancy boots and a turtleneck. Beside him, Jennifer's wearing a long, red dress with a high neck and triangular sleeves that fasten at the middle finger. They like to cover up; she called it "stimulating modesty."

Blood Dolls support their bands the way aristocrats used to keep pet poets and painters. Where does the money come from? "We invest together," said Dan. "Nobility isn't just a state of mind - it's economic. To join us, one of the things you have to do is pay a tithe. Even if you don't start with much, if they choose you - I mean, if we choose you, we help you better yourself."

The Blood Dolls treat themselves like underground lords and ladies. They despise vulgarity. Aside from a discreet nose ring or two, body piercings are rare. Visible tattoos are forbidden. I dug out my High-School Goth getup, but they responded with such palpable disdain that the next night, I met them in a business outfit.

They all acknowledge that their tastes aren't for everyone. "There's a reason why we're nobles, and they," said Dan, nodding to the dance floor, "are not." Still, the Razorkids are touring festival-style this year because their patrons are tired of reaping only ephemeral benefits. They want money, so this tour is the most public-friendly outing for the band yet. This time, they're out of the drawing room and into the same bars as the "common folk."

I thought I was getting a handle on these guys. They're rich kids who want to be America's House of Lords. I had to admire this kind of naked, non-ironic elitism. It's real rebellion. Other Goths bitch at each other over music and style, but ultimately, they still come from the punk genome, so it's all about an open door for minor rejects and eccentrics: people who always got volleyballs to the face in gym class.

There was one thing I still didn't know. Why the name "Blood Doll"?

Jennifer said, "Darling, the privileged have always had secrets."

**One Hell of an After-Party**

Oddly enough, I don't have much to say about the music. To my ears, it was all standard Darkwave, though the tempo was a bit slower and the sampling was laced with classical instruments. It's not my thing. Maybe the lyrics make it a distinctly Blood Doll thing. Here's a chunk of one Razorkids song, "Service." You figure this out:

*Delicious service*
*Your feelings fall into the flow*
*You love her you hate her, it doesn't matter*
*The red river takes it away*
*My love, my enemy*
*I would smash a marble statue for you*
*With my bare, cursed hands*
*The one I made of you, for you*
*Waste all my art*
*Delicious service*

The Razorkids have your typical Goth/Raver fusion look; I guess they're "commoners," playing to amuse the Blood Doll aristocracy. The Dolls didn't even dance at their own show. They had a roped-off area to themselves, while Nocturne regulars worked up a sweat on the floor. There were maybe 30 of them, hailing from all over the place. Dan and Jennifer took pains to tell me there weren't many Blood Dolls - they have high standards for admission - and that the two of them and Bill (who looked like the new guy in the trio) were the only real ones in Philly. Bill didn't talk much during the interview, but he was friendly afterwards, like he was the only one who didn't completely buy into the nobility thing. He opened the rope for me and let me mingle. I'd dressed for the part (I even bought a turtleneck), so the others didn't give me a second glance.

Other than the investment talk, they were pretty normal - except that I was the ugliest, oldest one. I've never before seen a group of 30 people that didn't include a flabby guy, somebody with zits and so on, outside of a TV casting call.

Bill invited me to the after-party. That was where it got weird. The band wasn't invited; they slept it off in the tour bus. Their music thrummed through Dan and Jennifer's big house, however. There was wine (really *good* wine) but no food.

Bill said, "Say your sponsor's Alexis, if anybody asks. He's not coming." I didn't know what the hell that meant, but it was good advice, since that was what everybody asked me. I faked my way through a lot.

"Alexis? I've heard of him. How does he taste?" asked "Jill."

"Fair enough." That made her laugh.

"You look old, like an independent operator," said "Michael."

"Independence is a state of mind." I put on a distant look and a frown here. That seemed to be the right tactic. It made him nod and leave.

At 4:00 AM, four new people came in. They didn't knock. They weren't Blood Dolls. One wore a plaid coat. Another guy looked like a burn victim. These weren't the Dan and Jennifer type.

Or were they? The couple practically sprinted to them, and everybody followed. They mobbed these guys as if they were rock stars. I was at the edge of the throng and I could barely see the newcomers. I caught a flash of "Jill" giving the burnt guy some tongue. I pushed in a bit, but a shoulder caught me hard and knocked my ass across the polished hardwood.

One of the four looked like somebody's anorexic spinster aunt. She actually raised her hand and whistled to get the Blood Dolls' attention.

She said, "You know the drill. One third payout after we're serviced. We choose who benefits. I assume you have some private rooms? We're not going to have any gangbang bullshit. *Get a hold of yourselves.*"

Yeah, it was time to leave. I wasn't the only one with that idea, either. Bill was waiting outside my car. He chain-smoked all the way downtown. I asked him what this was all about.

"That's a matter of privilege," said Bill. "I guess I wasn't ready to claim my place."

I offered to drive him home, but he insisted I let him off at an intersection. He swore he'd grab a cab.

**Delicious Service**

I've always believed consenting adults can do whatever the hell they want. The Blood Dolls shouldn't bother me. If a bunch of rich sub-Goths get their kicks (and investment capital) from some discreet prostitution, that's their business. Maybe heavy-duty decadence is part of the neo-aristocrat style.

The Blood Dolls don't feel like consenting adults - they feel like addicts. It's a desperate scene, filled with beautiful people fighting for the right to whore themselves. I thought there might be drugs at the center of it, but nobody around me ever snorted or injected anything. Privilege is the real fix. They want to be modern lords and ladies, with the cash to do anything - even bankroll a half-baked band on a North American tour. The trouble with aristocracy is you can't earn it by pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Doing so just demonstrates why the whole elitist deal is stupid. So they get on their knees and backs to reach the top instead.

I needed some emotional cleansing, so I went to a grimy punk show last night. I rubbed shoulders with pimply, underage drinkers, guys I give spare change to daily, fat kids with mohawks. The venue was a leaky warehouse, fit for the pimple on the ass of the masses. I feel a bit better now. A bit.



rapid mummification effect, indicating termination. If Management notes these signs, you will not receive an animate-capture bonus. Some specimens encountered in the field already have deformities that resemble the mummification effect: withered limbs or a "zombie" appearance. Don't concern yourself with the possibility that you may confuse this for a genuine ex-animate state, as quasi-decomposition effects follow rapid mummification in almost all cases. The six hours of observation mandated by procedure should settle such ambiguities, as you will be left with either an intact specimen or a pile of ash.

# ANIMATION TESTING

Ambiguous physical signs are a persistent issue with this type of specimen. Animate specimens can exhibit no metabolic signs whatsoever. There will not necessarily be any heartbeat, thermal sign or other conventional autonomic effect. Some specimens can produce these signs, so their presence is *not necessarily* a sign the subject is a living member of the general public.

Remember: in the absence of life signs, you're dealing with one of the following:

1. **A corpse with a piece of wood in its chest.**
2. **A normal injury victim. (You may have missed pertinent vital signs, for one reason or another.)**
3. **An immobilized specimen.**
4. **An active specimen that isn't moving. It may be attempting to deceive you.**

*Always* assume the subject is an active, uninjured specimen, even if you are completely confident the immobilization device has penetrated the heart. *This protocol exists for your safety.* Failure to abide by it is grounds for summary dismissal.

# REQUIRED PERSONNEL

Company procedure recommends the following personnel:

**Four Examiners:** MDs who have completed the Company's Red Resource Response (3 Rs) Course.

**Four Security Personnel:** AAA-rated security personnel, equipped with the Field Research Load.

The realities of field operations mean that you will often approach a subject with less-than-ideal staffing. You will be forced to improvise. Keep these principles in mind:

**The Buddy System:** Select your mission buddy from the same personnel group (examiner or security) as yourself. Protect your mission buddy. Always *watch* your mission buddy for abnormal behavior. Remember that specimens can inspire unusual, dangerous behavior. If you have an odd number of mission personnel, add the odd man out to the task that best suits his abilities and define his operational relationship in a circular arrangement (he watches one employee, who watches the second, who in turn watches him).

**Survival, Stopping Power and Secrecy:** Improvised plans should follow the KISS ("Keep it Simple, Stupid!") maxim and focus on the three "S" priorities:

1. **Survival:** Your main priority should be to survive contact. The Company doesn't expect heroics and, in fact, discourages them. If you take unreasonable risks, you not only compromise your own safety, but that of your fellow employees, both in the field and throughout the Company.

2. **Stopping Power:** If you have to improvise armament, concentrate on weapons that maximize kinetic energy transfer. Even though "stopping power" is a discredited concept in conventional ballistics, your targets may not be living human beings. Blood loss and organ damage will have little effect; your weapons must be able to destroy supporting structures — bones and muscles — to have an effect. Incendiary devices may also be employed, but improvised examples tend to injure their makers and increase the chance of public exposure.
3. **Secrecy:** Always ensure the confidentiality of Company initiatives. If you must decide between retrieving a specimen and maintaining our trade secrets, always choose the latter. *Never* let specimens escape with knowledge of the Company or its projects.

# PROCEDURE

The Animation Testing Procedure can be broken down into four steps:

1. **Secure Deployment:** Medical and defensive procedures.
2. **Restraint:** Ensure the subject's immobility, regardless of status.
3. **Assessment:** Flame-response, pupil and dental examination.
4. **Outcome Response:** Shipment, threat neutralization, medical treatment or disposal, depending on the outcome.

## STEP ONE: SECURE DEPLOYMENT

Treating the subject's head as "North," examiners should approach from North, South, East and West. Security should close from Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. Buddies should approach from opposite sides.

**Examiner Checklist**

- ☐ **Arrive** at the subject ahead of the security team, providing at least 21 feet of initial clearance, if practical.
- ☐ **Carry** suitable restraints.
- ☐ **Wear** medical barrier protection (gloves, mask, etc.).
- ☐ **Equip** yourself with an EMT kit.
- ☐ **Surrender** your firearm to prevent accidents in case of psychological subversion.
- ☐ **Watch** the target and your buddy.

**Security Team Checklist**

- ☐ **Arrive** behind the examination team, closing no more than six feet unless an emergency occurs.
- ☐ **Secure** the area to prevent discovery, escape and secondary attack.
- ☐ **Draw** your weapon, but do not disengage the safety, unless threatened.
- ☐ **Cover** the target, your buddy and the examiner to your right.
- ☐ **Aim** for the target's center of mass when you engage. Do not employ BAD/Mozambique Drill techniques, as shooting for the head doesn't provide a particular advantage.
- ☐ **Sanitize** all weapons and armor of traceable elements (point of sale, serial numbers, ballistics profile) whenever possible.

## STEP TWO: RESTRAINT

Apply restraints immediately after initial deployment. Always do this *before* the Assessment stage. Aim to complete this task quickly, but never sacrifice thoroughness for speed. Even if you suspect that the subject is a seriously wounded human being, you must restrain it thoroughly. Specimens have duped personnel into believing they are injured living humans before. People just like you have paid a heavy price to develop the current protocol.

**Note:** This procedure is specifically designed for subjects who appear to have been secured with an immobilization device. *Do not* use this procedure for active, moving targets.

The restraint procedure covers six points: the neck, left arm, right arm, hips, left leg and right leg. If you are able to deploy the full recommended team, each examiner should be responsible for a designated restraint point based on their angle of approach (See Diagram 9):

1. **South:** Left and right legs
2. **East:** Left arm, then hips
3. **West:** Right arm
4. **North:** Neck

Your team should practice rapid, thorough restraining procedures regularly.

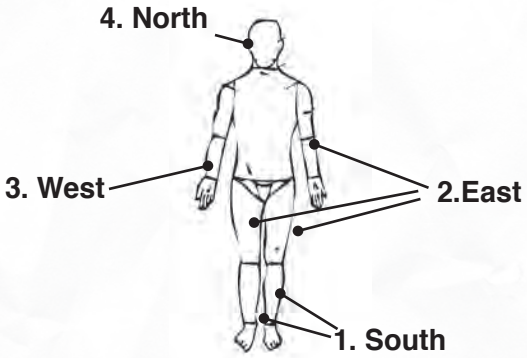



*Diagram 9 Restraint Procedures*

**Restraint Specification Checklist**

- ☐ **10,000 PSI** is the recommended minimum tensile strength of every part of the restraint, down to the anchor point.
- ☐ **1,000 lbs** is the recommended minimum weight for anchor points.
- ☐ **2 feet** is the recommended minimum distance between extremities.
- ☐ **Zero** slack in restraint length or enclosure, whenever possible.

## STEP THREE: ASSESSMENT

Now that your team has approached and restrained the subject, you may begin an assessment. Remember that your goal is to determine which of the four types (immobilized specimen, still/deceptive specimen, dead human, or injured human) you are dealing with, so that you can deliver the appropriate response.

Do not trust immediate observations or intuitions, no matter how sure you may be. Some targets are capable of implanting these impressions.

CASE FILE HRG 00002

# THE CAT LADY

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



TESS.
MORE RAFFERTY STUFF. DECIDEDLY UNPLEASANT.
- IAN



The way I figure it, nearly every neighborhood's got one of these. You know the type: the crazy old woman who lives in the house that her dead husband probably built with his own hands after getting home from Dubya-Dubya-Two, or some shit like that. The fence is falling apart. The grass is knee high. The windows are brown with caked-on dirt, dust, pollen, and whatever the fuck else. And the *smell* — that horrible, ammonia stink of cat piss that smacks you right in the face and makes your eyes water when the wind blows just so across the property. You know the kind of place I'm talking about. You've walked past it in your hometown and seen those 20 or so pairs of eyes — yellow, green and blue — staring out through the few patches of window that you can still sort of see through. You've heard that sound in the grass just on the other side of the fence and jumped back, because fuck if you wanted to get clawed by some mangy cat who probably hasn't been bathed since he was thrown from an incestuous litter.

Hell, I'm fucking *allergic* to cats. I can't get within 10 feet of one without my nose running like a sieve and the whites of my eyes turning some horrible shade of pink. Once, I started sneezing hard enough to get a nosebleed. But life is a vicious bitch with a well-developed sense of cruel irony, which is why I find myself sitting in a piece-of-shit van, talking into this digital recorder that I was supposed to use for college, while watching

a crazy cat lady's house and trying to figure out if what I think is going on is what's actually going on. Andy is with me, nursing a coffee and looking at me like I've got two heads — yes, I'm talking about you — because I want a record of what we're doing and why. Maybe it's just my need for vindication when, not *if*, we get caught and have to stand trial for doing something… uh…insane. Or, of course, when something horrible kills all of us off, and my transcriptions are the only legacy I leave to the world.

It all seems pretty mundane now, but I can't shake the bad vibe I got from the whole situation a couple of days back. I happened to be wandering the neighborhood and saw a flyer stapled up on a phone pole, for a lost dog named Duke. Nothing special, really — just your average "We love our boy very much and want him home soon" sort of thing that a family puts up when their pet wanders off. Anyhow, I noticed the dog in the cat lady's backyard when I was walking by, but he looked like shit. All torn up, with scratches, and one eye swollen shut and, I think, infected. There was a bad smell coming off him, even from that distance. He just seemed to be wandering around the yard and didn't show any evidence of noticing me. Feeling all good-Samaritan-ish, I rang the bell at the address on the flyer and a tired-looking guy, maybe 40, came out to ask me what I wanted. I told him about the dog and this weird expression came over him. He said it was impossible and his dog had already come home. He voice broke and I could tell right off the bat that he was lying. I tried to say something more to him, but he just thanked me hurriedly and asked me to "please go away now, and don't come back." I told him I just wanted to help and he pleaded with me — said something about his kids and how it wasn't fair to ask them to deal with it anymore, and he really *did* appreciate it, but he hoped I'd understand that he really didn't want me to go back there with any of this, ever again. He asked if I wouldn't mind tearing down that flyer I had seen and any others I might notice around the area. I told him sure and he seemed deeply relieved when he closed the door on me.

So now I'm watching this house, trying to figure out if this is just a red herring or if it actually leads to anything abnormal. Thus far, all I'm seeing is the occasional gross cat with clumpy fur, skulking into the yard or out of it. Honestly, we should probably just call the local animal cruelty people and have them deal with this, but I can't shake the sense that this is somehow a dangerous situation. You should've seen that dog. He didn't just look hurt, the more I think back on it; he looked *dead*.

Another 15 minutes and then we're heading out to grab some supper. I've got to do the overnight at the gas station tonight, and I don't want to have to make another 2:00 AM dinner out of microwave burritos.

•••••

That was totally a mistake. Now I smell like cat piss. I'm just glad I didn't get clawed or bitten, or cut myself on a shard of glass or some rusty old piece of gardening equipment hiding in the grass. *Everything* there stinks to high hell, though. Pretty much the moment I was over the fence, I started gagging. I'm a bit surprised I didn't throw up.

It was weird. The cats seemed to come and go the last time I went out to check the place, but I didn't see any of them when I was there a couple of hours ago. I managed to get up to the back of the house and peek in a couple of windows



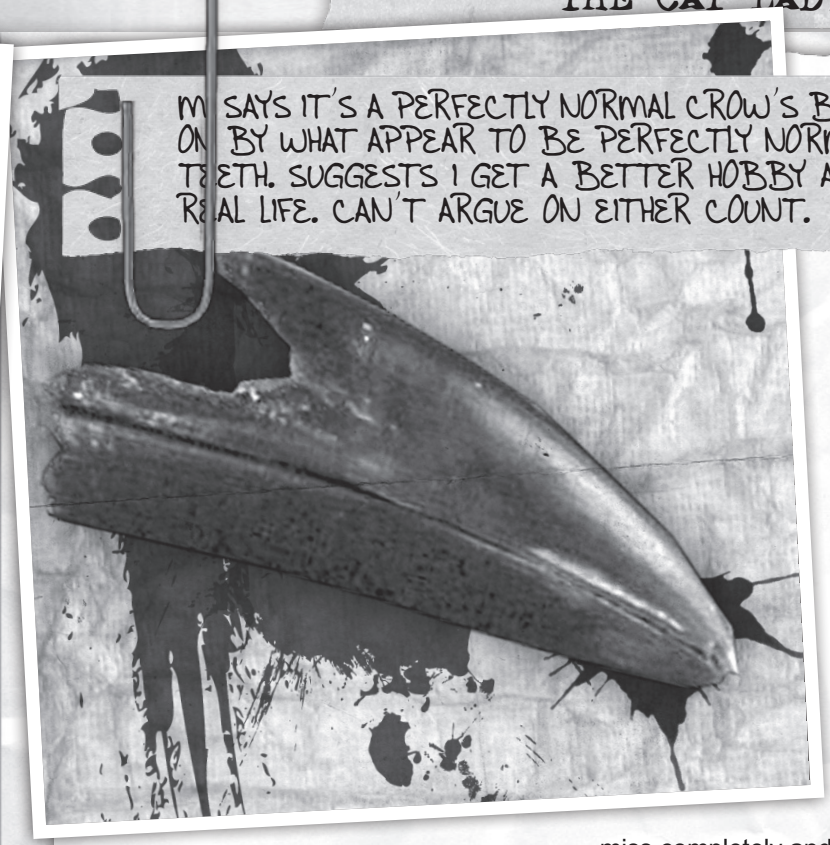
and I
didn't see any of them inside, either. It was like the place had just cleared out. Of course, I had to duck down at one point, when the old woman wandered by, but she was the only sign of life in the house, except for the flies that were crawling in, around, and on the two dozen or so dishes of cat food I could see. I stepped in something like 50 piles of concealed cat shit over the course of 15 minutes, but there wasn't so much as one lone straggler in the yard, or anywhere else that I could see.

For the sake of completeness, I slipped on a pair of gloves and gently checked the bulkhead, but that was locked from the inside, like I figured it would be. Keeping low in the grass (and doing my damnedest not to retch), I scanned my surroundings for any other promising clues, but I couldn't make out much through the stinging in my eyes. The only thing I turned up was a bird's beak, so I bagged it up and took it with me. Kind of sad, but I figured there was no sense in leaving empty-handed after ruining a perfectly good set of clothes.

For the record, there were no signs of the dog anywhere. Maybe there were tracks or some shit like that, but I'm not exactly a master outdoorsman.

•••••

Experiment time. I've gotten my hands on a decent $CO_2$ pellet gun; nothing special, but certainly enough to kill a cat. I feel shitty doing this, but I have to figure out what's going on. Two nights ago, I happened to be on stakeout when the cat migration happened. It was creepy as fuck-all, just this silent procession of semi-feral animals in the middle of the night, slinking out of every gap in the fence wide enough for a cat's head to squeeze through. It looked like some pet store in hell had just sprung a leak. Ernie confirmed that the same thing happened again last night, while I was working. (Or physically at my work-




place, anyway.)

I'm going to camp out in my car tonight and see if I can't get a clean shot at one of them, after the neighborhood's gone to bed. Really, I'm just hoping that I either miss completely and scare the cat off, or else kill it instantly. My stomach's queasy with the thought of a cat yowling in pain while I have to draw a bead on it again and try to put it out of its misery before one of the locals puts on a light to figure out what that noise is. It's funny: I've taken a weapon to at least a couple of things that looked like people, but I just can't bear the thought of hurting an animal, even if it is a piss-stinking, mangy monster animal. I don't catch myself hoping to find monsters all too often. Part of me *really* hopes that this is some kind of unholy creature and I'm not just shooting some old nutcase's poorly groomed kitty.

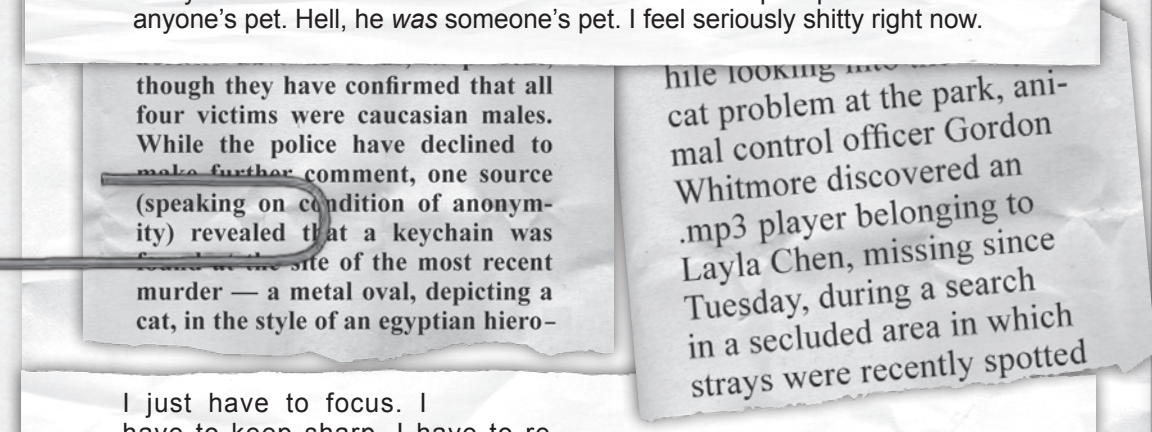
•••••

Right now, I'm the kind of upset that comes of learning just how good I'm getting at living this life. A few years back, I'd never so much as held anything that even looked like a gun, unless it was attached to a video game console. About an hour ago, I squeezed off one shot and the pellet took the cat right in the side. It limped silently a couple of paces forward before collapsing. By the time I got to it, it wasn't breathing. I scooped it up, put it into the shopping bag I'd brought, tied the bag up and dropped it into my trunk. I figured I could always just spray the whole thing down with air freshener or something later. For whatever reason, I thought of my own dog, Skipper, back from when I was a kid. I remembered what he looked like after that coyote mauled him and we had to bring what was left of him to the vet to be put to sleep.

As I was getting back into the car, this horrible chorus of caterwauling went up from in and around the house. First, it was just a few of the cats, but then

it spread until it sounded like dozens of them were screaming, all at once. I saw these half-luminous eyes in the windows and from between the slats in the fence. I couldn't be sure, but I think I also heard a few of them hissing and spitting in my direction. None of them approached me, but I got in the car and drove off anyway. I didn't feel like pushing my luck and, in any case, I wanted to be gone before any of the neighbors thought to look outside.

I mean, that shit clearly wasn't natural. Cats don't do that. But when I got home, all I saw in that bag was an average-sized, scraggly, smelly gray tabby that could — but for the atrocious state of his upkeep — have been anyone's pet. Hell, he *was* someone's pet. I feel seriously shitty right now.


though they have confirmed that all four victims were caucasian males. While the police have declined to make further comment, one source (speaking on condition of anonymity) revealed that a keychain was found at the site of the most recent murder — a metal oval, depicting a cat, in the style of an egyptian hiero–

while looking into
cat problem at the park, animal control officer Gordon Whitmore discovered an .mp3 player belonging to Layla Chen, missing since Tuesday, during a search in a secluded area in which strays were recently spotted

I just have to focus. I have to keep sharp. I have to remember that roving packs of cats don't send up a funeral dirge in unison when one of their own goes down. I have to get this cat to somebody who can cut him open and figure out if there's anything obviously bizarre going on inside him. And if there isn't, then I need to start researching alternate explanations.

But for now, I'm just draping a dishtowel over the cat's face, so he doesn't keep staring at me with those unblinking, half-open eyes.

•••••

M. checked out the cat for me. She said there was nothing particularly unusual about it; except, of course, for its shabby condition. It *did* have some bits of what she was pretty sure were bird bones in its stomach, though that's normal for an outdoor cat. It also had a recently broken tooth, but she couldn't figure out how that had happened, so that was also a dead end. As it turns out, my pellet took the cat in the heart, right between the ribs, so maybe I'm not as good as I figured — I just got lucky as hell. Somehow, the notion is comforting, which is odd when you're in a line of work that tends to kill off anyone who *isn't* good at it.

Now I'm home, smoking up, eating scrambled eggs and trying to figure out where to go next with all of this. I can't even be sure that the old woman noticed the dead cat. For all I know, she's deaf and didn't even wake up when that hideous shrieking started. I didn't see or hear anything about the incident — not even on the fringe channels — so it either never got reported, or just wasn't deemed worthy enough gossip among the wackos to make the rounds. Either one's fine by

me. It means I can still expect something of a low profile while seeing this thing through. Andy and Carol are finally willing to concede that this is Officially Weird, after what I told them about last night. I think they're going to juggle some things around and try to observe the place from a distance tonight. We've staked the place out too many times recently to feel safe parking within easy sight of it again — not for at least a few nights, anyway.

BRYAN,

GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER. SERIOUSLY. I WILL FUCKING FIRE YOU.

– GARY



the priest-mystic, conall of dunmore, went among the people and, seeing them vexed by many devils in the shape of cats, did command the creatures in the name of the savior to be gone and to trouble the village no more, whereupon the beasts fled into the wilds with a great keening.

•••••

I'm in trouble with Gary. Again. I showed up late for work. Now I'm just taking a break between rounds of restocking the shelves and perusing some of the books I picked up at the library, just before it closed for the night. Sadly, it's going to be a 2:00 AM burrito night for me. I hope no one shows up. No one ever does, for the most part, but my mind's wandering and I need to stay on target. I just haven't been sleeping as much as I should. I might try to catch an hour's shut-eye in the stockroom later on, though that's risky, what with Gary being on the warpath. He occasionally drops by for a surprise visit, just to make sure I'm not smoking a joint, pissing in the coffeepots, or otherwise being a slack-ass malcontent. Honestly, what more does he expect from an overnight gas station attendant?

Anyhow, I've found a couple of interesting things in my library books, but most of them are only tangentially connected to my situation, as far as I can tell. I've photocopied a few pages, here and there. I figure I can sort through them tomorrow or the next day, when Andy and Carol come back with more info. Wait…give me a second. I think I've got a fucking customer…

Back now. *That* was creepy. It's times like this I'm glad I've got the bullet-resistant glass between me and the populace at large. I know I should know better by now than to draw any sense of security from

that, but you learn to settle for any port in a storm, particularly when a waxy-looking guy with a handlebar mustache asks if you've got any fuses or mercury thermometers and gets persistent about it for the next minute or so, regardless of how many times you tell him no, we don't stock those here. Incidentally, it was only when he walked away that I noticed he hadn't showed up in a car. He just wandered off, into the night. Note to self: don't put out the trash until sunup. Maybe I'll ask the crew about that guy when I get a chance to talk to them tomorrow. Still, one thing at a time.

•••••

I just got off the phone with M. about something interesting. She told me about a dog that was brought in early this morning, a greyhound. Apparently, some guy was walking the dog when they both got jumped by a pack of cats. The greyhound was clawed up pretty bad in a couple of spots and the owner didn't get away unscathed, either, but, between the dog's teeth and the guy's can of pepper spray, they managed to drive the cats off. According to M., he told her the cats all smelled awful and looked like hell. He was concerned about rabies, but M. took a chance (based on the cat I brought in, which didn't have it) and told him he shouldn't worry about that. Now she's asking me some other questions. I might have to tell her more than I wanted to, and soon, but I can't worry about that just now. The cats have gotten bold enough to attack a human. Maybe this isn't their first time doing so.

I'm not sure where to go from here. I mean, sure, I could set fire to the place and let it go up, but there's an old lady living there who probably has not the first fucking clue what's going on. I've seen her a couple of times now, while staking the place out: she's like 90 and she just shuffles around, in the halfway oblivious manner that people too elderly to be living alone (but who do anyway) have. Talks to the cats even when they're not there. At one point, she started petting the arm of a chair like it was a cat, wadding up balls of shed hair as she did. I mean, she's clearly at least a little bit off her rocker. At one point, I overheard the old lady's visiting nurse on the phone on the way out — it wasn't flattering. She seems to know that something happened to one of her cats, though. I've seen her out on the front porch a couple of times, calling for "Smoky." She didn't seem sad or anything (but, then, I suppose she's probably seen a shitload of her cats die over the years since she went around the bend). After a few days, she gave up. I guess she just assumed he ran off, got killed or otherwise wasn't coming back.

I could always try picking them off, one by one, but that's an inefficient approach and, other than the great wailing and gnashing of teeth (literally, I think), I can't be 100% sure that anything unusual is going on. I'm about as close to positive as you can get without proof, but it's the *proof* that I need to take it to the next level. I've heard about those assholes who go overboard and start making crazy choices: "I'm reasonably certain that there's a monster living under that day care center and it preys on the kids' dreams at naptime. I guess I'll make a fertilizer bomb and set it off while the thing's feed-

ing. *That* ought to kill it." Fuck no, thanks. I hunt monsters; I'm in no rush to *become* one myself. Nietzsche's "gazing into the abyss" and all that happy horseshit.

All of us hear stories about those guys; most of us pretty early on into the calling. Eventually, it makes you start to wonder if the newest thing on the news about a sniper on the overpass is really just a garden-variety lunatic, or if it's one of *us*, gone sick in the soul with the weight of the work. You turn cynical and, one day, you find yourself speaking aloud to an empty bedroom that you're making the world a better place, like you're trying to convince the increasingly unfamiliar figure in the mirror. It's the sort of thing a crazy person says when he gets around to having second thoughts. And that's the real bitch of it — day by day, little by little, the work chips away pieces of you, here and there, until you're thinking insane things and part of you believes they're normal, and you have to remind yourself that they are, indeed, insane. So, no setting fire to the old cat lady's house. It'd be quick, but *monsters* take the quick path.

I'm human and that's a much harder road to walk. Thank God.

•••••

The vomit is still splashed on and around my toilet. I haven't even got the wherewithal to flush quite yet. It was enough for me just to rinse my mouth out in the bathroom sink. I'm shaking and crying and still feeling ill over the events of the past several hours. It was such a simple fucking thing. I didn't bother checking in with the crew before I went. Didn't see a need to. It was just more routine scouting. That's what I told myself, anyway. I'd probably catch some shit from Andy, but it seemed like we'd learned all we could by playing ninja around her neighborhood. What could it hurt? Just walk up, ring the doorbell and ask to come in and speak to her.

I introduced myself as Louis Wayland and told Mrs. Simmons (whose name I'd gotten off her mailbox and who, I'd learned, after a bit of digging around at the local archives, was a widow) that I was a social worker, come to check in on her and make sure that everything was going all right for her. She told me to call her Ella Mae and invited me to come in and join her for a cup of tea. The place reeked, about a thousand times worse than the yard, but I followed her inside. (Thankfully, I'd belted down a double dose of my allergy meds.) When she told me to make myself comfortable, I found a chair covered in that plastic wrap that old people put on their furniture, swept the small pile of cat hair off it and sat down. A minute or so later, she doddered back in, carrying a small tray with mismatched teacups, a tiny pot of water, some teabags and a miniature pitcher of milk. It seems I'd caught her just as she was about to make a cup for herself. I got up to take the tray from her, but she insisted I stay where I was and let her be a good hostess.

Ella Mae and I made about an hour's worth of small talk. The cats were just watching me most of the time, and generally making me uncomfortable. It was totally a vibe of *We know what you did to Smoky*

*and we're going to kill you for it.* None of them came anywhere even remotely near me, but they all kept staring and they'd cluster in groups of up to a dozen to do it, with groups breaking apart and reforming at different vantage points. I couldn't count how many of them there were, but it was at least 50. For all I know, it could've been twice that many. I was just thankful for the tea. It was some really strong herbal blend (which, for some reason, the old lady took with milk) and I could cut the stink of the house just a little by holding it in both hands, about a foot or so under my nose.

Eventually, I guided the conversation toward personal details about Ella Mae's life, under the pretense of my "job." She opened up pretty quickly about the whole thing. She'd been living alone since 1979, when her husband, Morris (who was significantly older than her and, she told me, a veteran of the First World War), died at the age of 83. To offset her loneliness, she picked up a couple of cats in the year that followed. Eventually, a couple became a few, and a few became many. She was clearly far enough gone in the head not to have registered the deplorable conditions that she and her animals had been living in since "many" happened. I'm sure she didn't even notice the smell anymore.

She talked about her nurse, Denise, and said the younger woman was "good enough," though she tended not to listen. Ella Mae told me that Denise came in twice a week, did her job and then went on her way. She spent a great deal of time on her cell phone while at the house and answered most of Ella Mae's questions and statements with a lot of "Uh huh" and "Yes, dear." If I was actually a social worker, I'm pretty sure I could've had Denise at the very least fired for her callous neglect. I mean, seriously, what kind of health care professional walks into a house that smells like a litter box and doesn't have *somebody* look into the situation? When I asked if anyone else had been by to check up on her, Ella Mae shook her head and said she barely spoke to anyone other than Denise and her cats, and she had long ago stopped trying to talk to Denise about anything important.

I figured this was as good a time as any to press the issue and asked Ella Mae if she had anything important she wanted to talk about with a person. She fairly lit up at that, set down her teacup, and said she was thrilled at the opportunity to chat with somebody about things. She said her health problems were important, of course, but Denise seemed to have a decent handle on those, so she wouldn't bore me with the details of that situation. Then she started talking about all kinds of craziness. She said she'd learned to fly and to run again and do all kinds of things that ordinary people couldn't. I asked her how she managed that, and she told me her cats had taught her how to, though she couldn't explain how they managed it. She said she thought maybe they showed her in dreams, by breathing her breath in and out while she slept, because they loved her and wanted to make her happy, like she'd made them happy. When I inquired after more details, she told me she could breathe her spirit into anything that the cats killed, make it move and experience its senses. She got this partway guilty look while telling me that part, but it was more like the

sly shame of a little girl who's been caught with her hand in the cookie jar; the sort of halfhearted contriteness of someone who doesn't fully understand right from wrong. The dark secret of Ella Mae Simmons and her cats, and she spilled it for me, just like that, simply because I took the time to ask the question and show some interest in whether she lived or died.

She said she regretted having had the cats kill that young woman at the park (I'd heard something about a missing person in the news, though not a murder), but she just wanted to know what it was like to be healthy and pretty again, at least one more time before the end. She leaned over then and patted my hand, and told me I was a "good boy for listening." She offered to show me the body in the basement, as well as the corpses of the dog and the raccoon, but she couldn't show me any of the birds, since she let the cats eat them "as a treat."

She got up then to go to the restroom and told me she'd be back in a few minutes. After she left, I refreshed her cup of tea and added some of the stuff I'd brought along to poison the cats' water dishes. I knew, at that point, that they wouldn't fall for it, but Ella Mae *would*. She trusted me, because I listened. My hand was shaking and my stomach was churning as I put a couple of drops into her drink, but I *knew* she'd do it again. How could she not? It made her young. It let her fly. Who *wouldn't* keep doing it, especially when the rest of the world stopped giving a damn about you? I told myself that this was better — better for everyone, even Ella Mae Simmons. It would be peaceful. It would be quick. When she returned and took her cup in hand again, I almost slapped it away.

But I didn't.

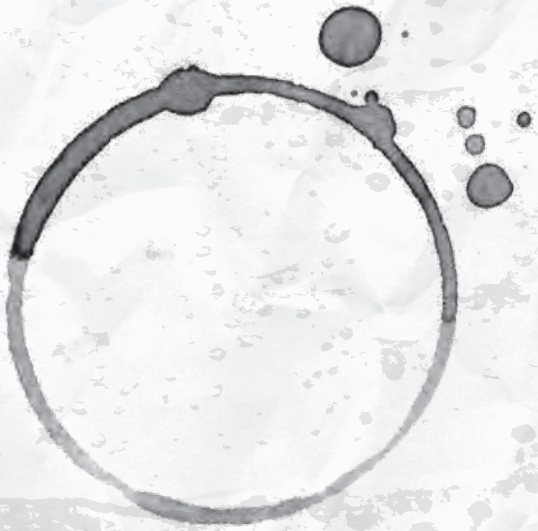
The cats stared at me with all the hatred they could muster, but Ella Mae liked me. She trusted me. And so they watched, impotently, as she drank down her death and then started to look sleepy. I helped her recline the seat when she said she thought she'd take a nap. I stood by and watched her breathing start to turn shallower and shallower. Then, I lit one of the candles on the end table and tipped it over.

The ancient wallpaper started to burn in seconds and fire snaked its way up, toward the ceiling. I walked to the front hall from there, almost mechanically, and I flicked my lighter on the lace curtain in the foyer next to the door, and it, too, lit up in a matter of seconds. Decades of dry wood, old papers and countless piles of cat hair were my kindling. I glanced back as I stepped out of the door, into a silent, twilit street, and saw Ella Mae just sitting in her den, surrounded by her cats and wearing the faintest hint of a smile.

I stayed close by for just long enough to confirm she never made it out. The house was a raging inferno by the time the fire department showed. I'm sure everyone in the neighborhood will be quietly thankful for the fire, and no one will inquire too deeply. Old folks burn themselves up by accident all the time with cigarettes, candles and ashes from fireplaces, right? A bunch of cats got out and ran off into

the night, but I couldn't think of any way to get them all that wouldn't have had me at the scene when the authorities showed up.

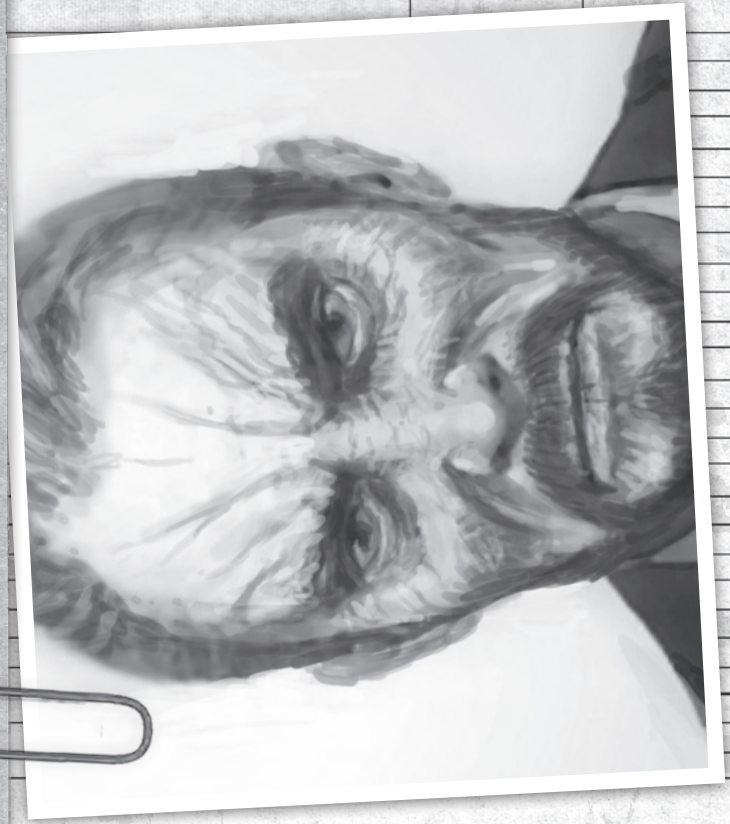
I'll tell the others what happened when I wake up tomorrow. Later, we can try to hunt down any of the cats that made it out. Right now, I need to curl up and hope for a few hours of dreamless sleep. If you see any packs of ragged cats staring at you with a lean and hungry look, though, maybe you're dealing with what's left of Ella Mae Simmons' "kids." If you *do* find any of them, please finish what I started, so Ella Mae can truly rest in peace.



CASE FILE HRG 00003

# OLEG CHERNENKO

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



An FBI file we obtained a couple months ago...a little something we've dubbed FRANKENSTEIN'S MOBSTER. Yeah, I think we do need to get out more than we do.

-A. Mangum

MARKO: So I've been here a while. I should let you know that the name you know me by isn't my real name. I have no intention of telling you what my real name is.

I like you all and respect you all too much. I don't want to get you killed.

But there are things it may help you to know that will perhaps keep you alive. You have experiences like mine. Not completely like mine, of course.

[pause]

So. You probably have some sort of idea that a fine man like myself did not come to your country because I dreamed of being a nighttime security guard in a mall. No, this was not my American Dream. No, I came to your country because I am a very bad man, and I have done very bad things, and I wanted to hide.

[pause]

I am from Bulgaria. I don't think any of you have even asked that. But then, why should you? None of you Americans can even tell the difference. But I come from Bulgaria. Because I am from Bulgaria, I have a poet's soul. All the men of my country have a poet's soul. Making poetry; it passes the time when there's nothing to fucking eat.

[laughs]

But when I was a young man, I was good at boxing.

If you grow up in the Communist countries in the 1970s or the 1980s, and you want to be successful, you get fit. You take the steroids. You win medals in the Olympics, and then you retire and you join the secret police. And then Communism vanishes - whoosh, gone like smoke - and you join the mob. It was much the same thing in those days. What choice was there?

I could set up as a legitimate businessman - but oh dear, there are no legitimate businessmen - or I could go back to poetry and not eating.

No contest. The 1990s were a good time to be in the mob over in the East. Everything had been gray and dull, and now you could do so much, and the law - well, we owned them, too. You start with the protection racket. You use the policemen for the talking and the athletes for the threats and the cracking of heads. You bring the cars into the country - no one had a car before we started, and then everyone had one - and you tell the man who buys it that he must pay you insurance or we beat him and take his car. And he pays us insurance. But we did the protection properly. He got his car stolen, we would get it back and crack the head of the man who stole it. A courtesy, see. We were stealing the cars and honestly selling them to rightful owners. It wouldn't be right for someone else to steal them.

And then the war started in Serbia, and that was the best thing that had ever happened.

[muffled voice]

Because of the sanctions. The UN stopped people taking goods to Serbia. But Bulgarian goods are fruit and vegetables, and if we are to sell them, we must drive them across Serbia. But the UN say, "No, no, you must not take your fruit and vegetables across Serbia, even if you promise not to stop," and so they have to turn to us because if they don't, they starve. What are they going to do, give it to Bulgarian people who can't pay?

So we start moving food. And then we start moving petrol, and oil - Kazakh oil, and Romanian petrol (and, by the way, if a Romanian ever tries to sell you petrol, don't ever put it in your car. Take that as a free word of advice from your friend Marko). And we start moving food. And we sometimes move guns. Serbs, Croats, we don't care.

Sometimes we moved guns and we'd get offered a job on the side, and what the hell, we had a few weeks and if some crazy man who says he's got a pet tiger wants you to burn down a village, what the hell, eh.

Great times.

So you get rich. And when you get rich through being a bad man, where do you go in the end? You go to Moscow.

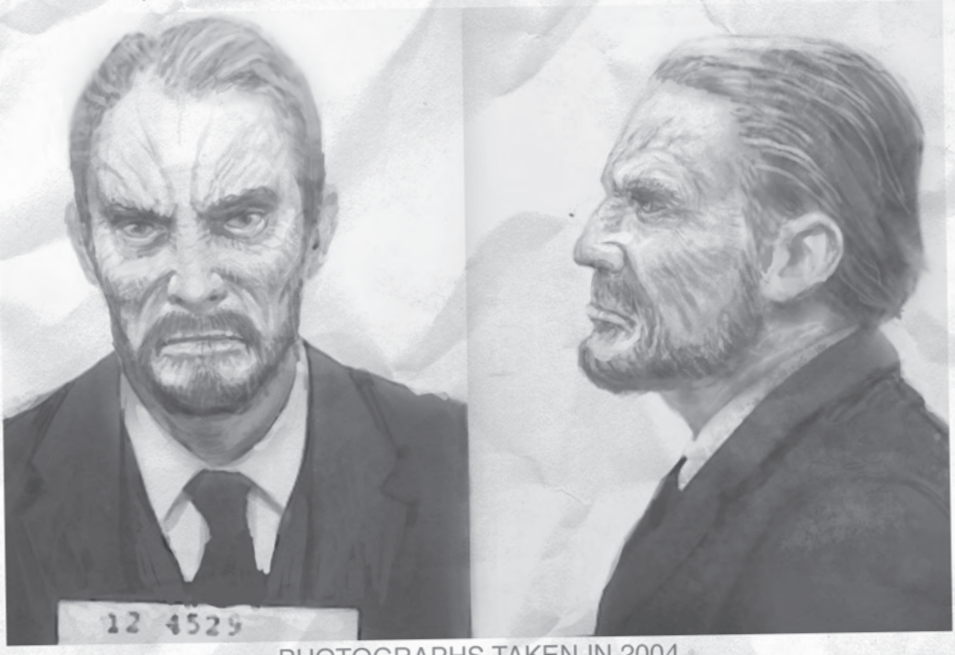
And in Moscow, in 1997, I got hired by Oleg.

MARKO: So here is Oleg. He is Ukrainian. He is like me. He is a bad man. But he is a more successful man, so he

# WANTED BY THE FBI

## OLEG CHERNENKO

*MONEY LAUNDERING; SUPPLY OF ILLEGAL ARMS; RACKETEERING; PEOPLE TRAFFICKING; DRUG TRAFFICKING; SMUGGLING; ARMED ROBBERY; MURDER*




PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN 2004

*ALIASES: MAXIM CHERNENKO, SEMYON CHERNENKO, OLEG CHERNOVICH, VLADIMIR CHERNENKO, OLEG WORMWOOD, "PRIPYAT," "COMRADE BONES," "CHERNOBYL OLIE."*

**DATE OF BIRTH USED: APRIL 30, 1966**
**PLACE OF BIRTH: (REPUTEDLY) PRIPYAT, UKRAINE**
**HEIGHT: 6'1" TO 6'2"**
**WEIGHT: 190 LBS**
**NCIC: ZW2590975207**
**OCCUPATION: BUSINESSMAN**
**HAIR: GRAY**
**EYES: BLUE**
**SEX: MALE**
**RACE: WHITE**
**NATIONALITY: UKRAINIAN**

**SCARS AND MARKS: CHERNENKO HAS POCKMARKS ON HIS FACE.**

**REMARKS: CHERNENKO MAY WEAR FACIAL HAIR, INCLUDING A SHORT, TRIMMED BEARD. HE IS KNOWN TO BE A HEAVY SMOKER AND MAKES FREQUENT USE OF PROSTITUTES. WORMWOOD HAS NO FIXED RESIDENCE, AND HAS TIES WITH RUSSIA, INDIA, PAKISTAN, SERBIA AND THE US.**

**HE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED, AGGRESSIVE AND DANGEROUS.**

is paying the money and I crack heads and I frighten people and sometimes I shoot them. The money's good. The women are good. Moscow in the 1990s was an entertaining place to live. Everything moved so fast. And Oleg, he is in the middle of it.

He doesn't look like the other mob men. They are big men. They are body builders, the others. Wrestlers. Weight lifters. Boxers. He wears the suits and has a big white Mercedes and a real Rolex watch and rings on all his fingers and gold chains around his neck, but he is real skinny. He is the thinnest man I have ever met. Like he has his cheeks all sucked in. Like he has a skull-face. Some of the men call him Tovarisch Bones, but they never call him that to his face.

Oleg, he likes the women. He can buy a new one every night, and he gets bored easy, so he likes a bit of variety, eh? Always the best ones. The ones who are clean. They are paid to like him, and so they act like they like him. And he gives them cigars and diamond necklaces and cars, and he always treats them nice in the bedroom. The boys, they like a bit of roughing up. Oleg never roughs up his ladies. But they don't like him.

No one really likes Oleg.

Back then, I couldn't tell you why. I could tell you: Oleg is a monster. But what were we all if we weren't monsters? Oleg, he was a monster.

He had his hands in everything. He smuggled cigarettes, oil, women. I watched him beat a man to death once because the man looked at him funny. Quite a rich man. Story got on the front page of Pravda. Not that anyone believes anything you read in Pravda.

So here's the thing. No one likes working for Oleg. Stories get around. Mobsters, they're like sailors and spies. Superstitious. And they start drinking - in Moscow, you have to know how to drink, it's the first rule - and when they are good and drunk, they talk about Oleg.

I remember one story. It goes like this. Oleg, he is running the women racket. There are different ways of running the women racket. But this is how Oleg does it. You take on women as recruiters. Some of them work in your brothels and buy themselves out by getting women to replace them. Some of them are the mothers and sisters of women. You tell this woman she will get her sister or her daughter back, but she must find six or seven other women to take her place. So your recruiter makes friends with girls who want more, and tells

them that a new Western department store is opening in Moscow, or Tel Aviv, and it needs shop girls. The recruiter tells them that the pay is more money than they have ever seen, and that the store will even give them a place to stay in Moscow or Tel Aviv. Then you rent out an office and you put on your second-best suit and on the recommendation of your recruiter, you give the girls job interviews. To the ones who aren't so pretty, you say, "Sorry, we have no job for you," and maybe you say, "You don't have enough experience," or "We found some better applicants." But the pretty ones, you give the job to, and you take them to Moscow, or Tel Aviv, and then they find out that the place they're staying in has bad men like me at the door, and that the clients come to them and screw them, and if they don't like it, the bad men will beat them and maybe even take a sample for free. And they earn more money than they've seen, but they don't see it. And if the men are very bad, the girls end up shipped far away, to France, or Britain, or America, and they never see home again.

[muffled voice]

I told you. I am a very bad man. But we all did it. It was part of life. I do not defend it. I cannot excuse it. Oleg didn't come up with that. He never came up with an original idea for a racket in his life. But he was good at that one. He couldn't make people like him, but he had this way where he would say something, real quiet, and you couldn't help but think he was right.

And Oleg is running the women racket. He is populating the brothels and he is sampling the wares, every time, and do you know, every one of the women dies of some sort of cancer in the space of a year. Which is very expensive. So Oleg, he doesn't do the women racket any more. He says it's too wasteful. But what his men think, but don't say to him, is that he made the women get cancer when he fucked them. Every time. Every woman he fucks, she dies of cancer in a year.

And another story. Now this one is a little stranger.

The gangsters tell me that Oleg keeps the bodies of some of the people he shoots. He keeps the bodies and he takes them to a basement, and he does things to them. Yevgeny, who gets shot for upsetting a Serbian Mafiya man about a month after he tells me this, swears to me that he saw the last man who crossed Oleg up and walking a week after Oleg shot him, and said to Oleg, "Didn't you kill Maxim Andreivich Romanenko last week?" and Oleg laughs and says, maybe, maybe not. But Yevgeny




saw the bullet come out the back of Romanenko's head. And he swears to me that when he saw Romanenko walking around, he still had the hole in the back of his head.

Yevgeny drank a lot.

I don't know why the boys tell me these things. Maybe I have a trusting face.

Anyway, so there is this one story. It goes back a few years, when Oleg was a Chechen, and -

[muffled voice]

Yes, yes, Oleg is from Ukraine. But the Chechen Mafiya sell franchises, and Oleg bought one of those. He pays the Chechen Mafiya for the name and as long as he upholds the reputation of the Chechen Mafiya, everyone is happy. So, anyway, Oleg was a Chechen for a time, and he had a gang out in St. Petersburg right after Communism fell.

And they all died. They all killed each other. It happens sometimes. Something goes wrong with a shipment. Some cases of cigarettes or some shipments of oil go missing, maybe. One of the women tries to escape, and they have to shoot her in the kneecaps and then someone does not bother to clear up the mess. It's someone's fault. Vassily decides he never liked Vladimir, who suspects that Boris is telling Ivan that Josef has betrayed the company. It is paranoia, and in the mob, it

is normal. Usually, the boss steps in and makes peace. But Oleg did not make peace, and all of his men in St. Petersburg died. All of them. They all killed each other. It was like they had gone mad.

So I have a friend in St. Petersburg, and I ask him, did a gang all kill each other a few years ago? And he tells me, yes, they did. And then he tells me that a lot of people who were not in the mob killed each other at about the same time. They had mobs. Witch hunts. Real witch hunts with witches and burnings. Riots. My friend, he thinks that it is all the same thing. But he has does not think it has anything to do with Oleg.

Now Oleg moves around. He never stays in the same place for very long. Sometimes he is in Moscow, sometimes he is in Kiev, sometimes he is in Belgrade, sometimes he goes to Tiraspol, where business is very good indeed, sometimes he stays in Odessa, and sometimes he is in Dubai, where he can rest. But like I said, Oleg never stays anywhere for very long.

But here is where my story comes into place. I have been working for Oleg for about two years or more now, but I have met Oleg maybe twice. He tells us what to do through telephone calls and emails. Oleg in Moscow. And Oleg wants a reliable man to whack someone. And so he calls on me, because I am a reliable man.

Oleg wishes to ride in the car to this job, which means that it is an important job, but which does not make me happy, because Oleg makes me scared. I do not like being scared. But when I am with Oleg, all I want is to get away from him. He does it to the others, too. None of the other men have told me this, but you can see it in their faces when he is in the room. They want to leave. They make excuses. They don't look at him.

So. The job. It is a nice day. The sun is shining. When Oleg comes out, he has taken his tie off and rolled up his sleeves. He has scars like terrible burns down his arms and up his neck. No, I do not ask where he got them. You do not ask such things from Oleg. And I am not allowed to take off my jacket or tie. Appearances, you see.

In the car, the air conditioning does not work. The car is like an oven, and I am very hot when I arrive at the man's apartment. I am sweating. Oleg waits in the car, with the windows closed. He is not sweating; the heat does not bother him.

The arrangement is simple enough. I will go in first and kill this man and call Oleg, and Oleg will come in, and

I will leave and Oleg will check that the man is dead, and then he will steal what it is he has come here to steal. Then Oleg will call me, and I will call the man from the police who deals with this sort of thing for us, and then I will drive Oleg away.

So I press the button, and I say, it is the milkman, and the old voice at the other end says, what? So I say it louder, and the door buzzes and I go in.

When I get to the apartment, I knock at the door, and it opens, and here is a very old man, sick and with scars all over his face, and with all his hair gone. And he is holding a gun. He waves me in with the gun, and I think, he won't hurt me. He doesn't look the kind to shoot.

But I play along and I sit down on a chair in the kitchen when he tells me to, and he says, is Oleg outside, and I say yes he is, and he says, this is good. He says to me, do you know who Oleg is? I say, he is the boss, and that is all. I'm not paid to ask questions. Oleg asks me what two and two is, and I say, whatever you want it to be, boss. That's the job.

The man laughs. He tells me that Oleg is a monster, and I say, that's a matter of opinion, and he says, no, Oleg is literally a monster. He is made from bits of metal and pieces of corpses, and I nod and think the man is crazy. He looks crazy. Oleg is scary, but he is not a monster. He is a bad man, and stories get around. But we all have fearsome stories about us. If you knew me by my real name, you would hear stories.

He is jumpy and he knows he is going to die. He does not care that he dies. He tells me to take out my phone and call the boss, and to get him up here. Tell him that the job is done. This is what we have agreed, anyway. The man keeps on looking at the refrigerator. I wonder what is in there.

I am getting a little bored, and I'm not getting paid to waste time, so I get up and swat the gun away and take the knife out and stab him in the stomach, one, two, three. And the crazy old man falls to the floor on his knees, with his hand holding his guts in, and laughs. So I take the chair and crack it over his head a couple of times, so his neck breaks.

And then I look in the refrigerator. Two bottles of milk, some cheese and a metal box with a wristwatch taped to it, and wired up to something inside the box. So I say, ah. And then something comes over me, something about Oleg, so I close the refrigera-

tor door and I take out my cell phone and I call Oleg, and I say, yes, it's been delivered, and no, it wasn't expected, and I straighten my tie and leave through the door and go down the stairs, and pass Oleg on the way up, and he raises an eyebrow at me, and I shudder and I get out of there. And I get back into the car, which is really uncomfortable. And I think, why did I do that? Oleg hasn't done me wrong. He is a creepy bastard, but he is my boss.

Of course, it is too late. I can warn him, but how will that look? So I think, oh well.

And then the apartment goes boom. Fire and pieces of wood and plaster and refrigerator fly out of the window. And the apartment block catches fire. And I wait for a while.

And then Oleg walks out. And it is like I can see him in the wing mirror like he really is. So I turn






# OBITUARY:

**Vissarion Yudenich**

We were saddened to hear of the death of Professor Vissarion Yudenich in the summer of last year. Professor Yudenich's work on nuclear containment was seminal in the late 1950s, and although his research fell in and out of favor with the Soviet regime, he never ceased to work, often managing to publish his work in the West despite the Soviet controls on doing so. Although in later years Professor Yudenich's research was less well received, his reputation was apparently sufficient that he was involved in the clean-up operation following the accident at Chernobyl in 1986, and proved invaluable.

He died in a gas explosion in his Moscow apartment on August 29th. He leaves no fami



No, Oleg, I will not see you.
You were my biggest mistake.

Vissarion



around and look over my shoulder, and Oleg's face is a skull. Not like a skull. A skull, with a few tendons for his mouth and his eyeballs. And his back and arms are all covered with burn marks, but also with open parts where you can see the muscle, and places where wires hold together different pieces of flesh, like he is made from bits and pieces of different people, like the crazy man said, and that weird unnatural fear gets much stronger, and I put my foot down and drive away as fast as I can, and I see Oleg in the rear-view mirror, in the middle of the road, and he is looking at the car.

I tell myself that I was seeing things, and that Oleg was horribly mutilated by the explosion, and that he will soon be dead. So I go back to my hotel room and check

out, and pack up my stuff, and think about where to go next. And then my cell phone rings. And it is Oleg. He says he wants to meet me, because he wants to explain a few things.

And I realize that what I saw was what Oleg is really like, and that he somehow had a way to hide what he was. And I say, sure, I will come see you, and I go straight to Moscow airport and take out one of my spare passports, and I am out of Russia.

But Oleg, he always knows where I go. And then things get really, really weird.

MARKO: I am working in Mumbai for a while. I am the bodyguard for a man who is well known in the Indian film industry. His name is Raj, and he is a bad boy. He makes films with mob money, and gets away with it, because he is in Bollywood. He is a mean dancer, too.

So one night, Raj gives me the night off, because he is with a woman, and I head out to find myself a good time. So I hit Mandlik Road and I am in a nightclub, and I have a couch and two young Desi ladies on my arm and one of them is a model. I think I might be lucky tonight, and then suddenly someone starts to scream, and people are running. So I get up and here is a man chewing off another man's face, and here is a man who has grabbed a woman and is gnawing her arm off and she is screaming and about to pass out with the pain. And here is a third man, who is coming for me. And I know him, because I killed him a week before for ripping off Raj for quite a small amount of money. I just do the job. I don't have to agree with it.

So anyway, here is the man with the bullet hole in his chest, here, through the heart, all full of black blood, and he has terrible, milky eyes and his mouth is hanging open and his hands are reaching for me. The other two drop the bodies they have just gnawed - they're twitching now, like they're not really properly dead. So I turn and run.

And they follow me. And there are more of them every time - the people from the club join them, and then more people join them. Dead people. Sometimes I fight. I remember taking the head of one clean off with a crowbar one time. I run one over in broad daylight. Another one I shoot and shoot, without it stopping, until I shoot it in the head. Then it

stops. And I lose my job. And the day I am getting my ticket, my cell phone rings and a voice says, I'll find you, and hangs up, and I know it is Oleg. And he is not going to leave me.

So over the next few years, I get jobs all over the place. And each time something happens. In Delhi, it's dead rats. So I leave and go to South Africa. In Johannesburg, everyone who works with me dies of flash burns like you get from a dirty bomb over the space of a night. So I move on and go to Argentina. In Buenos Aires, I am attacked by something terrible, like a hungry worm made of flesh, that bites a chunk out of my thigh - here, I'll show you the scar - and then dissolves into the ground, so it's just a black stain. So then it's Brazil. And in Rio de Janeiro, I get a new name and a legal job, fixing cars, and I think I have escaped him.

I even start dating a girl, and when I have been with her for a month and thinking that I might settle down and marry her, she vanishes. She goes away for a few days, and then one morning, she is sitting in my kitchen. And she's all burned. And I move to embrace her, and she acts like she doesn't know me. And then she attacks me with mouths in her hands. I fight as much as I can, and when she gets angry, it's like her skin vanishes, and she is all dismembered pieces stitched together. I kill her and sit with the body, and when it comes back to life, I shoot her dead again and chop the pieces up with a meat cleaver and burn them to ash.

And then I come to the US. To Philadelphia. And this is why I answered the advertisement. I was curious.

I have kept a low profile. I have stayed away from my…old job. I have been here three years, and I thought I was free of Oleg.

Yesterday, Oleg called me at my apartment.

He told me he's coming for me. He told me I'm going to die.

I can't run anymore. I don't have any more money to run. I don't have anywhere else to go. I'm just going to have to face him.

And this is where I come in. I trust you. I like you. And you know I have helped you in many ways over the last two years. And so, I am begging you. I need your help. I cannot face him alone.



## Mall Security Guard Attacked in Broad Daylight, in Critical Condition

Security guard Marko Kradzic was hospitalized yesterday after a seemingly unprovoked attack at the Willow Grove Mall, PA, where he had worked since late 2005. A man assaulted Kradzic at 2:45 PM in the center of a busy second-floor concourse, and, according to witnesses, beat the security guard unconscious before throwing him over the

## Injured Mall Security Guard on FBI Wanted List

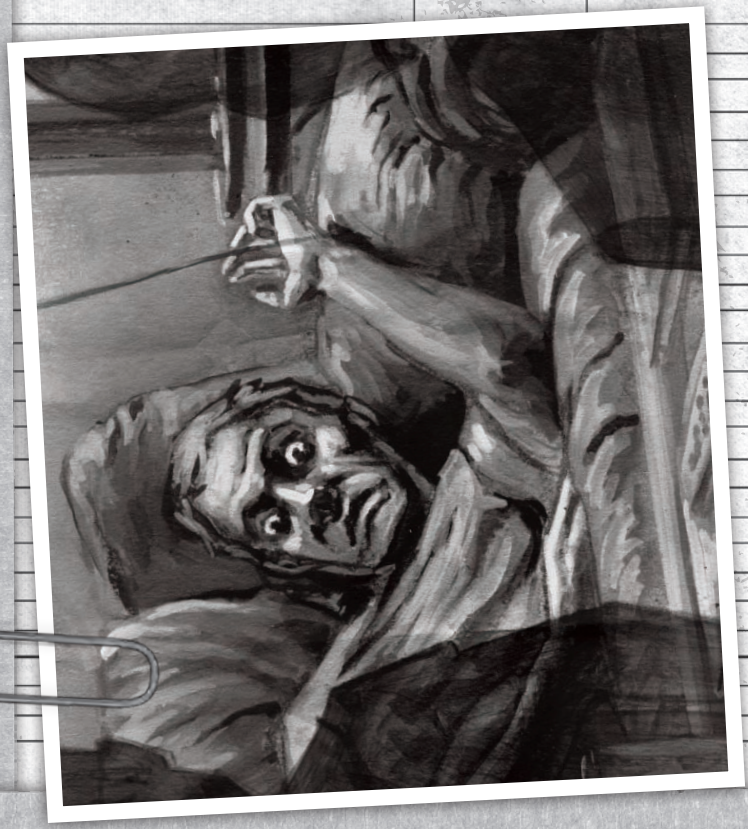
Police told the press today that they are seeking information as to the whereabouts of mall security guard Marko Kradzic, after discovering that he is, in fact, Yuri Zhivkov, a felon sought by law enforcement agencies in 11 countries, including the US. Zhivkov is wanted by the FBI for smuggling drugs, cigarettes and firearms, and for five counts of murder committed on US soil. Zhivkov, when working as a security guard at the Willow Grove Mall, was the victim of an unprovoked attack three weeks ago when a still-unidentified assailant threw him from a second-floor balcony. The revelation of Zhivkov's identity comes shortly after the news that Zhivkov had disappeared from the hospital.

When asked if the police were now investigating whether the attack on Zhivkov was mob-related, police spokesman Lt. Harold A. Taylor declined to comment, but said Zhivkov was not in a fit state to escape without help from person or persons unknown, and that the Philadelphia Police Department would welcome any information on Zhivkov or his accomplices.

CASE FILE HRG 00004

# CITY OF GHOSTS

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



I hope tonight
You will touch my hair
And draw ghosts on my back.
Mum, "The Ghosts You Draw on My Back"
(Summer Make Good)

If you're reading this, it may be because you were meant to. Usually put this kind of thing together for someone specific. But sometimes some details cross my path and it feels right to try and collect more. Possibly, there's a guiding hand influencing my actions. Possibly, there are stories that seek and find the readers they need. I don't know. Be aware, if you were meant to read this, that doesn't mean you won't regret it.

Jack Bleak.

To: Martinman@philnet.com
From: gsendack@globelink.net

Ernie,

Hey, thanks for coming by the other day. It was good to see you — it's been too long. Let's do it again soon. Barb has a friend she wants to set you up with, I don't know her, but let me know if you're interested and I'll find out more. By the way, that guy Andy who was here really wants one of your CDs — I pointed him towards your web site, so expect a sale. So anyway, I got a floor to work on — come by during the day sometime and you'll see the building gets some good light, and you'll also see that it needs 10 times more work than you first think. So I'll see you later.

Yer cuz,

Greg

Mum/Finally We Are No One/
The Land between Solar Systems
Colleen/L.O.M./Sea of Tranquility
Tom Waits/Alice/No One Knows I'm Gone
Cavestar/Cavestary/Spirit Writing
Calexico/Feast of Wire/Pepita

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

You gotta bring your ghost-busting club around here some night. There's something in the basement that makes these noises, thumps like I don't know what. And sometimes when the house is settling, it sounds like footsteps on the stairs. A kind of soft-then-loud rhythm. Barb says I'm going stir crazy being here all day — but I'm used to that (I mean, both being home alone all day and her calling me crazy). Anyway, we both love the place, so the noises just add to the charm. This whole block is really in the midst of a renewal, so we were lucky to get this house while it was still affordable, fixer-upper or no. Another house in our row is up for sale and you wouldn't believe what they're asking. (Maybe you should check it out, though — we'd love having you as our neighbor.)

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

How's it going with the someday-Grammy-winning Ernie Fish? I'm having a slow afternoon; the writing has slowed to a crawl and I don't feel like painting and spackling. So I'm avoiding work by catching up on some emails. Barb and I are really looking forward to seeing you at that club next week. I feel like I haven't been out of the house for ages. I can't believe we haven't been to center city once yet; that was one of the things I most looked forward to about moving back here. What was the name of that bar we used to go to, the one off Arch Street? Anyway, it will be good to get out. Barb's been super busy with her work. Seems like we barely see each other.

Did I tell you about the next book? I've been banging my head against the wall trying to get it started. The last one did so well, the publisher really wants me to do some kind of sequel, but I'm resisting that. I have a story in mind, sort of, but things haven't coalesced yet. I've had many false starts. Remember when we were kids, that comic book we made? I'd love to see that again. Wish we'd kept it instead of trading it to what's-his-name for those Matchbox cars.

I met one of my neighbors the other day. An attractive young woman — she'd be just your type, except she's married with a 10-year-old kid. Must have gotten hitched right after high school. There are actually quite a few children in the neighborhood. Some afternoons I hear them playing up and down the block. Chasing each other, yelling, riding their bikes. Takes me all the way back to when we were kids on Filmore Street. Barb hasn't said anything about it, but I worry it will be hard for her. Nobody in our apartment in Baltimore had any kids, as far as I know.

Anyway, back to the book, I guess. I wonder if any kids in the neighborhood have read any of my other ones. Maybe they'd have some ideas.

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

---

Sorry we didn't get to your show. It wasn't because of the weather, which sucked, of course, but Barb and I haven't been feeling so well. We both came down with fevers and headaches for a few days. Barb got better quickly; I'm still feeling a little bit off. We'll catch you another time. Why don't you come for dinner soon? How's Thursday or Friday? If you have a gig, you're welcome to stop by afterwards for drinks, or just to hang out. We'd love to see you.

I had the weirdest dream last night. I think it was just before my fever broke. I was walking through the city, but it was sometime in the past. Old buildings, cobblestone streets, old-fashioned clothing. The whole city was in a frenzy, people running through the streets and screaming like it was the end of the world. Families with all their possessions piled high on carts, fleeing for their lives. And everywhere, ghosts, wandering blank-eyed through the streets and alleys, pale and transparent. I stood there on a street corner and then I saw this big black coach being pulled by a huge, gray horse. The horse was walking slowly, plodding really. The coach was shaking. Whatever was inside it seemed to be banging on the walls, making this muffled thump, thump, thump…When I opened my eyes, I realized it was the same thumping we've been hearing from the basement.

I've been thinking about the dream all day. And I realize it's given me an idea for the next book! A ghost story. *City of Ghosts*, I think I'll call it. Maybe that seems a little macabre for a children's book. But kids love that kind of scary stuff. I just have to find a way to make it work.

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

---

You have to come over. I know you're into this weird kind of shit. I've been in the basement trying to find out where that thumping is coming from. It's so random that it's hard to catch it. I sat down there for two hours, listening, and nothing. But at one point, I put my ear to a wall, where I think the noise comes from. And I swear, man, I swear it sounded like whispering. I mean, it was short, but…anyhow, while I was sitting there, I got this sudden, deathly chill. I mean, my skin felt like ice. And then the headache, and suddenly a hot feeling of fever, just like Barb and I had last week. The whole thing lasted for maybe five seconds, but it was almost terrifying. I felt weak as a kitten for an hour.

Barb and I had a fight today. I tell you this because when you come you might detect a little tension between us.

INCIDENT RECORDS
WEST STREET ROW HOUSE INVESTIGATION

Logs taken 10-

Present: EF, BG, GS

EVP recording log

#1: 10:23 PM Transcription (male voice): Come, children. Come. Come, children. Don't be afraid.

#2: 10:57 PM Transcription (male voice): So many.

#3: 11:45 PM Transcription (male voice): Soon, children. Soon.

#4: 12:18 AM Transcription (male voice): Stop that.

#5: 2:04 AM Transcription (male voice): The key. Where. The key.

#6: 4:36 AM Transcription (child's voice): Doctor, doctor.

Motion detector log:

10:24 PM Contact

10:39 PM Contact

12:20 AM Contact

02:02 AM Multiple contacts

## PLAYLIST:

Tarnation/Mirador/Christine

Boards of Canada/In a Beautiful Place Out in the Country

Kristin Hersh/Hips and Makers/Houdini Blues

Eleni Mandell/Miracle of Five/My Twin

Robyn Hitchcock/Element of Light/Raymond Chandler Evening

Bruce Springsteen/Nebraska/My Father's House

EMF detector log:

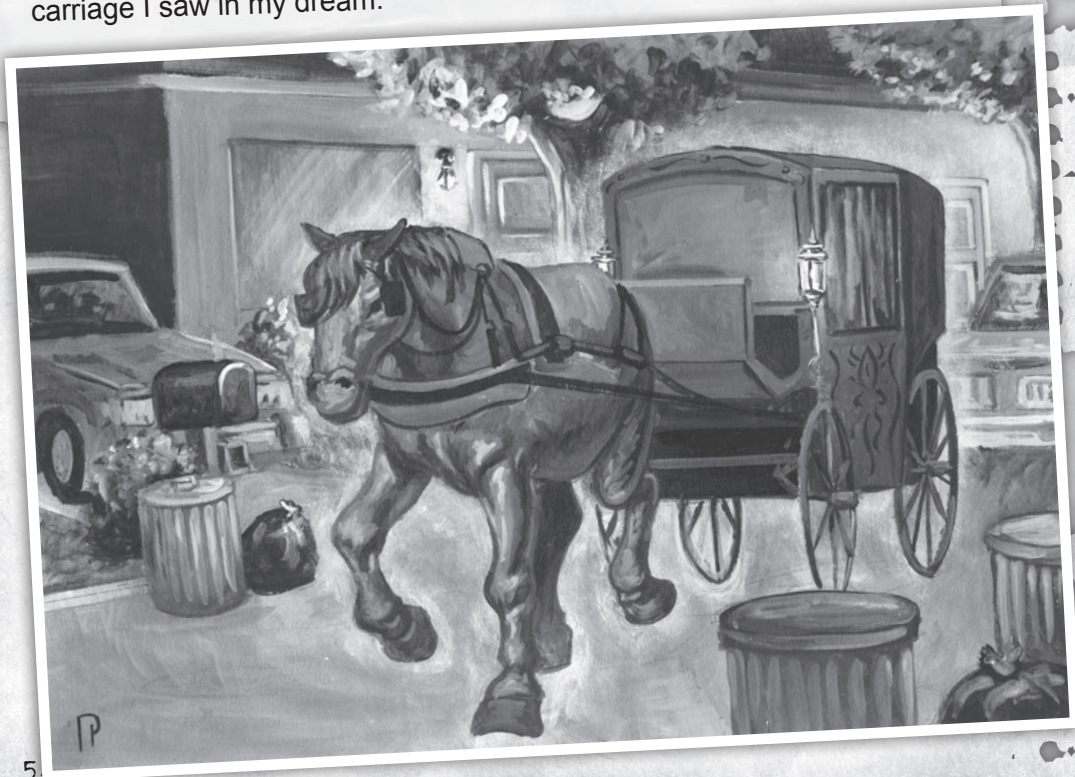
No significant activity, 8:00 PM-8:00 AM

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

You asked me to keep you advised of any strange goings-on in our gentrified little neighborhood. Two things happened today that, I think, qualify. First, I was out walking when I ran into two of the neighbor kids and their moms. I started chatting with them — I asked them what their kids' favorite books were, and of course they didn't mention any of mine. One of the kids had a little rubber ball and he asked me to throw it to him, so we played catch for a little bit. I never miss a chance to pick a kid's creative little mind — there's always a chance for some tidbit I can use in a book — so I began quizzing him on what he liked to do, who his friends were, what he was learning in school, that kind of thing. He told me he has a pet turtle, he wants to get a puppy, but he's afraid of horses. I found that kind of interesting — most kids are crazy about horses or completely uninterested in them; I never heard of one who was afraid of them. I asked him about it.

"I'm mostly scared of the big gray horse," he told me. I asked some more questions. "The big gray horse who goes up and down this street." I said I didn't remember seeing any horses on our street lately. "It's the one who pulls that black box with the big wheels." I glanced at his mother and she shrugged. "It's a dream he's been having," she explained. "A recurring nightmare. He's always drawing pictures of it in school." And I desperately wanted to see those pictures. Because I'm certain it's the same horse and carriage I saw in my dream.



I'd been writing it into my book, *City of Ghosts*. It's the horse and carriage that takes the ghosts wherever they need to go.

The other strange thing happened later that afternoon. I was sitting on our front steps, talking to Barb on my cell. A little girl walked past with her dad. They were holding hands. While I was talking, right in the middle of a sentence, I felt a headache coming on. They've been coming and going since that time I was sick in the basement. Typically, they just last for a few seconds, and they're not all that intense anymore. Just a short ache in the front of my skull, and my body feels hot and achy, and in another second or two, it's gone. Anyway, this happened just as this kid and her father walk past. And the kid looks at me and she shrieks. She rips her hand away from her dad and takes off down the pavement. And this is a kid I'd never seen before.

Weird.

You're the spook expert. What do you make of all this? Or am I connecting dots that don't need connecting?

To: Martinman@philnet.com

From: gsendack@globelink.net

Sorry I missed your call…I was out cold on the couch and didn't hear the machine. I didn't get much sleep last night. I guess you read about the Webber boy. It's been two days now. I can't tell you how freaked out the whole neighborhood is. I just walked down to the corner to get the paper and the street's deserted. It's a beautiful Saturday and every family's keeping their kids inside. The guys at the deli were practically somber. I don't know…it was like buying a hoagie was some sign of disrespect. The only people on the streets are cops and reporters. I think of that time I saw Jason Webber with his mother, and he told me about the gray horse…and now that horse is in my manuscript…God, I hope they find him. I hope he turns up okay.

I was talking to one of our neighbors about this…I met him a few nights ago when I went out for a stroll. He's a doctor. Walks with a cane. I felt bad for him, so I stopped to talk. I was describing these headaches and symptoms I've been getting…it felt good to talk about it. He seems upset about Jason Webber's disappearance, too. We're all shaky around here. Barbara is…well, she spends a lot of extra hours at work. I think it's her way of avoiding it. Most nights I'm asleep before she gets home. Then I wake up in the middle of the night and wander the house like a zombie. Insomnia… Anyway, the reason I called you…the basement. Did you pick up anything with those recordings you guys made? Because I'm hearing those noises

every night now. I go down there when I can't sleep and sit for a while, and I hear them. Sometimes I read aloud parts of the book I'm working on. At some point, I drift off, and then I wake up and I'm somewhere else in the house. I mean, I kind of remember walking around and dozing off, so it's not sleepwalking exactly. I have to find that key…Anyway, give me a call when you get a chance and let me know what's up.

## PLAYLIST:

Sad Rockets/Plays/Desert
Erik Satie/Trois Gnossiennes; I. Lent
Aphex Twin/Selected Ambient Works Vol. 2/White Blur 2
Nobukazu Takemura/Songbook/Uruu-hi
Snakefarm/Songs for my Funeral/Pretty Horses
Eno & Fripp/Evening Star
Harmonia/Tracks and Traces/Weird Dream

To: Martinman@philnet.com
From: gsendack@globelink.net

I believe in ghosts. Always have. You know that. Remember those lights we used to see in the woods? But…come on. You want me to run away from my own house because of some noises in the basement? Even in the *Amityville Horror*, it took more than that before those poor bastards bailed. Besides, a few weird noises are the least of my problems. Barbie, she…I think she may be having an affair. She's out late every night and I know it isn't work. I can tell she's lying to me because she's a shitty liar. But if I call her on it, I don't know what will happen. If she knows I suspect her, it might make matters worse. Maybe I don't really want to know the truth. That's what Dr. Rush thinks; I was talking to him about it last night. You know how I cheated on her five years ago. I think she's never forgiven me, not really.

We haven't been getting along lately. It's a lot of small things and one big thing. The big thing being we don't agree about having kids. I've been wanting to try for a while now. She says she's not ready. And it's not that she doesn't like kids, or doesn't want kids. I know she does. But she doesn't trust me. Doesn't want to make that big a commitment, or doesn't want to do something that can't be undone. It's because she still doesn't trust me after what I did to her five years ago. That's what I said to her. It didn't go over too well. Since then, she's rarely been home before midnight.

So, a ghost in the basement? No big deal. My wife has pretty much become a ghost herself.

Phone message 10-12

Ernie…pick up. Ernie? The cops just left, or I would have called you sooner. There's been another…a disappearance, I guess you'd call it. Oh God. Call me.

Phone message 10-13

Ernie…are you home? The cops came back today. I need a lawyer, I think. Those two girls, they think I…

I gotta go.

Phone message 10-15

Ernie, it's Greg. Everything's fine. Please don't come over. I'm very busy.

## Sendack Writing Journal Entry #17, 10/14

I wish I could tell Ernie everything. I wish I could tell somebody everything.

Last night I was up until three. Waiting for Barb to come home. Worrying about the police. Finally, I drifted off, lying on the couch. A few hours later, I opened my eyes. It was just getting light out.

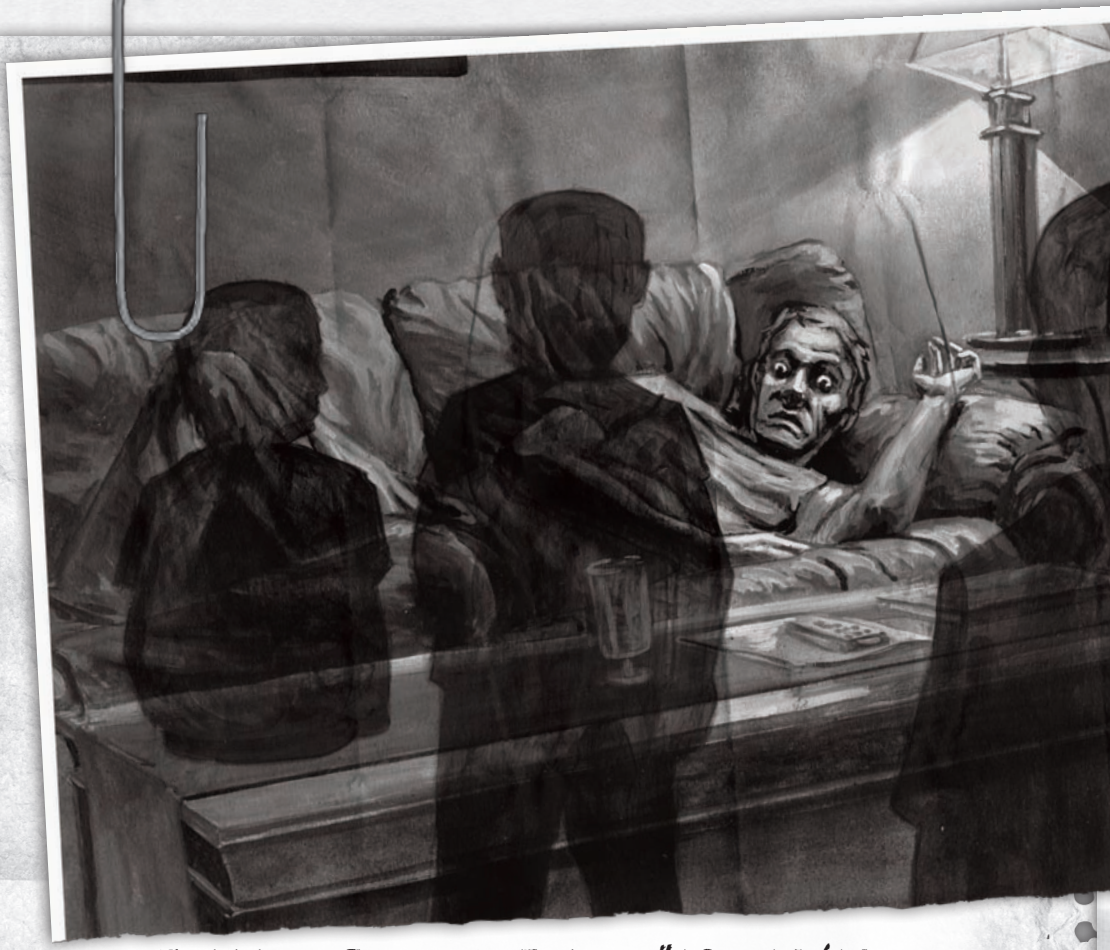
I wasn't alone.

I stared for a few seconds, not sure what I was seeing. Standing on the other side of the living room. In the shadows. The three of them.

Three children. They were just standing there. I could only see their silhouettes. They seemed to be looking at me. Waiting for…I don't know what. I was half asleep, but it was real. It took me a minute of watching them to really wake up; with a start, I suddenly realized what I was seeing. I jerked upright, almost fell off the couch, lost my balance. By the time I got to my feet, they were gone.

I dream of a city full of dying people and ghosts. And a black carriage pulled by a gray horse.

The banging in the cellar goes on all day and night. What's down there?



## Writing Journal Entry #18, 10/19

I woke up and I was in a strange room. I tried to focus my vision. It was dark. Moonlight through a window. I was standing next to a bookshelf. I could make out the titles: Green Eggs and Ham. Big Red Barn. Two of mine: Friendly Monsters, The Walking Trees. A stuffed penguin. A pile of plastic animals in the corner. A bed with Elmo sheets.

I'd never seen this room, this child's room, before. I had no idea what I was doing there.

My hands were shaking. I found my way into a hallway, down a staircase. I bumped into a chair; it scraped across the carpet. The noise sounded like an explosion in the stillness. I froze. No other sounds in the house. It seemed to take forever to find the front door. Heavy breathing. Sliding the locks open was agonizing. Slow motion. Quiet. I found myself on the pavement. My feet were bare; they were cold. The row homes looked



all the same, until details jumped out at me. I was on my block. My house was four doors down. I looked at my hands to see if I was dreaming. My clothes were torn. Dirty. My hands were scraped bloody, but they were my hands. I was holding a scrap of paper; I hadn't even realized it. I unclenched my fist and there it was. The writing on it says Key Key Key Key.

KEY KEY KEY KEY

**DRAFT # 3-CITY OF GHOSTS**

1. Here is a city of ghosts.

And here in the city is a house.

And here in the house in the city there's a man.

A man in the house in the city of ghosts.

REDO.

~~2. Where is~~ 2. Here is a man in the house, in the house in the city of ghosts.

Here is a ~~dead~~ man in a room in the house, the house in the city of ghosts.

He hears a ~~shout~~ noise in the basement in the house, in the city, in the city, in the city of ghosts.

~~No one can leave, no one can leave, no one can leave~~

What could be in the basement, in the house in the city,

In the house in the city of ghosts?

THIS FEELS TOO SHORT.

3. (cut) ~~crying crying~~

4. There's a ghost in the house. There's a ghost in the house.

There's a house in the city and a ghost in the house.

The ghost of a man? The ghost of a horse?

There's a ghost in the house in the city of ghosts.

In the room in the house, a man and a ghost,

And a key in the house in the city of ghosts.

And the ghost wants the key and ghost wants the man.

And the ghost hates the woman in the house with the man.

5? And the children in the house in the city of ghosts.

AND AND AND AND AND AND AND AND KEY KEY KEY KEY

## Writing Journal Entry #21, 10/28

**Barb hasn't been home for days. Hasn't called. Where is she?**

**I should call somebody.**

**Did I do something to her?**

## PLAYLIST:

Be Good Tanyas/Chinatown/I Wish My Baby Was Born

Lisa Gerrard/Duality/Pilgrimage of Lost Children

R. Carlos Nakai/Earth Spirit/Nemi

Susumu Yokota/Grinning Cat/Lost Child

Djivan Gasparyan/I Will Not Be Sad in This World

Shelby Lynne/Identity Crisis/If I Were Smart

Jenny Lewis/Rabbit Fur Coat/Melt Your Heart

## Transcript: Barbara Sendack

Recorded 10-1 by E.F.

E: So you don't mind me recording this?

B: No, not if you think it will help.

E: It's just that sometimes, small details turn out to be important. I wouldn't want to rely just on my note taking.

B: Sure.

E: So did it start when you two got sick?

B: Well, the noise in the basement started before that. At first we figured it was just pipes or something. You only noticed it when things were quiet. I didn't think much of it. When we got sick — he told you about that? It was awful. The headaches, the fever…

E: How long did it last?

B: Well, I was over it in two days, about. But he was sick all week. I wanted to bring him to the doctor, but he talked me out of it. He figured he'd get better, like I did. And then he started getting better.

E: Okay. And when did you have…I mean, when did you see…

B: The first night we were sick. We were both feeling horrible. I woke up with my head pounding. I reached to turn on the lamp. But it didn't turn on. I looked over at him. He was covered in sweat, and shaking.

E: It's okay. Take a breath.

B: And then I saw there was someone else in the room with us.

E: What did you see?

B: A…shape. A shape at the foot of the bed. A tall…a man, I think. Weird clothes. Like a cape. A hat…

E: What happened then?

B: The…the man, he looked at me. And all of a sudden, my symptoms got worse. My head was pounding. Every bone in my body was aching. I was too weak to hold myself up. I could see him walking around the side of the bed. He walked with a limp, carried a cane. Greg started tossing, turning…moaning. The man reached towards him. Place a hand on his head. I…I passed out…

E: Here. Drink this.

B: Thanks, I…hang on. Sorry. I, whoa. Saying all this out loud really brings it all back.

E: Yeah. Whenever you're ready.

B: I'm okay.

E: So after that…

B: I didn't know what to make of it. He was so sick the next day, so I just focused on taking care of him. After a few more days, I convinced

myself that it was better not to think about it. It really felt unreal, like a vivid dream. And Greg started feeling better. I just wanted to believe that things would get back to normal.

E: Then something else happened.

B: Yesterday. Just a week since we first felt sick. He started…

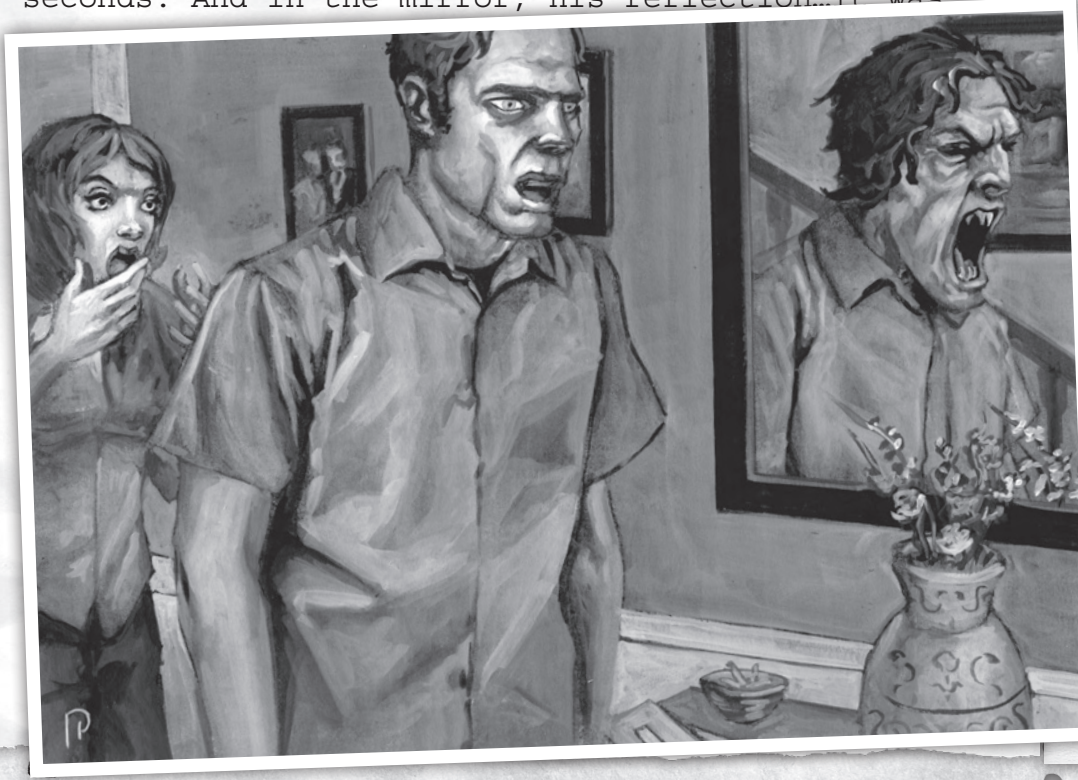
B: These sort of…spells come over him. He just… sort of stares. At his hands, at the wall, at me. Stare like he didn't understand what he was seeing. It would last for a minute or two, then he'd be back to normal. I'd ask him what was wrong. He wouldn't seem to know what I was talking about. That's how it started.

E: And then?

B: This morning, I saw him walking around the house in a trance. His face…blank…like he was looking for something. He was moving things, looking behind books, under furniture. He wouldn't answer me. And the mirror…

E: The mirror?

B: For a moment, in the mirror. All of a sudden, the fever and headache were back, just for a few seconds. And in the mirror, his reflection…it was



someone else's face. It's impossible, but Jesus, I saw it. I swear.

B: Am I crazy? What do you think? Ernie?

E: I think maybe you should stay away from that house for a while.

B: But what about Greg?

## Transcript: Field Recording, 10-09

BS: (WHISPERING) Like I said the other day, he goes into these trances where he talks to himself. If I go in there quietly, it's like I'm not even there. He ignores me. I'll try and record him on this thing you gave me.

GS: …don't know…what do you think?

Unidentified voice* …where it is…look and look… all over these houses…

GS: …where that boy is…what about…

UV: …she is…don't trust…

GS: …I don't…my wife…

GS: Barb? I didn't see you there. Where have you been?

*BS states that both voices on this recording are Greg's. Although the whole recording is faint, the two voices sound very different, so I've given the "unidentified voice" its own designation here. — EF

## Transcript: Phone Message 10-10

Hi Ernie, it's Barb. I'm at work. I've been working late hours, like we talked about. I wanted to find out if you got anything from those recordings you guys made in the basement last night…Call me.

## Transcript: Phone Message 10-11

Ernie, it's Barb. I slept at my mother's last night. I don't think he believed me. This morning I thought I could get in before he woke up, but he was sitting in the kitchen with…that look on his face. He was looking at these…these pieces of old,

yellow paper. But as soon as I came in the room, he shoved them under some newspapers. The way he looked at me…and the headaches, the fever, it hit me like a freight train. I had to lean against a chair to keep from fainting. The next thing I knew, he was helping me up, but he was like himself again…I don't know. Do you and your people have any ideas? I'm scared, Ernie. I'm scared.

Transcript: Phone Message 10-15

Ernie, Barb. I…Something's…Hello?

## PAPERS RECOVERED FROM THE SENDACK HOUSE (TRANSCRIBED BY J.B.)

visiting the Hanson family tomorrow. They have two children. The Fever has touched their neighborhood now and they are quite afraid. They are ignorant immigrants, after all. After dinner, I shall have a talk with old Tom and see what he thinks.

FRAGMENT #1 By the Savior, but those neighborhoods are disgusting. Not the filthiest in the city, but something close to it. I dare say Doctor Rush is correct when he blames the lower [illegible] the miasma with their dirty

By the Savior, but those neighborhoods are disgusting. Not the filthiest in the city, but something close to it. I dare say Doctor Rush is correct when he blames the lower classes for raising the miasma with their dirty ways. I had not thought the plague could last so long, but the toll of death shows no signs of abatement. Best to take advantage of it as I can. And so did I pay a call on the Hanson clan. The minutes I spent in that decrepit hovel are best not described. I can't be but pleased, however, at the ridiculous fear that hangs over their door like smoke. Several neighbors have died; this morning, two of their corpses still lay in the street. I'll wait one more day before warning them that their two little angels are doomed. What power a doctor has, to convince a mother that her healthy child is sick, absent any symptoms or evidence!

Later, I made my appointment with Mr. and Mrs. Witherspoon. The treatment I gave them for young Olivia should have proved its worthlessness by [illegible] this family is as lacking in in-

later, I made my appointment with Mr. and Mrs. Witherspoon. The treatment I gave them for young Olivia should have proved its worthlessness by now. I daresay this family is as lacking in intellect as the scum of Water Street, despite their blue blood. The note they sent was desperate with fear that the fever might find its way to their estate. They are all packed to flee the city. Convincing them to turn her over to my "clinic" will be simplicity itself. Old Tom will be pleased.

[illegible]
day, with young Rudolph and [illegible]
the back of the carriage. And what do I see as I guide Gray out of a garbage-strewn alley? Some poor urchin whose parents have fled and left her behind…or perhaps they died of the fever and left her in that way. It's hard to tell when a child of five is speaking literally. So, little Ann comes with us; not much extra burden for Gray to pull. Add that to young Olivia and the other two waiting in my basement, and it's quite a collection I have to sell to Old Tom. What does he d[illegible] with them, I wonder? Besides give [illegible] exchange. Sells them t[illegible] haps…who k[illegible]

On my way home from the Hansons today, with young Rudolph and Hans sniveling in the back of the carriage. And what do I see as I guide Gray out of a garbage-strewn alley? Some poor urchin whose parents have fled and left her behind…or perhaps they died of the fever and left her in that way. It's hard to tell when a child of five is speaking literally. So, little Ann comes with us; not much extra burden for Gray to pull. Add that to young Olivia and the other two waiting in my basement, and it's quite a collection I have to sell to Old Tom. What does he do with them, I wonder? Besides give me currency in exchange. Sells them to work in the mines, perhaps…who knows.

Must take an early bed tonight. I feel quite tired. This game leg of mine is throbbing like the devil.

Damn those brats. Went into the basement to feed them some bread. Two of them have gone practically feral. Grabbing at my coat, shrieking like alley cats. I'm feeling under the weather as it is. It caught me off guard. Now my coat is lying down in the basement, and in the breast pocket is the advance money Old Tom sent me. And damn it! I can't find the key to the cellar lock! I must leave this wretched city before the plague grows worse. But I need that money! I need some rest, then. Tomorrow I'll have to smash the basement lock and retrieve the jacket. And give those

Was more tired than I thought. My head aches so. Morning already. I should just saddle up Gray and flee. But I owe the stable master a considerable sum. There's nearly a riot going on down the street. Forget all else.But I need that money.

have gone practically feral. Grabbing at my coat, shrieking like alley cats…I'm feeling under the weather as it is. It caught me off guard. Now my coat is lying down in the basement, and in the breast pocket is the advance money Old Tom sent me. And damn it! I can't find the key to the cellar lock! I must leave this wretched city before the plague grows worse. But I need that money! I need some rest, then. Tomorrow I'll have to smash the basement lock and retrieve the jacket. And give those

Was more tired than I thought. My head aches so. Morning already. I should just saddle up Gray and flee. But I owe the stable master a considerable sum. There's nearly a riot going on down the

Tom: So much pain. Can't move hardly. Tom if come and get me
Your delivery is in the basement I My body hurts like the devil so hot.
The fever.
Can't

ly. Tom if come and get me (unreadable) Your delivery is in the basement I (incomplete) My body hurts like the devil so hot. The fever. Can't

## Transcript and Field Notes, Sendack House, 10-30

(First page missing. — JB)

E: Take it easy, Andy.

A: It's just…missing kids…I mean, if anything like that happened to Luke, I don't know what I'd do.

E: I get that, but keep cool. We don't know the whole story here.

A: Yeah, sure. Okay. I'm okay.

E: So…we've been inside for about an hour, and we just broke through the cellar wall at the spot Barb told me about. Behind it, there's this kind of crawlspace…I guess an older part of the cellar. Man, it's narrow, but…really long. Uh, it's about an hour 'til dawn. Greg won't be up for a while, if he follows his usual pattern. Give me that other light…yeah. Wow, I think it extends past this one basement. Maybe this whole row had a common cellar once? Look at that…Hand me the camera? Yeah, you know what, I think I see a gap way off to the right…and there's another one. They're small. A person could fit through, but it would be a tight squeeze…

A: Hey, look there in the floor. Is that…Here, take this.

J: Yeah. Like a trapdoor. Look at the size of that padlock.

NOTE: The recording fades out here; right here was when Greg came in screaming. We all started feeling sick. Andy managed to grab hold of him. I tried to talk to him, but it was like he didn't know me. Then things in the room started flying around…Janice got grazed on the side of the head with a hammer. Blake started reciting that Latin prayer and draped his weird silver rosary around Greg's neck. He screamed, the wind or whatever it was died down, and that sick feeling went away.

Then I heard a voice calling my name. And Greg started yelling. But the voice wasn't his. I got the recorder going again. — E.F.

## PLAYLIST:

Angus Maclaurin/Glass Music/Fugue
Silent Hill/Soundtrack/Kill Angels
Colleen/C.E.L.B.A.M./Your Heart Is So Loud
Brian Eno/January 07003/Virtual Dream Bells
Aurelie/Desde Que Naci/Lost Letters
Caribou/Start Breaking My Heart/
Children Will Play Well Together
Foehn/Hidden Cinema Soundtrack/Creep and Hide
k.d. lang/Hymns of the…/One Day I Will Walk
Gillian Welch/Time (The Revelator)/I Dream a Highway

GS: Let go of me, you damn scum! What are you doing in my house! Did Old Tom send you? Unhand me at once! I'm a doctor! No! Come away from that door.

E: Greg, it's…Hey, do you guys hear another voice? From over there?

J: Yeah…it sounded like a woman. Is it…is it coming from down there? We…What are we getting into here? Who's down there?

E. Easy, easy. Look at this…It's some kind of vent in the floor.

J: Give me the tool bag. I'm breaking that lock.

E. Here, try this. Andy, how's he doing? Don't hurt him. Jesus, Greg…

A. Hurt him? He's strong as hell for such a skinny guy. Look at his eyes…

GS: I'll kill all of you.

J: One more whack should get this lock cracked open.

Unidentified Voice: Ernie!

E: Oh, Shit. Barb? Is that you? Are you down there?

Voice: Ernie…it's not normal here time …in and out of…

A: Look out! I can't hold him!

GS: Get away from there, damn you! [unintelligible]

COMMENTS/NOTES (from JB)

E: At that point, Greg broke away and ran to the trap door, shoving us aside. The recorder went flying and cracked open. We all started feeling sick again. I grabbed for Greg, but he slipped past and threw himself down the hole. We scrambled for the flashlights and could see the remains of a wooden ladder that went down to another room. There were sounds like scraping. Then screaming.

J: When we got down there, I knew the three kids were dead. They were just lying there. Curled up…I'm shivering, thinking about it. But then I saw them breathing. They were asleep, the three of them. Like in a deep, deep sleep.

B: I saw everything that happened. Sometimes after I use the rosary, I can see and hear things for a while. I wish I couldn't. I still have nightmares about this one.



First I saw the man with the cane. Ragged hair, wild eyes.

And the room was full of children. More than I could count. Little ghost-children with skull faces and bones sticking out of their clothes. They grabbed at him, tore at his skin. They had claws. They ripped him, bit him. Two little girls pulled his hand from his arm…

The horse came then. Big gray horse pulling a carriage. The children threw him in it. The horse took off, snorting black sooty smoke, running down a road that appeared in the wall.

Then I passed out.

A: We called our police contact. We had an argument about it — some of us wanted to stay with the kids, but… in the end, we watched the house from down the street until the squad car got there a few minutes later.

E: I never saw my cousin or his wife again.

What did we do wrong? Can we call this a success? Three kids were returned to their parents. Something evil was sent packing to parts unknown. Barb and Greg are just…gone. The cops and the media can't figure out the story…they don't know whether to call them suspects, criminals or victims. Maybe if we'd had a better plan, things would have been different. Maybe I could think of my cousin and his wife without feeling sick to my stomach. They didn't deserve this. They didn't do anything but move into an old house in the city.

# ROW HOME HORROR!

True story of the Philadelphia child-killing couple! See page 3 for photos of the secret cellars beneath the Philly row homes, the crawlspaces that let a serial killer and his bloodthirsty bride steal their neighbors' children in the night! See photographs of the catacombs filled with tiny bones — cont'd on page 3

Dr. Fromm: And who was there when you woke up? There was someone in your bedroom?

LB: It was the brothers. Hans and Rudy.

Dr. Fromm: What did they look like?

LB: I don't know. Two little boys. They wanted me to play with them.

Dr. Fromm: Then what happened?

LB: Amy and I went with them to their room. Under the house. There were lots of other children there. They were lonely.

Dr. Fromm: Were you afraid?

LB: I wasn't afraid. I was kind of sleepy. They told me stories and we sang songs. Sometimes we went to sleep, but we were awake in a dream. And we would bang on the walls with the white sticks. Over and over.

Dr. Fromm: There wasn't anyone else in there with you? Any adults?

LB: After a while, there was this lady. The boys and girls brought her there, too, so she could tell them stories. She got hurt, though. It was hard for her to fit through the last little hole in the ceiling. She told us stories about the friendly monsters, the walking tree, stuff like that.

Dr. Fromm: What was the lady's name?

LB: I don't know. Sometimes a voice up above would come and tell us stories, too. About a city or something.

Notes: Patient LB's story is remarkably similar to her sister's and to the Webber boy's. My guess is the three of them created this shared delusion to help them cope with the horror of their abduction and imprisonment. It is fascinating, the consistency of level of detail each of them recalls, right down to the archaic clothing, names of the children, etc. What's more, their instinctive protective strategy seems to be working: there are some mild anxieties and a few nightmares, but none of the children seems to show the kind of deep emotional trauma expected in a case like this. Fascinating. Will continue to collect data for possible American Psychologist write-up! Conference is only two months away.

PHILADELPHIA (AP) A spokesperson for the Philadelphia Museum of Historical Attire announced today the donation of several items of apparel: three complete sets of children's clothes and one adult man's coat, all given by an anonymous donor. "We're excited to add these items to our collection and hope to have them on display soon," the spokesperson said, adding that the pieces of clothing, while in fair condition and not particularly rare, are fine examples of everyday-wear from the early 19th century. Along with the clothing were some items apparently kept in the pockets of the coat, including a handkerchief, a heavy iron key and a bundle of period currency which, curiously, appears to be counterfeit.

To: martinman@philnet.com

From: Undisclosed sender

---

Ernie,

I can't really explain how it is possible that I can send this message to you from this place, because I don't know. I do know that I won't be able to do it again.

Please make sure they seal up the basement of our house. It will be dormant for a while, but there's something there. A kind of soft place. It leads to the other side.

When it was over, there was no place to go except through. The children, all those children, they were trapped down there a long time by their fear and hate. Now that the doctor is gone, they can leave. But they have no one to help them. No one to guide them to wherever it is they're supposed to go. No one to watch out for them.

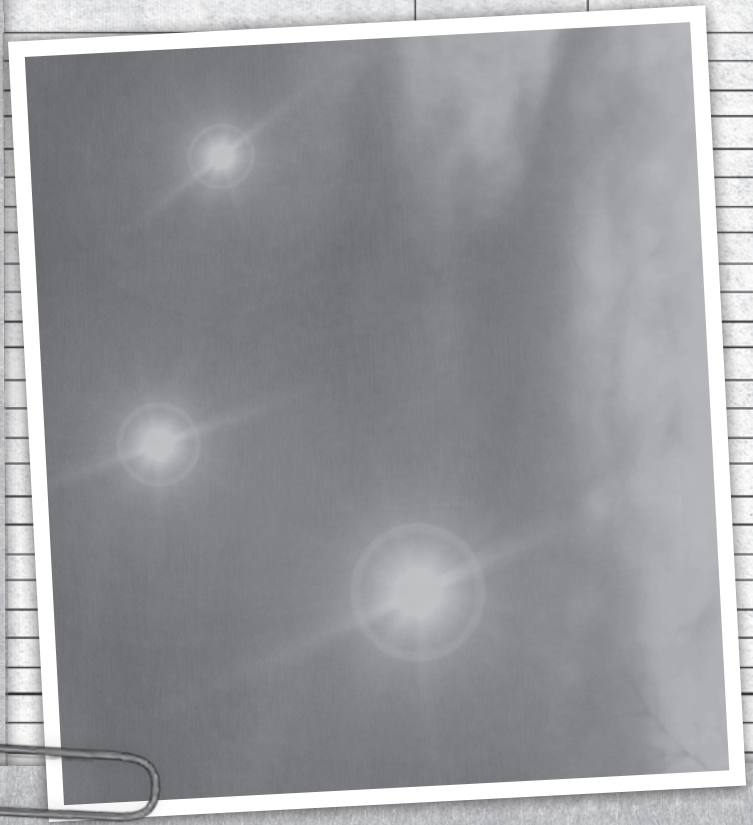
No one but Barb and me. So that's what we're going to do.

Goodbye from the city of ghosts.

CASE FILE HRG 00005

# THE CLOSE ENCOUNTER

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



TESS,

THIS IS SOME OF THE STUFF RECOVERED FROM THE BRYAN RAFFERTY CASE. GENUINELY BIZARRE SHIT. KID WAS CRAZY ABOUT TAKING NOTES. A BIT EMO, IN PLACES. TRIES TO MAKE IT AN ENTERTAINING READ, THOUGH. NEVER MANAGED TO FIND THE ORIGINAL RECORDINGS. LOOKS LIKE HE AND HIS PEOPLE DID ALL THE TRANSCIPTS IN-HOUSE. LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.

-IAN

I met Leland Preston over coffee. He'd put up flyers around town, saying he'd been abducted by aliens or some crazy shit like that. I figured it was worth looking into. Worst case, I spent a couple of hours having my time wasted by a whack-job and, honestly, I could do with a lead that didn't pan out into anything meaningful. Sad, really, that my idea of a vacation now involves the chance to maybe get chatted up by a bullshit crank for just long enough to finish a couple of cups of coffee and a half-stale donut. And to think, I'd probably be finishing up my dissertation right about this time of year, asshole vampire aside. Some fucking journalist I've turned out to be.

Anyhow, Leland has the haunted look, the thousand-yard stare that makes you pick him out of the crowd right off the bat. He has that half-blank expression that makes you realize this poor asshole needs to be on meds, which is never a good sign, since it means he's either legitimately insane or just legit. As I sit down, I'm really, *really* hoping for the former and dreading the increasingly likely odds that it's the latter. He starts a bit when I take my seat and then offers me this sad smile that never makes it anywhere past his lips, and reaches out his hand. I figure I at least owe the guy a handshake, and I immediately notice he's hot. Not "a bit warm" or any shit like that, but seriously *hot*, like he's just been hanging out dangerously close to a bonfire. Which is pretty unlikely, considering it's pouring outside.

He sniffs once and looks around for a second or two. I can tell he's seriously uncomfortable (not that I can blame him). He says, "Leland Preston. Where do you want me to start?" He's got a bit of a rural tone to his voice, but he's not a rube. He gives me this pleading look, like he wants someone to just tell him what to do to make sense of any of this shit.

So I tell him to start at the beginning and I choke down a sip of bad coffee. My chances of having my time blissfully wasted are rapidly dwindling from slim to none.

Turns out, he'd blown a flat along Route 345, out by the French Creek State Park, at about quarter of three in the morning. He wasn't getting any cell reception and decided to walk into the park and see if he couldn't find one of the camper or staff cabins and get some help. When he got maybe 10 minutes out of sight of the car, Leland claims to have caught a glimpse of some weird lights overhead, out of the corner of his eye, but he wrote the whole thing off as a case of being tired and pissed off; pretty reasonable, all told. A couple of minutes later, he saw them again, but this time they were bright enough and obvious enough not to be some trick of the mind. He stopped a second to look up at them and try to figure out if it was a plane or a helicopter or what. Next thing

he knew, he was lying facedown on the ground, about 50 yards from where he last remembered being, and it was an hour and a half later. His wristwatch had changed wrists and it was dead. (Later, he had it looked at, and the hands were actually *fused* at 4:27:16.) But that wasn't all; far fucking from it, in fact.

Leland did eventually get some help getting his car towed and his tire replaced, but he started to feel sick. He got a bit pale and was hot all the time. Cold showers helped, as did running the air conditioner, but that was just treating the symptom and not the sickness. Finally, he went to talk to a doctor friend of his, off the books, since he was scared of sounding like a nutcase or being treated like some kind of Patient Zero. ("Yes, doctor, I saw lights in the sky and then I woke up in a field with my watch dead and broken on the wrong wrist and, ever since, I've felt off kilter and unnaturally warm. I have no memory of the hour-and-some that I was out. Can you prescribe something for me that isn't for crazy people and doesn't involve the CDC?")

This doctor friend (whom he wouldn't name, though he confessed to me that she disappeared without a trace less than a week after he first talked to her about all of this shit) got seriously worried about what she saw when she gave Leland a quick checkup, and managed to pull some strings to get him a full-body MRI; off the books, of course. Apparently, Leland had an *extra fucking organ* resting on top of his left kidney. Accordingly to his doctor friend, it wasn't a tumor or a cyst or anything like that — it was an inexplicable and distinct lump of flesh that had no business being there in a normal person.

At this, Leland takes out an envelope and shows me some images of the scans and, sure enough, there's that weird thing sitting there, shaped kind of like a tiny butternut squash, pressed along the curve of the top of his left kidney. Fucked if I know what it is or what it does, but it certainly lends a bit of credence to his story. He takes out his watch and shows it to me, too. Just like he says, its hands are frozen at a little shy of 4:30. Then he begins unloading some other stuff on the table of the booth that we've snagged, along the back of the coffee shop. They're papers — computer printouts, to be precise —and, sure enough, there are several reports (almost all of them from your standard-issue tinfoil-hat-wearing UFOlogists) about "lights in the sky" along the border between Chester and Berks Counties. Only one or two are firsthand reports and the rest are the same half-dozen assholes, saying the same couple of things over and over in the sort of Fortean circle jerk into which my life has gradually degenerated. The majority of the paperwork's bullshit, but Leland has enough corroborating evidence to make it worth my time to look into the matter. I figure there's no need to involve the rest of the crew, as yet. At this point, it's just a semi-plausible story that might lead to some answers.

Leland's look of relief when I tell him I know some people and can try to look into things is profound. It's that look of validation that forces an insincere smile onto my face, because it's one more step for me into the long, dark country of "all of this shit really *is* real," and I have to pretend that the reward of setting the world back to rights, in my own small way, somehow outweighs the sheer fucking misery of *knowing*. Not that Leland sees any of this. He sees only the plastic smile and he believes, because…well, what the fuck *else* does he have to believe in now? He shakes my hand again and leaves me with the evidence, stepping back from it like it's a corpse he accidentally touched, and now he needs to go and wash his hands.



Krzysztof Radzikowski (order #1262821)



My coffee is acrid with the promise of what's to come. I finish it anyway and leave a small handful of change for the waitress.

●●●●●

The place doesn't look at all menacing under the light of the early afternoon sun. A touch backwoods for my tastes, but the slow encroachment of civilization makes its presence known. I passed by a golf course a couple of miles back. There're some cabins for campers who prefer a touch of comfort to the visceral thrill of experiencing nature with only a thin sheet of fabric between you and the jackals or whatever the fuck else is out there. I'm pretty sure that I'm right around the spot where Leland claims to have blown out his tire. The big, V-forked tree that he described is just on my right. It's quiet, but not unnaturally so. It certainly doesn't feel like a place where a crime against humanity and the laws of nature recently transpired.

Against my better judgment, I find the park offices and rent a small, bare-bones cabin nearby. I've got antique camping gear in the car, sure, but I also don't have much interest in sleeping tonight. In the ideal, nothing pans out and I've spent a night awake in the wilderness. (Again, you've got to take your vacation time when and where and how you can get it.) After twilight fades, I stretch out

on a cot and turn on my police scanner and my dad's old shortwave radio, but that's a fucking bust. Eventually, I step outside to enjoy a beer and a joint and I'm halfway through both when I see the lights, clear as day. They look to be several miles off, north-northwest of me, if my keychain compass isn't lying. They're pale blue; a cluster of three of them, forming the points of an equilateral triangle, and they're *fast*. They zip from place to place, hovering over the same general area, for about 15 seconds, and then they're just gone. I can't tell if they disappear or if they move so quickly I miss the motion in the blink of an eye.



Suddenly, I feel exposed out here and stupid for not having told anyone else about where I was going or why. I'm about to step back into the cabin when something catches my eye, way back through the trees, along the road: the glint of moonlight on a dark sedan — probably black, though fucked if I can tell for sure — rolling along slowly, without any lights on. I don't think my car's easily visible from the road, thankfully, and I don't have either of the two cabin lights (inside or outside) on, so I quickly drop my joint, crush it out under my heel, and pick it up, dropping it into my pocket as I duck back into the shadows of the cabin, scrutinizing that car as it creeps forward like the asshole behind the wheel is counting down the last few seconds before a drive-by. Whatever they're looking for, I guess they find it, because the headlights and taillights go on after maybe 10 more, agonizingly long seconds and the car drives off at a normal pace. It's a good thing I wasn't planning on sleeping.

I spend the rest of the evening holed up in the cabin. Once, during the night, I sneak outside to take a leak in the dirt right along the wall, but I'm scanning my surroundings the whole time. Like fuck I'm walking the couple of hundred yards to the port-a-potty that they dare to call "toilet facilities." I'm not sure, but I think I see those lights again while I'm mid-business, only they're closer this time. I just about piss on myself in my hurry to finish up and scramble inside again.

It's an interminable crawl to dawn from there, but the sun finally does, at long last, rise, and I'm gone with the first sounds of decently steady traffic along the road.

●●●●●

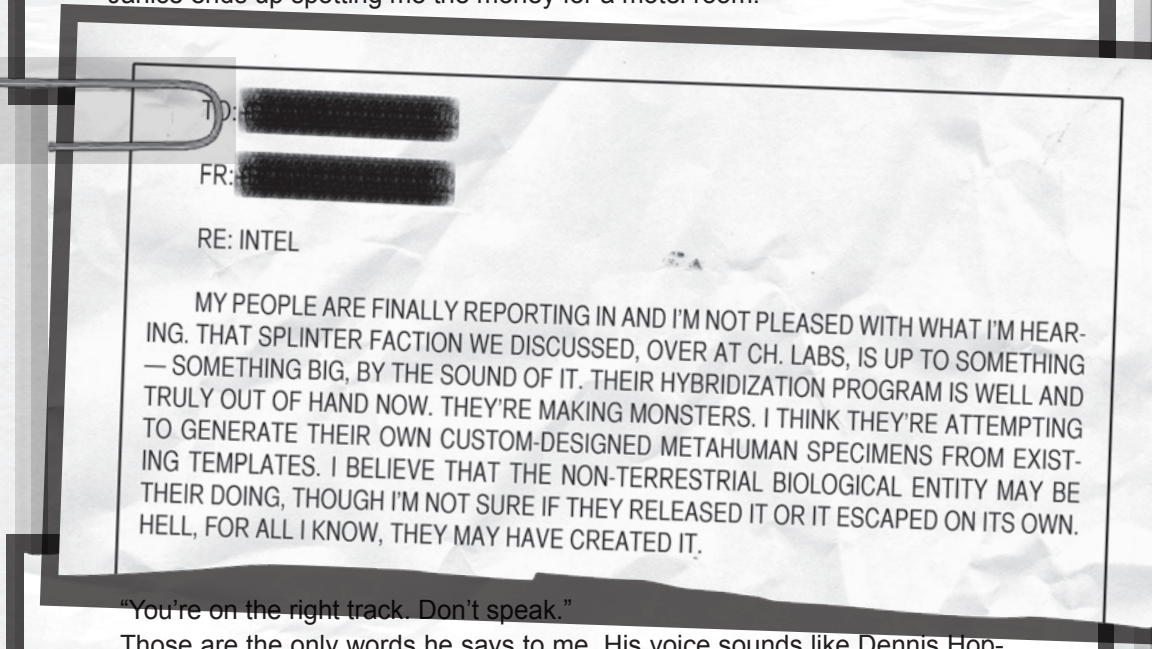
When I get back, I'm sure to check in with the crew. As expected, I catch the appropriate ration of shit for failure to demonstrate even rudimentary intelligence. Somehow, it feels good to settle into my hole-in-the-wall basement studio; probably just the by-product of bleeding off the influence of a significantly greater-than-normal quantity of nature — that, and the whole "men in black" experience. I check my email, with the intention of going to bed immediately afterward, and there's one from a "j.smith@anon.gov." Like any halfway sensible person, I realize that this isn't even remotely normal, on any level. When I open the email, it contains only two words:

*Found you.*

By the time I locate my phone and calm down enough to start flipping through my address book, the email is gone. I never saw it happen, but I'm suddenly

looking at an ad that says “3nh4nc3 ur s1z3. Sh3 luvs 1t in b3d.” There’s no trace of J. Smith’s cryptic threat: not in my inbox, not in my trash, not in my spam folder; nowhere. Even clicking the “back” button along the top bar of my browser yields nothing. It’s like it never existed, at all.

Janice ends up spotting me the money for a motel room.



TO: [redacted]

FR: [redacted]

RE: INTEL

MY PEOPLE ARE FINALLY REPORTING IN AND I’M NOT PLEASED WITH WHAT I’M HEARING. THAT SPLINTER FACTION WE DISCUSSED, OVER AT CH. LABS, IS UP TO SOMETHING — SOMETHING BIG, BY THE SOUND OF IT. THEIR HYBRIDIZATION PROGRAM IS WELL AND TRULY OUT OF HAND NOW. THEY’RE MAKING MONSTERS. I THINK THEY’RE ATTEMPTING TO GENERATE THEIR OWN CUSTOM-DESIGNED METAHUMAN SPECIMENS FROM EXISTING TEMPLATES. I BELIEVE THAT THE NON-TERRESTRIAL BIOLOGICAL ENTITY MAY BE THEIR DOING, THOUGH I’M NOT SURE IF THEY RELEASED IT OR IT ESCAPED ON ITS OWN. HELL, FOR ALL I KNOW, THEY MAY HAVE CREATED IT.

“You’re on the right track. Don’t speak.”

Those are the only words he says to me. His voice sounds like Dennis Hopper’s. I don’t even know who he is, but he drops a beat-up, dark brown leather document bag on the ground next to the park bench I’m sitting on. I only catch a glimpse of his face — the craggy features and the thin gray beard — before his swift stride carries him away. I don’t know why, but I opt to respect his anonymity and instead pick up the case like it was mine all along.

A quick glance at the documents inside reveals some seriously fucked-up shit: something about “Ch. Labs” and “making monsters” and “metahuman specimens.” There’s a photocopy of a memo with the names blanked out. The part that stands out most, though, on that one is the phrase, “…non-terrestrial biological entity.” There’s a grainy night-vision photo of something moving through some trees, but the proportions of it look…off. And, then, I just about piss myself when I realize that the very edge of my car’s dented rear fender is visible in the corner of the picture.

It was taken at the cabin, not even 24 hours before. And I never heard anyone or anything moving around outside. That thing could’ve been staring at me while I was looking at lights in the sky. It could’ve been studying me while I pissed, trying to figure out if it wanted to give *me* an extra something over my left kidney, too. I feel sick, but not like Leland. My sick is decidedly more of the “throw up and curl up in a little ball” variety. The fear crawls up into my belly; it’s a sensation I’ve become all too fucking familiar with since that night a few years back. After the initial wave of terror abates somewhat, though, I know all of this means something else, too: I am, as the man said, on the right track.



THE ANGELS OF OLD HAVE RETURNED FROM DISTANT STARS. AS BEFORE, THEY RIDE THE HEAVENS IN CHARIOTS OF LIGHT, BUT THEY FIND THAT THE FAITH OF MEN HAS GROWN WEAK IN THEIR LONG ABSENCE. ONCE, THEY SHAPED HUMANITY'S DESTINY — AND EVEN THE HUMAN FORM — WITH THEIR ANCIENT WISDOM. NOW, THE DESCENDANTS OF LEMURIA, ATLANTIS, THULE, AND THE OTHER ANTEDILUVIAN CIVILIZATIONS CARRY WITHIN THEM THE GENETIC CODES TO UNLOCK HUMAN POTENTIAL. LOOK TO THE MAYANS, THE BASQUES AND THE DOGON.

The rest of the team is laid up right now. I think it's this cold everyone seems to be coming down with. Andy sounded like shit on the phone. Me? I feel fine, but I've always had a good immune system. Have to, when you grow up on a diet of microwave dinners and soda. On a lark, I figure I'll look into some of the locations tagged by the cranks on their forums and blogs, but nothing too close to the campsite. I'd rather have some company for that one.

No, what I'm looking into now is a spot along the road leading up to the area where Leland had his experience. Some guy going by iofthepyramid71@ufology.net says there's some dead air out there, where you can't get a signal on a cell

phone. He also claims to have tried a satellite phone and a walkie-talkie and to have gotten nothing. He says it's got something to do with the "lights in the sky," but he was coy on the forum as to how. Since I haven't finished wiring up my bullshit detector, I have to go out and identify the bullshit with my own two eyes. This seems as good a waste of my time as any, and being able to bring even the slightest shred of information back to Leland when I have to hit him up with more questions — even if it's only news of which leads haven't panned out — is better than just shrugging my shoulders at the poor bastard.

So, I pull up to the place "iofthepyramid71" mentioned. And…

Huh. Weird. What follows is cobbled together from my shorthand notes, as my digital recorder blew out its entire charge, all at once. I think it still works, but it's just flashing the low-battery light at me. High-tension power lines? Nope. Electromagnetic phenomenon? Not if my compass is any indication, as it seems to be pointing just as north as it was a few days ago. The guy was wrong, though. My cell signal is down to two bars, but I've definitely got it. Just for shits and giggles, I try to connect to my voicemail; "iofthepyramid71" was highly nonspecific about the nature of the dead air, so I figure maybe it affects reception regardless of how many bars of signal you've got.

●●●●●

I'm home again. The digital recorder is plugged in to recharge and it seems to be in working order. I hope it's working. Otherwise, I'm pacing back and forth on a three-foot leash in my living room, talking into an expensive paperweight like a total jack-off.

I didn't want to stick around that clearing after what happened out there. I dialed voice mail and it seemed perfectly normal, so I started walking around the clearing, just to stretch my legs. As I got to this one spot in particular, the automated voice faded out and something else faded in: a repeating, modulating sequence of snaps and pops, and something in the background that *almost* sounded like speech, but it was too damned faint to really make out and, if it was a language, it was no language I'd ever heard. If I walked two paces in any direction, I got my voice mail back. Near as I could tell, the weirdness only existed in that three-foot radius. Weirder still, whenever I stood there, it felt as though the wind wasn't blowing and all sound from back at the road became somehow muted, like I was standing with one foot partway out of the world.

So, with that established, I'm going to put this thing down to keep charging for a bit and see if anyone turned up anything while they've been home, nursing the plague that's been making the rounds.

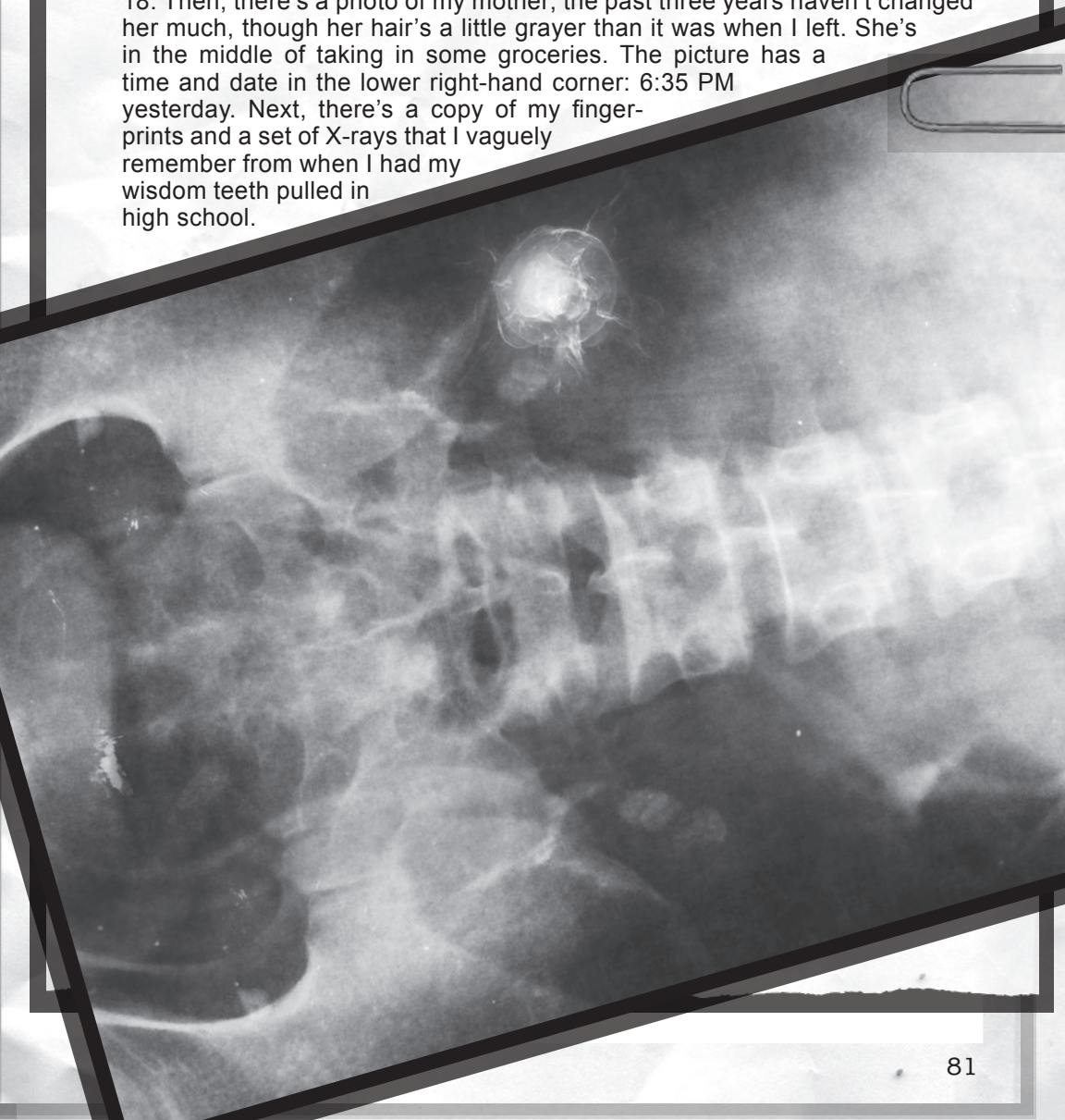
●●●●●

I'm on at the gas station again tonight. Gary decided to give me my fourth "one last chance," I guess. Early part of the night was spent menacing the new stock with the pricing gun, followed by a beer from the cooler. (We like to consider those ones "dropped and broken" and, since Gary's ultimately just as lazy as the rest of us shlubs — just slightly better paid for his time — he lets it slide, provided it's one of the low-end domestic beers. It's more work for him to find people to replace the overnight guys than it is to just deal with us.)

When I get back from my drink in the stockroom, though, I get the sense that something's off. I don't pick it out right away, but my eyes eventually settle on the little drawer-thing that I use to take money from the overnight customers

and to slide their purchases out to them. It's a black folder, with a thin red elastic cord connected to the cover to hold it shut. At first, I wonder if one of the other overnight guys is fucking around with me for a laugh, but this seems a little too cerebral for any of them. I spend about a solid minute staring at it, unsure of what to do. Finally, I grab a pair of latex gloves from the cleaning supplies and gingerly pick it up, slipping back the cord so I can look inside.

The first thing that slides out is a photo of Leland Preston. Specifically, a black-and-white autopsy photo of Leland Preston's corpse. I'm starting to panic as I pick up the picture from off the floor and start leafing through the other contents of the folder. The next thing I see is a color copy of my driver's license and my Social Security card. After that is a sampling of my juvenile records — all of which were supposed to have been destroyed when I turned 18. Then, there's a photo of my mother; the past three years haven't changed her much, though her hair's a little grayer than it was when I left. She's in the middle of taking in some groceries. The picture has a time and date in the lower right-hand corner: 6:35 PM yesterday. Next, there's a copy of my fingerprints and a set of X-rays that I vaguely remember from when I had my wisdom teeth pulled in high school.



The phone. I let it ring three times before I can force myself to pick up. It's Gary, just making sure that the new cans of no-bean chili are getting stocked behind the old ones, so they can be bought out before they expire and the store has to swallow the $12 or so they're collectively worth. Sadly, I've never been happier to hear his pack-a-day voice.

Whuh…?

[Muffled "thump," immediately followed by the loud "crack" of a sudden sharp impact.]

●●●●●

Holy shit.

That "thwack" just at the end of the last recording was me dropping my recorder. I chipped the corner of the casing, but it hit a stack of magazines behind the counter before it hit the floor, so the damage seems to be purely cosmetic. When I hung up with Gary, something caught my eye and I looked outside. A guy in a black suit, black tie, white shirt, was staring at me from the far side of the gas pumps, right down next to the road. I think he was bald and he was definitely pale. Like, unhealthy pale. A bit like Leland. He had glasses, maybe? I'm not sure. I jumped when I saw him and — my priorities being what they are — went to grab my recorder from the floor. In retrospect, I probably should've gone for my gun.

When I looked back up, he was gone. I picked up the phone to try to call somebody, but it was dead. No dial tone. No busy signal. Nothing. It was like the damned thing wasn't even plugged into the wall. I fumbled for my cell phone and, as soon as I found Ernie's number and hit "send," I heard that popping sound again, only the voice was a bit clearer and its tone was more insistent, though its words were no clearer than before. I don't know why, but I ran to the back and checked the door. It was unlocked — even the chain and the bolt — though it was still shut. For maybe the five longest seconds of my life, I considered opening the door, but thought better of it and closed it up as tight as I could. If I'd had a hammer, nails and some planks, I'd have sealed it up with those, too. I know for a *fact* that the door was locked when I arrived and I hadn't touched it since then. When I crept out again, toward the register, I had my gun in hand.

Clearly, whoever was fucking with me was trying to drop some less-than-subtle hints. The folder was a straight-up threat. If you were to ask me then why I went outside, I don't think I could've told you. Honestly, I can't think of a good reason *now*, looking back on it. I guess I maybe just got pushed a little too far. I locked the front door behind me as I stepped out and toward the pumps, about 15 feet away. I kept scanning my surroundings for any signs of Men in Black, little green men, or whatever the fuck else was skulking in the parking lot. I had my gun tucked down by my side, semi-hidden by the untucked bottom of my work shirt.

Nothing. Crickets chirping in the grass. Gentle breeze blowing down the road. A few clouds overhead, but not enough to hide the moon. I spoke, slowly and deliberately: "If you're out here, show yourself. I want to talk."

No answer. Might as well have been talking to myself (which, in all likelihood, I was.) No more surprises when I went back to the door. It was still locked. No big-headed gray alien was standing behind the counter, doing my job. No government agents appeared out of nowhere to begin accusing me of breaking laws that involved the names of other planets or threatening me with things that the

government (supposedly) isn't allowed to do to human beings. From then until my shift was up, it might as well have been any other night at the gas station. When my relief showed up, I had calmed down enough to look like I'd just smoked a bit too much pot on my shift.

To be fair, though, I *did* finish off the rest of what I was holding.

●●●●●

This is composed directly to my computer, the laptop that I never connect to the Internet. I don't have a sound recording for these events. It's been three days since the folder arrived mysteriously at the gas station.

I woke up in the middle of the night to find myself in the field near where Leland Preston blew out his tire. Everything felt weird, like I was wandering around in a dream. For all I know, I was, but there was a certain reality to this experience, a gravity that's too heavy to dismiss. It's the little details — the chill of the dew under my bare feet or the last lingering taste of my toothpaste — that have me convinced this was real. I walked for…a while, anyway. How long exactly, I just can't say. I'm not sure I was going anywhere in particular. At some point, though, I saw another person; the gray-bearded man who left me that document case. When I focus on the events of last night, I remember his words with perfect clarity, though almost everything else is fuzzy and indistinct: "You were right to stay on the hunt, kid. The death of Leland Preston was a regrettable loss. He could've taught us so much about some of the major players." I think I asked him at that point who the "major players" were. Or maybe he just kept talking. In any case, he answered my question. "Medical conglomerates. Renegade branches of the government's alphabet soup. Cults that predate the written word. Monsters, masquerading as human beings — some of whom are technically *still* human."

He led me to a van, parked next to the same cabin I'd stayed in. The side door was open and there was a sheet stretched out over a figure. I had the unpleasant suspicion that Leland Preston's corpse was under it, but the old man ripped it aside before I could contemplate that too deeply. What lay beneath wasn't Leland or anything else that had even been a person. I recognized some of the angles from the thing barely visible through the trees in that picture the old man had given me, but I couldn't make my mind quite grab onto the lines of the thing. Maybe it was whatever they'd done to me or maybe it was just part of the creature's nature: a self-defense mechanism that death didn't thwart.

"I apologize that we had to lay your friends up with that flu," he went on to say, "but even this much exposure is dangerous for us. I figured you had a right to see the thing, though, before it gets shipped off to the lab, never again to see the light of day." I have a hazy recollection of asking what *it* was, and he answered me. "A non-terrestrial biological entity. Otherworldly? Extra-dimensional? We're not sure. We killed it with a chemical cocktail in a tranquilizer dart. Except for a couple of minor tweaks, the poison we used was basically liquid aspirin."

Everything after that gets a lot less certain. I think someone else started talking to me. I recall the old man walked away, toward a bunch of *really* bright lights. Three of them, I think. Then I blacked out and woke up back in my apartment. Everything Leland had given me was gone, as were the black folder and its contents. But, in their place, I had a manila envelope with some photos inside and a note, consisting of only three words: WATCH YOUR BACK.

No shit.



# THE FROSTBITE GIRL

CASE FILE HRG 00006

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



IAN,
FOUND THIS WHILE LOOKING INTO BR. I BOUGHT IT FROM YOU-KNOW-WHO AND HE WAS, AS EVER, A SON OF A BITCH ABOUT IT. IT'S KIND OF A SAD READ. AND DON'T BE A BASTARD — I'M ALLOWED TO SAY I FEEL BAD FOR THE GUY.

— JESS

The people around her act oddly. Oh, sure, she's pretty and you have to account for that (as a rule, pretty people *always* set us ordinary folks off kilter), but it's more than just the customary blend of awkwardness, deference, jealousy and such. And, to be fair, she's not *that* pretty. Everything goes strange in her presence; at least, it did for *me*, even if only for a moment. I can't really explain it, except to say that it felt a little bit like being high, a little bit like just waking up from an especially vivid dream, and a little bit heartbreaking. No, that's not it, either. Fuck. I can't make this make sense to you. It doesn't make sense to me, either.

I ran into her at the Food Lion. I happened to be out that way, digging into some sort of Black Dog (of the legendary, and thus capitalized, variety) sighting that turned out to be absolute bullshit — run-of-the-



mill black English mastiff that'd gone semi feral. Huge, though. But totally mundane. Anyway, I'll be up-front: I had my reasons for striking up a conversation with her, and she seemed to be into it. She was always fidgeting, but that didn't bother me too much. Honestly, I was just thrilled that a woman was actually talking to me, now that I've started giving off what Ernie calls the "hunter vibe," which I guess is a polite way of saying, "since I started seeming like the kind of guy who haunts forlorn bus stops late at night, looking for something to kill."

The problem was that I just kept getting the feeling something wasn't right about her, and I didn't seem to be the only one. It was the shift-change and some of her co-workers were on their way by while we were talking. I saw the looks they had on, that struggle between the need to be closer and the instinct to run far, far away. But then I looked back at her and saw her smiling at me, and some part of me tried to force the rest of me to forget my reservations.

I realize then that she's not fidgeting. She's shaking. I say as much to her and offer her my coat, at least for the walk back to her car. She laughs and says to me, "That's funny. Nobody ever bothers to look at my tag. They just call me Shakes." She shrugs. "Poor circulation. My mother had it, too. Doctor told me the scientific name for it once, but that was a long time ago. I've kind of gotten used to it." She thanks me for the offer and reaches out to give my arm a gentle squeeze, and fuck-all if she doesn't have the coldest hand I've ever felt on a living person. She seriously feels colder than the temperature outdoors, even though it's only a few weeks into spring.

We get to talking, while we're standing next to her car. I can't shake the feeling that something is…off. Wrong, somehow. Maybe it's the way she keeps glancing around when she thinks I'm not paying attention. It's the kind of look that a criminal has when she thinks the cops are around. Or an abused woman, worried that her psycho-possessive boyfriend is going to pop in at any moment and goon-arm her away. Then again, maybe it's the fact that she's shivering less now, in the early spring chill, than she was when she was in the store. Of course, it could also just be my amazingly refined sense of the seriously abnormal. I don't think she notices my scrutiny; I've gotten pretty damn good at the surreptitious glance in the past couple of years. Half the time, I think people don't notice bizarre shit because they're conditioned to believe that nothing *really* goes bump in the night. That, and they don't *want* to notice.

Against my better judgment, we exchange phone numbers. She doesn't promise to call and neither do I. Maybe each of us realizes, on some level, what a bad idea it would be to

pursue this any further. Still, as I take the slip of paper between thumb and forefinger, just before she releases it, there's a feeling — like a brief jolt of electricity — that passes through me.

I'd say I have to go take a cold shower now, but I somehow think it would only remind me of her.

---

Last night, I dreamt about her. It's been two nights since I got her number. I haven't called and she didn't call me, either. Sorry, I'm still a bit fuzzy-headed. I just woke up.

It was the most vivid dream I can ever remember having. Lying here, in bed, it almost feels like real life is less real than that dream was, but the memory of it is slipping away from me as sleep fades. I'll try to remember what I can. I think it's worth saving.

I was wandering through the snow. There was snow everywhere. I think I was in a forest…no, it was ice crystals — some of them 50 feet tall or taller. They branched out from these massive cores, turning finer and finer, until they looked like transparent feathers. It was dusk. The sky was this purplish blue, with a touch of red on one horizon. My legs were numb with the effort of traipsing through drifts of fine white powder up to my thighs. It wasn't that it was hard to walk through so much that the cold made even the slightest exertion difficult. My lungs burned with the chill in the air and my throat was parched from the kind of dryness that only intense cold can create.

Now that I think back on it, I distinctly remember feeling like I'd lost my way and somehow stumbled onto this ice desert. I have only the faintest recollection of some dream that came before it, or maybe it was the same dream — something about a tailor who was supposed to make me a pair of white pants, for which I was paying him with a backpack full of miniature grapefruits (which somehow kept getting away from me) — but then everything changed, like I took a wrong turn in my sleep and I was suddenly in this incredibly *real* place. I was looking for her. I don't know why, to tell you the truth. I honestly hadn't been thinking of her at all yesterday. Well, maybe a couple of times, but not enough to warrant a hijacked dream about her. Hijacked. Yeah, that's a good word for the way it felt.

Eventually, I started calling for Shakes. I'm not sure, but maybe she started calling back to me, or maybe my own voice was echoing back to me oddly off all the ice. It's getting harder to remember now, though I *do* recall looking at my reflection in the ice and noticing that my eyes didn't catch the light — they were completely dull and dead. Ugh. Why, of all the things to stay clear in my mind,

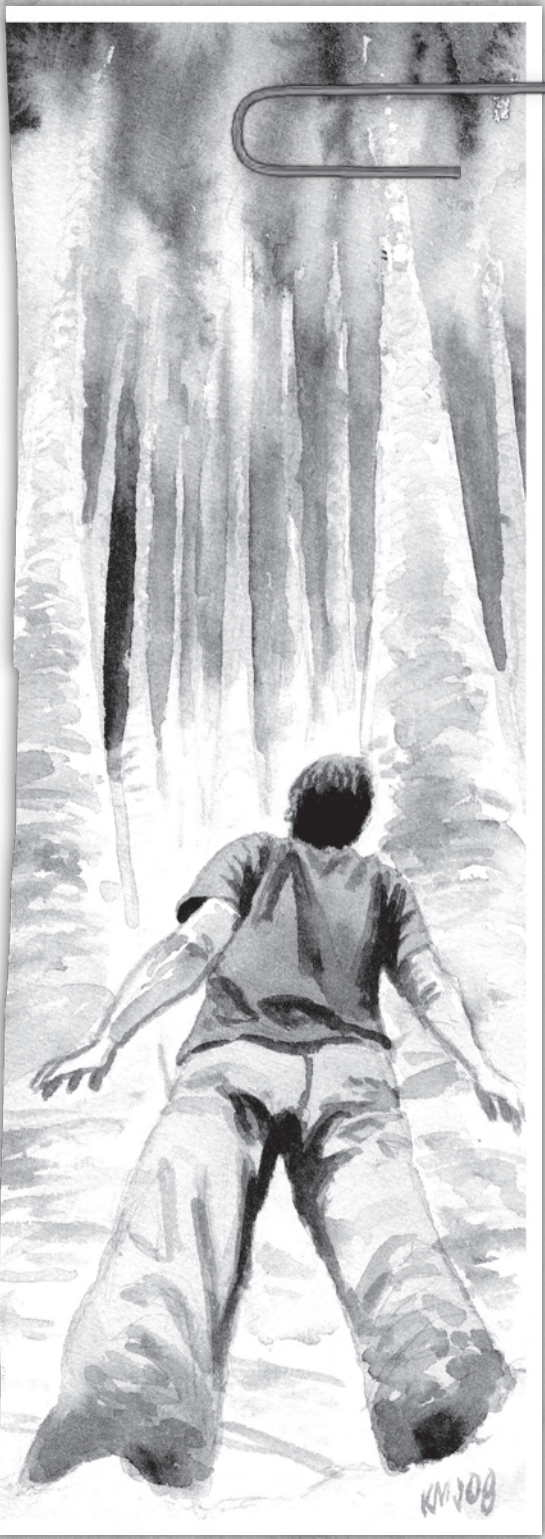
would *that* have to be one of them?

I never found her. Eventually, I just collapsed. Then, something started getting closer. I didn't see it or hear it; I just *knew*. Then I woke up. Or the dream ended. Or I just can't think of what came next. Come to think of it, all of it feels a lot less real now than it did a few minutes ago. It's pretty much completely out of my head…just the normal disjointed fragments of dream. I should go back and listen to what I just recorded. Give me a second.

Wow. That was one fucked-up dream. Even more so, because the only part I remember now is that stupid shit with the tailor and the grapefruits; seriously, I listen to the recording, and everything involving that ice forest might as well be someone else telling me about a dream he had.

---

We meet for coffee. Just coffee and conversation. Everything seems somehow more sharply defined; more *real*. The paper placemats on the table — deep burgundy, with scalloping along the edges — have a richness of texture that I never noticed before. The smell of the place fills my nose: the slight bitterness of the coffee in the air, along with the vaguely tangy-sweet scent of various sorts of baked goods. Even watching the lips of the other customers moving, I can follow every word as it



forms. My fingertips instinctively move over the old letters scratched into the far corner of the tabletop, where some dumb high-school kid etched something unflattering about a girl who either gave it up too easily, or wouldn't give him the time of day.

I'm about to tell her that I know something's up, but she beats me to the punch. "I know what you're about to say about me," she says. "And you're right. I'm *not* like everyone else. I'm sorry I didn't say something up front, but I'm…well, I'm used to being hunted. Hurt." She gets this furtive look. "I've spent the past few years running away." She chuckles — a bit unpleasantly, actually. "Running for years and never getting anywhere."

The talk goes in a bunch of different directions, but I always catch myself telling her a whole hell of a lot more than she's telling me. She'll drop one or two facts about herself (hell if I know whether they're truth or lies) and then I'm running at the mouth for five minutes straight. I'm not sure if it's some kind of unnatural ability or just a talent for getting people to open up to her. Maybe it's a bit of both.

She tells me she used to be human, just like me (this is, of course, a story I've heard before, but it never made me feel genuinely bad before I heard it from her. I have to wonder if that's a bad thing — not just feeling sorry for her, but also the fact that I can't remember ever feeling sorry for any other monster…creature…whatever. I'm sure some of that comes out in our conversation, and I'm sure she's filing it away for interesting ways to get me to do whatever she wants.

In the end, nothing is settled, nothing is solved. But, then, we met under the pretense of a chat over coffee, so I guess there was nothing *to* settle or solve. I know she's angling for something, but I can't figure out what. I think she's trying to figure out how suitable I am as a white knight (or a patsy; take your pick).

When she gets up to leave, she stops and turns back, and plants this feather-light kiss on my lips. There's that electricity again. I should have told her no. But I didn't want to. When she turns, I want to call out to her, ask her to come back, but all I can do is sit there, silent, grinning like an idiot.

---

"*Pleeeeeeeeease*?"

That's how she asks. She leans in and smiles at me when she says it and I know *she* knows the effect it has. She's clearly too scared to look into it for herself, but, just as obviously, I can't ask the crew to come along for this

one. I'd get chewed out, and rightly so: this is stupid. Straight-up, totally, unambiguously stupid. Even dumber, because I'm not agreeing to it for any even remotely good reason. I'm saying yes because I look into her eyes and I see her need and her vulnerability, and I know she's manipulating me into doing this for her and I don't even care. What a fucking wretched state of affairs.

I ask what I'm looking *for* and she hesitates to say. I finally get her to confide that she was "Taken," as she puts it, somewhere in that general vicinity. (The emphasis she places on the word seems dire enough that I feel the need to capitalize.) I can't get any word out of her as to exactly *where* she was brought. She just shakes her head at me, while her eyes wander elsewhere. It's like trying to get a blow-by-blow of a mortar attack from a post-traumatic veteran. She just starts to shut down, the more I press for details, so I let the subject drop. Almost immediately, she starts to snap back and she smiles that smile at me. Without my asking, she assures me I should be safe — that nothing's happened there for years.

Naturally, her reaction to my questions leaves me a bit skeptical as to just how "safe" all of this is, but I've long since gotten used to danger. That's not a "look at me, I'm such a badass" thing; it's just a statement of insane fact. I'm one of those poor, dumb assholes who walks directly at those things normal people run *away* from.

---

The following is dictated to Carol, as I drink piping hot coffee and attempt to get some feeling back into any part of my body. Apparently, I have some patches of frostbite on my right shoulder (which still hurts like a motherfucker and has a bruise on it about the size of a catcher's mitt), with a mild case of hypothermia, to boot. We should know by tomorrow if I have to have any skin hacked off, though Carol thinks it's pretty likely I'll be fine. I still feel like shit but, fortunately, I'm anal-retentive enough about my words that I'm sure to go back over this later and make sure everything's just so. As to how I got this way:

I was looking into that abandoned school Shakes had mentioned to me. She seemed sure there'd be some clue to whatever we were both looking for there, but she told me she couldn't go. Something about a promise she'd made and couldn't break. When I asked her about it, she said it wasn't a matter of *not wanting* to break the promise, but that she literally *couldn't*. That words — even poorly chosen ones — have power, and all that shit. Fucked if I know.

Getting into the place was easy enough. Some vandal had broken the lock on the chains; years ago, it looked like. It was a dead end, though, and I knew it from the get-go.



I knew it was stupid to keep looking, but I wasn't looking because I wanted to solve the problem. I was looking because I wanted to make *her* happy. So, I kept poking around for about two hours, ducking for cover like a kid trying to drink a six-pack of shitty beer in secret whenever the occasional car passed nearby. The musty smell in there was mingled with the odor of old waste — human and animal alike, I think, based on the occasional bits of junk that looked like they were left by homeless squatters. The lockers and walls were a battleground of tags and spray-painted art, much of it terrible but some of it actually quite good. At one point, something scampered in the dark and I jumped back with a bit of a shout, but it turned out to be a rat, I think. Whatever it was, it was already most of the way gone by the time I trained my light on it, and it didn't bother me again.

I never felt like as much of an amateur — not even when I first started with the work. And that just made me feel like a loser and, for some reason, feeling so down on myself automatically made me go back to thinking about Shakes. Finally, reason

won out over hormones (or whatever else made me keep dwelling on her). I stepped out into the overgrown recess yard and started fishing around in my jacket pocket for my cigarettes.

The hand closed on my shoulder from out of the shadows and I felt every last bit of heat leach out of my body from the point of contact. It felt like I'd never be warm again. A frozen cloud of breath whispered in my ear, in a voice that reminded me of nothing so much as the cracking of centuries-old glaciers warping and settling. I'll never forget what it said to me: "Where, O where, is my precious girl gone? My little sunlit icicle, my alabaster pet? You have seen her, have you not, O man? *Tell me where she is.*"

I think I stammered out something incoherent. I'm not even sure I was able to form sentences. I'm shivering now, just remembering it. I think it tilted its head next to mine, trying to make out my words, or whatever passed for them, through the violent chattering of my teeth. I saw some kind of motion out of the corner of my eye and heard that sharp grinding sound, like the foot-thick skin of ice on top of a frozen lake trying to decide whether or not it was going to give under your feet.

"You shall have to do better than that, O man…better by far." The ice-thing tightened its grip on my shoulder. I was aware only because of a dull pressure that obviously should've been pain, but I was just too cold to register that sensation. "Or, perhaps, you are offering yourself in her stead? Perhaps you want to come home with me?" It chuckled at me. Sounded like sheets of ice falling off a roof, one after the next, and shattering on asphalt. "If you tell me that you do not wish to come home with me, I shall let you go free. Have we an accord, O man?"

I never tried so hard to form a single fucking syllable as I did at that very moment. My lips couldn't even wrap around anything as complex as the word "no." All that came out of me was a slow series of warbling, gasping moans. If my insides hadn't felt quite so frozen solid, I'm certain I would've soiled myself.

I didn't need to see that monster to know it smiled. I could hear the grin in its hideous voice; I just knew that sound could only be the cracking of frozen skin, like leather left out in an arctic blizzard. "Then it is settled." A second hand settled on my other shoulder. I don't know quite what happened next, though. All I know is that it screamed, like it was terrified, in pain, or a lot from column A and a lot from column B. I fell to the ground as it let me go and vanished in a cloud of fine, white ice crystals. Within seconds, even those were gone, melted away to nothingness. As I curled up into a ball on the ground and tried to rub

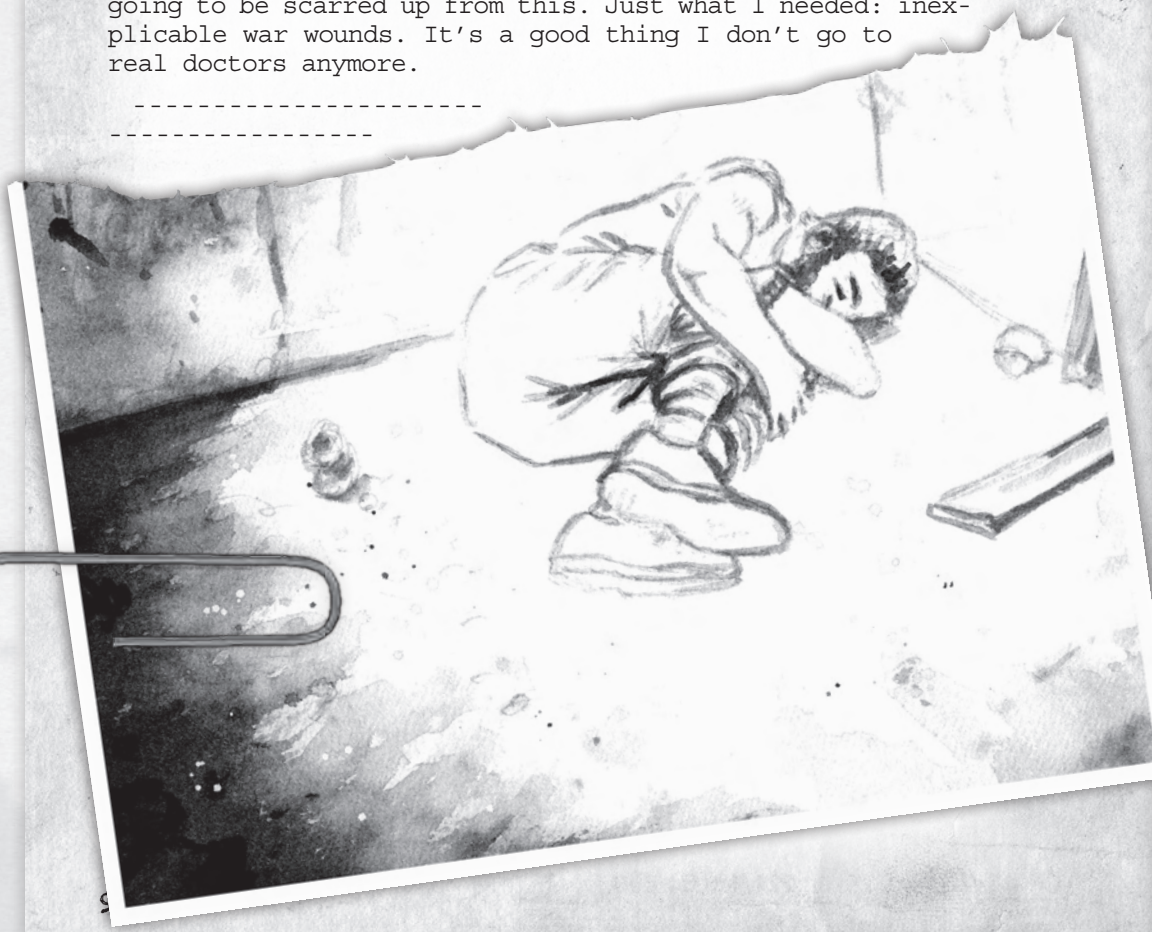
some warmth back into my limbs, I drifted off to sleep with the sound of church bells tolling midnight in the distance. For the life of me, I couldn't recall if the ringing had started before, during or after the screaming.

When I woke up, it was just shy of dawn. I managed to get my hand into my pocket and pull out my cell phone. I couldn't feel *anything* in my hand; my entire arm, really. I was shaking badly enough that even scrolling through the address book was nearly impossible, but I managed it, if only barely. When I reached Andy's number (the first number I could reasonably expect to dial without having to offer any kind of explanation for what I was doing looking like I'd been entombed in a fucking meat locker for a week), I called and stammered out my location and something that might have been construed as a request for help by those willing to be *extremely* generous with their definition of the English language.

After that, I passed out again and only barely remember being hauled into the backseat of a car. Then, I got dropped into a bathtub full of hot water and drank down cup after cup after cup of piping hot tea. Carol tells me my shoulder's probably going to be scarred up from this. Just what I needed: inexplicable war wounds. It's a good thing I don't go to real doctors anymore.

---

---



---

After bringing the crew back by the scene of the crime (as it were), we're able to learn precisely jack and shit about what transpired there. It's pretty obvious where I was standing, given the oversized, vastly elongated, vaguely footprint-shaped sets of cracks in the asphalt; not from great weight, mind you, but from what appears to be the perfectly normal wear-and-tear of the elements. Oddly, there is no damage where the little toe on the right foot should be, like it got amputated or something. Weird.

Anyhow, the footprints are right against a wall, meaning that whatever it was couldn't have sneaked up on me, unless it could walk through walls. Andy mentions something about the unusual color of the mortar on the bricks in the immediate vicinity — a little darker than the rest, like it's been stained by something — but that seems farfetched, even to someone in my line of work. A stroll around the neighborhood reveals the church whose bells I heard, but nothing about the place is particularly exceptional. It's a bit run-down and a quick search online comes up with nothing special about it, in terms of miracles or any other unusual phenomena.

The best the crew can come up with are some old fairy tales (not the Disney film variety, but the old-school "steal your children in the night" pre-Christian otherworldly monsters sort of shit, wherein nothing turns out well for anyone) about the sound of church bells being anathema to certain kinds of inhuman creatures. Naturally, most of the sources are religious and they're long on the notion of the power of Christ to banish evil, but short on facts. As always, that's the fucking problem with legends. Basically, we're back at square one, though we've got some fodder for discussion and maybe a few methods that we can use to deal with the thing, should it rear its ugly head again. More crazy shit to put in my emergency kit, I guess: wrought-iron nails, rowan wood, a horseshoe, and a few other things that'll directly contribute to the verisimilitude of my inevitable insanity plea. Also, Ernie mentions something about putting my clothes on inside out the next time I feel like this thing might be out and about. Apparently, that does something to their magic, or so the ancient Germans, Celts and what-have-you were occasionally known to believe.

---

The letter is waiting for me when I return home. Funny, I don't recall ever giving her my address. Maybe she used some kind of weird spell to find me. Then again, maybe she just has friends who know how to use a computer. In the end, it doesn't really matter. It's been shoved under my apartment door, rather than resting in my almost perpetually empty mailbox. I don't know if she did that to demonstrate to me that she can get to me whenever she wants, or

if it was her way of trying to add a more personal touch to things. Maybe it was a bit of both. Then again, maybe thoughts of my privacy and my feeling of security never once crossed her mind. I think that possibility is probably the likeliest, though I'm also a bit cynical, so you should probably take my opinions with a grain of salt.

Anyhow, it's not really what I expect — though, to tell the truth, I don't know that I was expecting *anything* at all from her. It has to be the truth, because it's the world's shittiest lie, otherwise. I mean, seriously: who tells a lie that should, by rights, incline the reader to kill the sender? Unless, of course, she *wants* to die, but maybe I'm just not cynical enough to make that leap, quite yet.

I've attached the letter here. Make of it what you will. Maybe it'll make more sense to you than it does to me.

Bryan,

I'm so sorry. I sent you there, knowing he was going to try to take you. I thought maybe you'd be interesting enough to make him forget all about me. I figured a new toy for his collection might make him consider us to be even, ever since my "betrayal." It's complicated and, all at once, painfully simple.

I'm a bad person. I really am the horrible creature that I know you think I am. I see more into your heart than you realize. I walk in your dreams as easily as you walk the streets of this city. I listen to what your secret heart whispers. I know what you feel for me — or what you felt, anyway. A lot of that is my fault: what I forced you to feel toward me, intentionally or otherwise. I didn't want to hurt you. I hope you'll believe me when I say that, though I can't blame you for never again believing anything I tell you, if that's what you choose to do.

I cared for you. I care for you still. I just care for myself more, because what's left of my soul is a scarred-up mess and I'm a selfish bitch. You were good to me; better than I deserved. Anything more I might say will just be me repeating myself, and I don't expect you to trust another word of mine, anyway. For what it's worth, even if only for a little while, you made me feel safe and genuinely wanted and accepted, and the memory of that is more valuable to me than I have the ability to express.

Whatever you decide to do — toward me or about me — I'll understand. You have a right to whatever kind of satisfaction you're intending to exact.

– Shakes

---

Why I decided to call her up one last time and have this conversation with her, I just can't say. It's stupid and that much was clear to me, even as I dialed her number and listened to the phone ring a couple of times before she picked up. When I heard her voice, I knew, right then, that she hadn't bothered to check the caller ID, because it was her customary faux-cheerful tone. After two seconds' silence, though, she *knew*. She didn't say my name, but I heard something in the sound of her breathing, maybe, that tipped me off, like the weight of her actions had firmly settled onto her and she was aware that the person on the other end was the guy she'd fucked over in such a profound and grandiose fashion.

With no better ideas in mind, I ask her to meet me, and she agrees to it. Her tone makes it sound like she's expecting me to show up with a shotgun and express my displeasure thereby. She also sounds resigned to it, like she really *does* believe that shit she said to me, about my being justified in doing anything to her by way of satisfaction. This would be a whole lot easier if she just acted like a lying cunt. But, no: she can't make it easy for me, even now.

I see her through the window of the coffee shop before I walk in. It takes a moment for me to steel myself for this. I want to charge through the door and strangle her. I want to walk in, cup her face with my hands and kiss her. I want to run in, grab her hand, and run away with her, to someplace that probably doesn't even exist. Instead, I do none of these things. I wander in, neither quickly nor slowly — with forethought but devoid of purpose — and take a seat at her table.

Shakes apologizes to me, but it rings seriously fucking hollow. Despite that, I so desperately *want* to forgive her, though I know it's just part of her magic…part of what makes her inhuman. It's the self-defense mechanism of a predator, same as any other. She feeds on trust and obsession and longing. She makes you want her and want to be with her, and the saddest part is that I honestly believe her when she tells me she's not doing it on purpose. That ice monster did something terrible to her and she came back incomplete. She feeds on warmth to survive, now: the warmth of human bodies and the warmth of the human spirit. She's no more to blame for what she is than a rabid dog. She's just a shitload more dangerous.

It doesn't matter. I can't bring myself to kill her or scold her or do *anything* to her, except to resolve to just walk away when she's done. Every step I take away from her hurts. I want to just turn around and go back and hold her

until she feels warm again. But that's the thing. She'll *never* be warm. She'll *never* get enough. She's always going to have that hole in her soul, that sliver of ice where her humanity should be.

My advice to you, if you should ever get the chance to read this thing: don't get involved. Don't get invested. If someone seems to start liking you for you, run away. Either they're someone good, who doesn't deserve the shit you're going to put them through, or they're someone like Shakes, who'll leave you feeling lonelier and more miserable than you ever believed possible. If you're reading this and just starting out, seriously take a moment and ask yourself — really ask yourself — if you want to walk down this road. It doesn't get easier and it doesn't end until *you* do.

If this sort of thing sounds depressing to you, then get out, now, and don't ever look back. Some lessons are better left unlearned. And, if you decide to go ahead with it, then I raise a glass to your sheer, dumb conviction, wherever it is that I am while you read this, and I pity you, because it never gets any better than you have it, right now.

CASE FILE HRG 00008

# GILLEN, EMILY

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.,
"Where Do We Go From Here?"

6/12/08

Went to a PTA meeting earlier. Turns out one of the kids from Luke's school went missing yesterday morning. I could see the principal wasn't comfortable telling everyone, but the little girl's parents were up at the front with her, as were a couple of cops. She told us the facts and nothing more, probably trying not to stir up panic. It didn't work. Come the end, once she'd outlined what the school would be doing to protect the children through the day, the room exploded in questions.

"Why aren't our children safe?"

Some people asked about reputable child-minders; others asked if it was safer to drive their kids rather than let them take the school bus – too easy to see that they're really thinking, "I'm going to drive my kid and don't you dare tell me I'm wrong." One guy asked about installing video surveillance at home. They've all got the same thing in mind, the same thing as me.

"Why aren't our children safe?"

Helen asked if the cops had any leads. That surprised me a little; I'd thought she'd join the chorus of meaningless questions. Then again, she's not prone to panicking. The others may be desperate for any chance to absolve themselves of responsibility, but if anything happens to Luke, we both know we'll have to do something useful.

The cop sighed and said the one thing that cops everywhere say: "We're continuing our investigation, but if anyone has any more information, we'd urge them to come forward."

Translated, that means they're getting nowhere.

Since I let the Market tear us apart, Helen's started to come around to my way of seeing things – or maybe I caught a dose of her pragmatism. Even so, she surprised us both. Whoever had snatched the girl had taken her while she was coming back from playing with friends on the same street. Driving to school or putting up video cameras wouldn't have saved her. They're just placebos, a way for parents to solve a problem by throwing money at it.

And I'm as affected as any of them. I'm thinking too much, over-analyzing every angle, getting angry with the responses of everyone who doesn't bother to think when something bad happens. Channeling my hurt and my pain through words and thoughts. For the first time, I think Helen understands. We're both turning in on ourselves, wondering if there's anything we can actually do. Right now, all we can do is be there for each other. At least I recognize that this time.

From: Andrew Kaplinski

To: Support Group List

Date: Thurs, Jun 12, 2008 23:11:00

Subject: Children

Some of you may have heard already, but I just found out through the school. Janie Morris was kidnapped yesterday evening. She was in my son's fourth-grade class. From everything that's been said, nobody's got a clue what's going on.

She was snatched right off the street, in broad daylight, on her way back from a friend's place. The friend lived on the same street. I'd say she wasn't on the street for more than two minutes, and someone took her.

Where do we draw our line, here? Do we just act when things get too weird for the authorities? That's not why I'm here. I'm here to keep my family safe.

Catching the sick bastard who took Janie would help keep my family safe.

The Hits Keep Coming

June 12th, 2008 at 10:22 PM

Status: Protected

Some days, wearing the uniform pisses me off.

Take the case I'm currently working. No names or details, but it's high-enough profile. To be honest, we're getting nowhere. Witnesses? None — at least, none that we've found. Detectives could be pounding the streets and knocking on doors, but they don't like doing that here. Instead, they send us, the uniforms. Whether we have better shit to do or not. Your husband beating you to death? Sorry, ma'am. Gotta wait while we do the crap jobs that come with the uniform. Just be glad we can get to you before we finish our paperwork.

Nobody came forward, so the detectives suggest convening a meeting of parents. Of course, the detectives don't bother showing their faces. So between writing up pointless interviews with people who didn't see nothing so we know they didn't see nothing, we had to haul ass to this meeting.

I can hear the excuses for sending us already. "The uniform sends a clear message." Bullshit. Everyone expects a detective in a suit with a badge. Do these idiots think people don't watch TV? The uniform sends a message all right: "We've got better shit to do. Call us when you find a headless corpse."

We had to stand on that stage and watch a whole room full of people, people who've lived their whole day on rumor and suspicion, have

us confirm their worst fears. And then they start with the hysteria and panic and stupid fucking questions. Is a backyard light on a motion sensor going to stop some scum taking my kid off the street? Can I get my kid microchipped like I did my new Lexus?

If you don't want to hear stupid questions, don't talk to the public. Not when everyone's running high on fear and uncertainty. It's the biggest killer of intelligence. The same shit makes people think they can challenge a buy with a shotgun in their face. One time in a million, yeah. They'll win. But they're playing the odds, and the other 999,999 times? The idiot's in a shallow grave.

I wish I could be more optimistic about this case, but it's been 24 hours now. I don't think we're going to see a good outcome.

Christ, walking a beat for 10 years turns cynicism into an art form.

# FEARS WORSEN OVER MISSING GIRL

The parents of missing schoolgirl Janie Morris made an impassioned appeal last night for anyone with information about their daughter's disappearance to contact the police.

"We just want to see her again." Olivia Morrison had to choke back tears in front of the cameras. "Someone out there knows what's happened to our little girl. Please, tell us what you know. I'm begging you."

As the search for the schoolgirl abducted in broad daylight moves into its fourth day, police remain confident they'll soon have a result for the parents. Officer Carol Del Ray echoed the Morris' request for information, but declined to comment further on the case.

06/15/08

They found her.

Those words don't really convey anything, though they get the basic facts over easy enough. Earlier today, police reported they'd had a positive ID of Janie Morris' body. It'd been dumped on an empty lot, but that's all they said. From that, it's easy enough to work out that she was a mess. No signs of sexual assault. For some reason, the media love to report those lurid details, like it matters more whether someone's a pedophile when his hobbies include torture, mutilation and murder.

I'm a little overcome. Someone in the group pointed out that the police don't release details of the body when it's particularly gruesome – like the guy found with his genitals hacked off and stuffed into his mouth. I'm not sure I believe that. I mean, it'd be pointless for the police to release details, anyway; half the time the newspapers just invent them.

It's definitely something we're discussing in the group tomorrow



*night. I want to know more, I want to do something to help, but I don't exactly have the skills to find out where the police are, or to catch a killer.*

*The planned abduction and murder of a nine-year-old girl. The thought of it turns my stomach.*

*Everyone's on edge. There's a real bad feeling in the air. When Helen picked Luke up, she told me some of the other parents were watching her. All the parents watch each other with suspicion. What if it's her? Could he have done it?*

*It gets worse. Of course it gets worse. Luke's noticed all the media coverage. I had to sit him down earlier and tell him that the girl in his class wasn't coming back. I didn't enjoy that one bit.*

Drained

June 15th, 2008 at 05:38 PM

Status: Protected

I didn't find the body, thank God. That part was all the detectives. Makes a change. They got a call about a body dumped on some waste ground. First thing I knew was my partner pulling me away from a whole bunch of paperwork. Tells me we've got a backup call and that's it. We're on the road.

As it turns out, "backup" is a fancy term for "keep the cameras out of our face." While I'd never say that the detectives in question had called

in the media — that'd be a fundamentally dumb idea — I wouldn't put it past them to pose for the cameras, just a little. It's a high-profile case that's caught people's imaginations. They want the city to see them making things right. We do the scut-work, we take the statements, but nobody ever sees us. We just get in the way of the real photo-op.

End of the Line

June 16th, 2008 at 00:16 AM

Status: Protected

I got to see the body, though I wasn't supposed to. The Medical Examiner owes me one from way back. He also keeps a bottle hidden away, and fuck me if I wasn't damn thankful. I've only just got back from the bar.

Whoever killed her…I hope I never get to meet him in person. Because we have this thing about laws and justice and all that shit, and I want to shoot him dead. He took his time, and he very carefully removed all the skin from this girl's face. Every last scrap. She looked like a fucking med-student prank, just muscle exposed to air. The ME said Janie would've passed out from the pain, but it wasn't having her face removed that killed her. The killer cut her throat with a rusty blade, then used the same blade to sever her limbs.

Jesus. Read that again. Let it sink in. Better than that, paint yourself a mental picture. Think about what it must feel like to peel flesh off muscle. Maybe it's a bit like skinning a chicken, maybe it's not. Then — and this is the key point, only after you've done this sick shit — you cut her throat with a rusty blade and you dismember the corpse. Imagine that. Run it through your head a couple of times.

You still don't feel as bad as I do. Remember, you're just imagining this happening. I've seen the end result.

There's a human being alive right now who can do all of this to an eight-year-old girl.

What kind of world do we live in?

*06/16/08*

*Everyone's somewhere between paranoid and outright crazy. I've had some parents offer me counseling and others looking to form vigilante groups to break people's doors down. They're not thinking. Nobody's thinking. We have to approach this rationally: even though the police don't know what do, we can't have mob rule or vigilante justice. If we did, we'd just hang everyone who didn't fit in.*

*I suppose that's the great joke, really. Here I am writing about vigilantism when it's a subject close to my own heart.*

*Maybe the group's no better off than anyone else when it comes to tracking down killers. Maybe it'd be a good thing if more people showed up; we could rely on many hands. It wouldn't work, of course. The group thrives on being*

small enough that we don't really need organizing, and on our shared experience. Every one of us has encountered something strange. We know the truth. If we had more people, they wouldn't believe. Herd mentality would rule the day. They'd find a culprit, an explanation, but with just enough holes that anyone who'd experienced the strangeness of the world couldn't accept them. The final stage then is shouting down anyone who disagrees with the group. Dare to go after the unpopular explanation that actually fits the facts of the case, and we'd be outsiders once again.

I'm going to see if I can't talk to one of the cops who came to the PTA meeting, see if there's any way they could get me some more information, or if there's anything I can do to help.

All day, my head's been pounding. Like everyone else in the neighborhood, I'm dreading tomorrow.



**PLEASE HELP!**

Our little girl was taken from us. Not snatched from her bed at night, but walking home along this very street in broad daylight.

SOMEONE MUST HAVE SEEN IT.

DID YOU?

If you have any information about what happened to our little girl **CONTACT THE POLICE**

06/22/08

It doesn't get any easier. We're not anywhere near the neighborhood where Janie was abducted, and we're still being paranoid. Every parent is. We can't help but think that the school's this psycho's focal point.

Would that it were.

A couple of other guys in the group have done some digging. They found something in the newspaper archives. Janie isn't the first. Kids get snatched every few months, and then turn up on waste ground a few days later. From what little they could get out of the reporters, the guy is more than a little bit of a butcher. Janie's the fifth.

I want to say that I don't understand the killer, that I can't comprehend what would drive a person to kidnap and kill children. Bliss really is ignorance. Serial killers aren't the strangest thing in the world. That's not to say that I understand any of them, but I don't put them in a class apart from everything else, like they're fundamentally alien.

Serial killers are people too. That's far scarier than the thought that they're something else.

Nobody's come up with a link between the murdered children, no way to prove conclusively that it was the same person. I hope it's just one person. The thought that we've got two people running around who'll happily murder children really makes me freak out.

I haven't been sleeping well. A couple of shots of whiskey help me get over, but even then, nightmares haunt my sleep. Helen's the same. We've not got to stupid levels of paranoia, but I've discussed what the group found, and we know when to worry. Losing sleep is a stupid, amateur mistake – but a mistake that we're happy to make.

I don't know. It's a confusing time for everyone.

The cop wasn't any help. She just stuck to her line like I was some kind of reporter, telling me over and over that the best way to help was to go home and look after my kid. Which is true, but it doesn't help anyone find the truth. I mentioned the other murders and she told me I was being paranoid. Which is bullshit. Five kids go missing and turn up dead on patches of waste ground all over the city, that's not coincidence. Whoever's running the case is ignoring the facts. That just means other kids are going to die.

Luke's getting annoyed. We've not let him out of our sight since Janie went missing. Nobody would blame us, but we can't watch him all the time. Some of the parents at the school have talked about setting up groups, so there's always at least one adult watching the kids, but it's never the same one, so everyone can start getting on with their lives. Normally, I'd say it's a good idea, but let's be honest: how much do Helen and I trust the other parents? Nobody's come forward. How do we know it's not one of them?

Paranoia again. Hardly surprising.

Back-Seat Driving

June 23rd, 2008 at 12:45 PM

Status: Protected

Updating on my lunch break. I can't keep all this in.

Someone concerned about the big, high-profile case really dropped me in it with the brass. And I mean *really*. Shit-hitting-fan time. I'm so tense I want to hit something.

See, this guy, this fucking guy — Kaplinski or something — he came to me with a folder full of cuttings and printouts from web sites, and he pretty much threw them at me. Before I could ask him what the hell he was thinking, he started ranting about how the police didn't care, about how there's an "obvious pattern" going on and some serial killer preying on children.

I only worked out what he was going on about when I took a look at some of the press cuttings. Four other child-murders. Child-murders that the detectives in charge of this case had not thought might be related. I couldn't exactly invite him into the squad room — I work for the police department in the real world, this ain't some TV show where the little old lady solves the murder all in time for tea.

I gave him the usual — go home, calm down, get some sleep and make sure your own kid's safe. He left the folder behind, and I stuck it in my locker. I had every intention of bringing up the related cases, but it's not exactly the sort of thing I could mention over coffee. Especially not with us being backup. Hell, if I weren't feeling charitable, I might suggest that the detectives don't claim the cases are linked to avoid FBI interest in any serial killer they find. Anything to cover their own damn asses.

Turns out that bouncing the guy with the news clippings wasn't a good idea. He went high, sending copies of his theory straight to the captain. He also mentioned my "unhelpful attitude." Asshole. Just because I didn't smile extra-sweetly when telling him to screw off, the captain's giving us his full attention.

I can see why. Five dead kids are worse than one. Doesn't matter how you spin it, and doubly so when you see what was done to these kids. Silly detectives, leaving all the case notes right there on your desk.

Then again, I get to re-interview all the damn witnesses and see if there's anything — anything at all — that links this case with any of the others.

A serial killer. I thought we'd get some help from the Feds, but no such luck. I've heard that we've got a couple sniffing around, but the top brass want this to be a police-only operation. Bastards only think about how this reflects on them.

From: Andrew Kaplinski

To: Support Group List

Date: Wed, Sep 10, 2008 20:31:52

Subject: READ THIS NOW

---

I've just got back from the police station.

Three hours ago, my son Luke was kidnapped.

Unlike the previous abductions, this one happened in plain sight of a reliable witness. Me. I was there, I saw what happened. I saw who took him.

We have to stop her.

Repeating myself would take too much time. Scan of my statement attached.

## FROM POLICE REPORT

We needed milk. I can never remember when I should pick some up; I drink my coffee black. My son, Luke, he was getting sick of staying in, so I told him he could come with me.

We walked no more than a couple of blocks, just as far as the nearest store. It was a quarter after five when we set off. We went in, I bought an 8 oz. carton of milk the same as I have a hundred times before. Luke ran on ahead of me while I got my change.

I turned toward the door and saw a woman pick up my son. I told the man in the shop to dial 911, and started running as she bundled him into a green minivan. I didn't see the model but it looked like a Ford. By the time I reached the door, she had got into the driver's seat. I lunged for her, but she'd already slammed her door. Before I could reach the curb, she'd sped away into traffic. I gave chase on foot for a block before realizing that I couldn't run as fast as a car.

The woman had blonde hair, fairly short, down to about her jaw. Maybe late 20s, slim to average build. Gray jacket, gray trousers. I didn't see her shoes. She was driving a bottle-green minivan, looked like it mighta been a Ford Windstar or something similar. The license plate started with a G or a 6, but I was too busy running to really focus on the plate.



From: Bryan Rafferty
To: Andrew Kaplinski
Date: Wed, Sep 10, 2008 20:42:35
Subject: Re: READ THIS NOW

---

> This bitch has my *son*. I am going to find her.

Hey, man. We are going to find her. We are going to get your son back.

He's gone.
It's my fault.
HE'S GONE AND
IT'S MY FAULT

09/11/08

My son's been missing for 29 hours.

I spent the day in the care of an Officer Rodriguez. Carol. I think she was there to stop us doing what the police call "anything stupid." I don't think anyone really knows what that means.

She's been good, she's stuck around and got photographs and done everything she can to help us through this. I can tell she wants to catch the woman just as much as I do. As much as we do.

Helen's expressed an interest in meeting the group. We've talked it over a few times, but it always comes to an impasse – what happens when it all goes wrong? Helen wants to be there for Luke, but I know what kind of danger she'd be putting herself in. Part of me says it's her choice, but another part thinks, what would I do if I had to choose between her and Luke? She's coming along to the next meeting, and if we hear anything before then, I'm going to keep her informed. It's only right.

Carol's just called. They got nowhere with the car and it's the end of her shift. I haven't slept, but I understand that she's got to. Tonight, we'll see what happens.

Eye-Witness

Sept. 11th, 2008 at 21:03 PM

Status: Protected

At least this time we have a witness. Admittedly, he's my conspiracy theorist (see here), but I'm going to be nice and not hold that against him.

I've been babysitting him and his wife all day. To be honest, they could do with someone else, someone who can do the whole grief counseling thing. These guys honestly think they might see their kid again. Great, they've got hope. Unfortunately, they're going to have to come to terms with the fact that they ain't seeing their son alive again.

Everyone was on at me before I left the station, telling me it might not be the same crazy. They might actually believe that, but

frankly I've got my doubts. There's not too many people would just snatch a kid in broad daylight, and with the recent shit, I don't want to think of what happens if we have two perps.

The witness still has hope. I wish I did.

When I left tonight, everyone was pinning their hopes on getting somewhere with the license plate partial. It's not a good partial. We could be looking for one car in over three million. There's no record of the car on any traffic cameras, and so we can't narrow the search by location. We're doing our best, but frankly I'm not holding out much hope.

**GreenLight:** News

**AndyK1978:** What? Have you heard something?

**GreenLight:** Better.

**GreenLight:** I've found the car.

**AndyK1978:** What?! How?

**GreenLight:** I know some people.

**AndyK1978:** How do you know it's the one?

**AndyK1978:** There's over three million that match.

**GreenLight:** That's what you think. Every detail narrows the search space.

**GreenLight:** It's a Ford Windstar or similar model. It's green. One driver, late 20s-early 30s female. Everything narrows it down.

**AndyK1978:** Who is she? Where is my *son*??

**GreenLight:** Out in the suburbs.

**AndyK1978:** We have to get him out!

**GreenLight:** Not yet. We need to get organized. You can't just run in there.

**AndyK1978:** The hell I can't!!

**GreenLight:** Think. You don't own a gun. This butcher will cut you to pieces. Give us an hour to prepare. Meet at the usual place.

**AndyK1978:** I can't wait an hour.

**GreenLight:** We both know that's a lie.

**AndyK1978:** One hour. Then you tell me that address or I'll break you neck.

**GreenLight:** Deal.

(no subject)
Sept. 12th, 2008 at 16:12 PM
Status: Protected
Got a big break. Fucking finally.
I think we're going to catch this sicko.
More to come.

LET IT GO

MAKE IT STOP

goodbye

# PHILADELPHIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## LAW ENFORCEMENT INCIDENT REPORT

Philadelphia P.D. Complaint Number: 97000245
Incident Data
Incident Type: MURDER
Address of Occurrence: [redacted]
How Received: SURVEILLANCE
Date Reported: 09/07/2008
Time Reported: 1610 HRS

Arrival Time: 1610 HRS

Weapon or Object Used: KNIFE/CUTTING INSTRUMENT

Domestic: NO

Arson Related: NO

Officer Assaulted: NO

Victim

Name: LUKE KAPLINSKI

Race: CAUCASIAN

Date of Birth: 17/04/1998

Home Address: [redacted]

Occupation: STUDENT

Sex: MALE

Marital Status: SINGLE

Suspect

Name: EMILY GILLEN

Race: CAUCASIAN

Date of Birth: 17/05/1982

Home Address: [redacted]

Occupation: HOMEMAKER

Sex: FEMALE

Marital Status: WIDOW

Narrative

At 16:10 on the day in question, I received a call from the detectives leading the investigation into the disappearance of Luke Kaplinski. They'd got a list of five possible residences with a vehicle matching the eyewitness profile. Given the time pressure of the case, they sent other detectives and uniformed officers to investigate the other residences. Five pairs of officers in total, one for each residence.

The address we'd been assigned was out in the suburbs. We didn't race in with lights and sirens - we were under instructions to only observe the address and see if we could find any signs that warranted further investigation. To that end, we took it quiet. We drove by the address three times. My partner identified a bottle-green Ford minivan parked in front, though we saw no signs of life inside. All the first-floor cur-

tains were closed, and that made us suspicious. He suggested we go check the place out on foot.

We parked around a bend in the road, in case someone was watching from inside, and approached the house. We could see no activity within, and got no response when we rang the bell. We progressed to banging on the door, intending to get the attention of anyone inside. I could see we were beginning to draw attention, so we decided against pressing the matter. On returning to our car, we tried to make contact with the detectives in charge to find out exactly how far we could go.

*We wanted to know if the minivan and lack of activity were good enough to kick the door in*

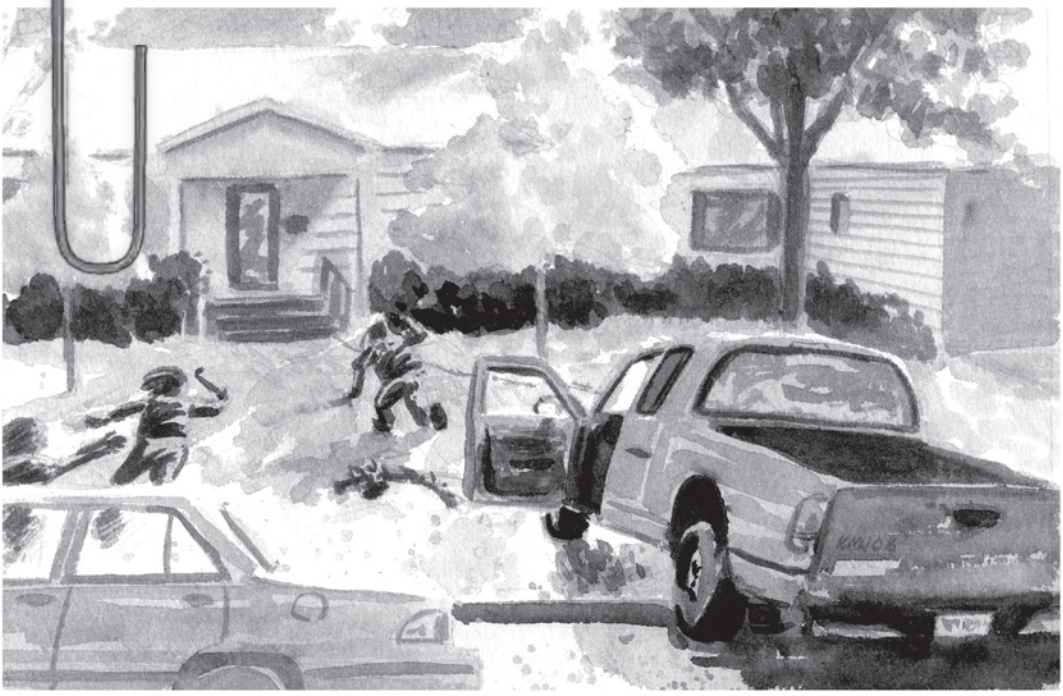
At the time, the detectives weren't available, so we took no action. My partner was wary of making any move, but I convinced him to stay to see if anyone returned. We had access to binoculars, so we could watch without being too obvious. We observed no change for 12 minutes by the dashboard clock. During that time, we tried and failed to establish contact with the detectives leading the case. Advice from the captain was to keep watching.

*It's their fault. It's my fault.*

At 16:37, we observed three vehicles pull up in front of our target house. We saw a number of people emerge and rush toward our target house. I could see at least two of them brandishing weapons. We called it in as a home invasion and set the sirens going loud. They were only a few steps ahead of us, but we had no backup. Larry grabbed the shotgun and we ran inside.

*How did they know? Why didn't they tell us?*

The invaders were trashing the place by the time we'd entered. We'd have started making arrests when I heard a loud scream coming from the doorway to the basement stairs.



In the basement was a chair, set on top of a number of plastic sheets. There was a child, tied to the chair. I couldn't be certain of his identity. One of the people who invaded the house was on the floor, cradling his arm. I recognized him from prior contact as Andrew Kaplinski, the father of the missing boy. A woman who matched the description of the kidnapper stood between the man and the chair. She was wearing an apron stained with blood, and had a straight razor in her hand.

*What kind of sick world do we live in that he had to see that basement?*

I drew my sidearm and shouted at her, "Get on the floor. Get on the fucking floor!" She refused to comply, and moved toward me. I fired three shots. I saw two of them hit her square in the body. She fell to the floor.

I didn't just fire because she was brandishing a weapon at me, or because she was advancing. I fired because the child's face had been cut off and re-



placed by an ill-fitting mask that didn't quite cover the bloody mess underneath. None of the invaders had been there long enough to do anything like that.

*She had killed before, and she was going to kill again.*
*I could see it in her eyes, the kind of wildead look.*
*You're nothing more than meat to those people. I had to.*
*It was self-defense.*
*It was self-defense.*

Life and Death

Sept. 14th, 2008 at 13:12 PM

Status: Private

I killed someone.

I can't get beyond that. I ended a human life.

The scary part is the change. All the psych guys, the counselors, everyone who's supposed to know this shit, they talk about how taking a human life flips some sort of switch in your head. That one moment, when you kill someone, that's when your life changes utterly.

That's complete bullshit. I've killed someone. And it hasn't changed anything.

I don't know why. I mean…fuck, I don't know what I mean. I guess it's one of those things. Either the psych people are full of shit, or what I killed wasn't human. I know she was human. I know it. She was sick — seriously bugfuck crazy — but she wasn't an animal.

So the psych guys are full of shit.

Or am I already mad?

There's no easy answer. Everyone thinks that pulling the trigger puts a period at the end of the sentence and draws a nice line under everything. They're wrong. Pulling the trigger isn't the end, it's just the start of a whole new paragraph. And all of a sudden, nobody knows who's writing.

*09/15/08*

*Luke.*

*Luke's dead.*

*I lit my own candle in the darkness to keep him safe, and to keep Helen safe.*

*I failed. Utterly.*

*For posterity, and for the group, I'm writing down what happened. Then I'm giving the group my only copy of this journal. I can't go on. My candle's blown out.*

*We found the place. The house, where the kidnapper had my son. Helen wanted to come with me, but I convinced her to stay at home. I wanted her to be safe. She thought I was spinning a line of macho bullshit, but she came around eventually.*

*We burst through the door and started searching the house. I went down, into the basement. I saw...I saw...*

*Luke was there. I think – no, I hope he was already dead. The woman who killed him, she went for me, took a chunk out of my arm with a switchblade or a straight razor or something. Next thing I know, a cop bursts in and shoots her.*

*I wanted to kill her. I didn't even get to raise a weapon, just huddle on the floor with blood flowing over my fingers.*

*I couldn't do anything.*




…e child, I can confirm that he had been … police officer found him. Due to the … sustained while the victim was alive, pin… of death is impossible at this time.

… with a sharp blade, possibly some kind of … paramedics first thought was a mask was … moved at least a day previously, and had … with inch-long nails. These nails penetrated the skull in several places, some doing damage to the prefrontal lobes of the brain.

The victim displayed extensive bruising to the limbs and torso, as well as burn marks and lacerations to the limbs consistent with wounds received when attempting to defend himself. Extensive bruising and abrasion on the wrists and ankles, combined with the ligature marks and the rope found around the victim's wrists and ankles, indicate that he had been restrained for some time.

Stomach contents indicate that the boy hadn't been fed for a span of time consistent with the duration of his abduction. In cases such as these, the kidnapper knows that the victim is going to die, and so avoids feeding him. Depending on the projected length of captivity, the killer may provide water, but the lack of food is a clear indicator of premeditation.

The Wider World

Sept. 20th, 2008 at 19:05 PM

Status: Protected

We didn't arrest most of the people involved in the home invasion. When we saw the basement, we kinda forgot anything else.

I've been on leave for the past few days. Tell the truth, I thought I'd be living in the bottle, but I'm not. I'm just getting used to feeling hollow.

The counselor recommended talking to someone about what happened. Not the details, of course, but he gave me the details of some support groups who could help. One of them's running tonight. I'm going to give it a shot.

Even if it sucks, I'll get free coffee.

The Land of Free Coffee

Sept. 21st, 2008 at 02:01 PM

Status: Private

I didn't expect that. Turns out I already knew most of the people at the support group. They were the guys who barged through the door and smoked out the psycho killer. Turns out they knew the victim's father, that he was a member. Which explains a lot, even if only after the fact.

He was a member, got them all mobilized to kill whoever had kidnapped his kid. They've got something going — everyone's had some kind of experience with either something really weird, or a whacked-out serial killer. I suppose I do, too.

They were kinda bummed out when he quit. It's understandable. You try to save your kid and get nothing but police questions and a slashed arm in return. Worse, you have to see the kind of thing that nobody ever wants to see.

We talked for several hours. Turns out I'm not the only one among them to have killed before, but we're still in a minority. Which is good. It keeps us grounded.

I said "us." I've told them I'll be going back. After what I saw, what I did…sometimes, the badge isn't enough. Sometimes you need to make a stand. You feel like shit at the time, but if you've got people around who know that what you did was right, it can make you feel better.

I do feel better. Better than I have in a long time.

Tomorrow, I'm going back to work.

**Cedar43:** I know some people in the group aren't happy opening up when there's a cop around.

**BRafferty:** That's true.

**Cedar43:** I don't blame them.

**Cedar43:** To that end, I figure I've got to do something to prove myself.

**BRafferty:** What did you have in mind?

**Cedar43:** I know someone who works in the ME's office. I know someone's keeping records of this shit.

**Cedar43:** I've got the report on what happened to Andy's son.

**BRafferty:** And you'd be willing to share it with us?

**Cedar43:** Yes. I'm also willing to tell everyone who asks that I can't remember anyone else's face.

**Cedar43:** I saw bodies, and I saw Andy lying clutching his arm.

**Cedar43:** I wouldn't be able to pull anyone else out of a lineup.

**BRafferty:** We're not some secret society of freaks. You don't have to prove yourself to us.

**BRafferty:** But it's a good sign that you've offered to do so.

**BRafferty:** See you Saturday.

December 19th, 2008

I know I left the group at a bad time. I thought I'd write you something just so you know I didn't do anything stupid. And to maybe try to put a line under that period in my life.

We've had to move away from Philadelphia. It held too many bad memories, as I guess you know. I've got a job in Portland, and we finished moving over to Oregon last week. Just getting out of town, learning a whole new area, it feels better. Like we're making a change, making a start. We're still not out from under the shadow of what happened, but we're definitely making progress. Helen's parents have moved with us, and I'm doing everything I can to embrace my new life without any of the weird shit in the shadows.

Part of our new life is continuing our family. Much as we're never going to forget Luke, we have to move on. Two days ago, we found out we're going to have another child.

I guess what I'm trying to say (and what I'm trying to convince myself) is that life doesn't end. You can't ignore loss and hurt and pain, but you can't let them rule your life. That's not how things work. You work through the pain and do your damndest to make the world a little bit better, anyway.

Against all the odds, we're doing okay. I hope you are too.

CASE FILE HRG 00008

# GNOSOPHARM

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



**Date:** 01/04/2008 11:04 PM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

John and I are going to give it one more try. This was my choice to make. John didn't seem to care either way. In the counseling session, he talked about how much he loved me, but that he didn't deserve me, etc, etc. In short, it was the same guilt-tripping, self-deprecating bullshit I've been hearing for nearly a year now. So why do I say he didn't seem to care? It was the flatness in his voice. He wouldn't look at me. I wanted him to get mad, yell — do something to break that quietly miserable exterior of his.

I guess I'm running away with negatives, so I should explain why we're not just separating. The counselor (Mr. Smith) seems to think John's probably depressed and it's not just a matter of mid-life angst. He explained the symptoms to us and they fit John to a "T." He sleeps all day and doesn't seem to find pleasure in anything. Even sex just seems like a mechanical release for him (and, to be honest, it hasn't been great for me, either). That's called "dysphoria." He hasn't been taking care of his appearance. The emotionless quality in his face and voice are apparently "lack of affect."

It's a chemical thing. I have to remind myself of that. It's substances in the brain. He wants to love me.

Anyway, the course of treatment is (more) counseling and drug therapy. This is where we hit a sticking point. John used to have the health plan, but he lost that when he stopped going to work. My Fearless Accounting is all freelance, and I'm almost tapped out. Mr. Smith doesn't come cheap. There's a glimmer of hope, though, because he had a tip for us: there's a small pharmaceutical company here in town that's testing a new antidepressant. It looks like John probably fits the profile for their subjects. They'll pay for in-house counseling if John goes through a drug course.

I guess I'm in a "wait and see" mode, then. If we can get John in this program and there's progress in a month or so, we might be able to sick together. If this falls through, though…I don't think I can stand this relationship anymore.

I do love him, care about him, and all that. Cheating never crossed my mind. I just don't love what he's doing to me right now. I can't stand it. I don't want to feel like a total bitch for abandoning my husband because of a disease that, in some sense, is really no different from diabetes or any other chemical imbalance, but

I have to think of myself in there somewhere. I need something in return. I'm tired of a dirty house and looking at a miserable, unkempt man all the time, especially when he won't even go out the door. I do want to have a baby some day, and I don't want the current John for his/her father. I want the guy I fell in love with.

**Date:** 02/04/2008 6:18 PM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

I didn't have to call that drug company. They called me. Mr. Smith called them, which was kind of weird. (Isn't there some kind of therapist-client privilege thing?) The company's called Gnosopharm. They have a little office over in Wash West. The woman on the phone didn't ask any questions. She just asked if she had the right people and gave us our choice of appointments. John was asleep (again), so I told her I was expecting the call, he was out but he'd told me to schedule things for him. No problem there, so we're going over at 1:00 PM tomorrow.

I hope this works.

**Date:** 02/04/2008 5:01 PM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

I started early with John this time. I pulled aside the curtains at 11, ran a bath for him and talked to him until he got up, stumbled into the tub and made himself ready. I even reminded him to shave. I wanted him to look presentable so he wouldn't get rejected for the drug trial, but looking back, that doesn't make any sense at all. I don't know… how depressed should someone look to qualify for antidepressants?

Wash West played its usual curse on my ability to find a parking space, but eventually we found a spot around the corner from Gnosopharm's office. They're in a converted house right above a law office. I thought that was a bit odd, but what was I expecting? It's not like we'd drive out to a factory or big white lab or anything, I guess. The inside looked like a normal doctor's office. The secretary I talked to yesterday grabbed John right away and led him into the back. He didn't even have a chance to introduce himself, but given his state right now, that's probably a good thing.

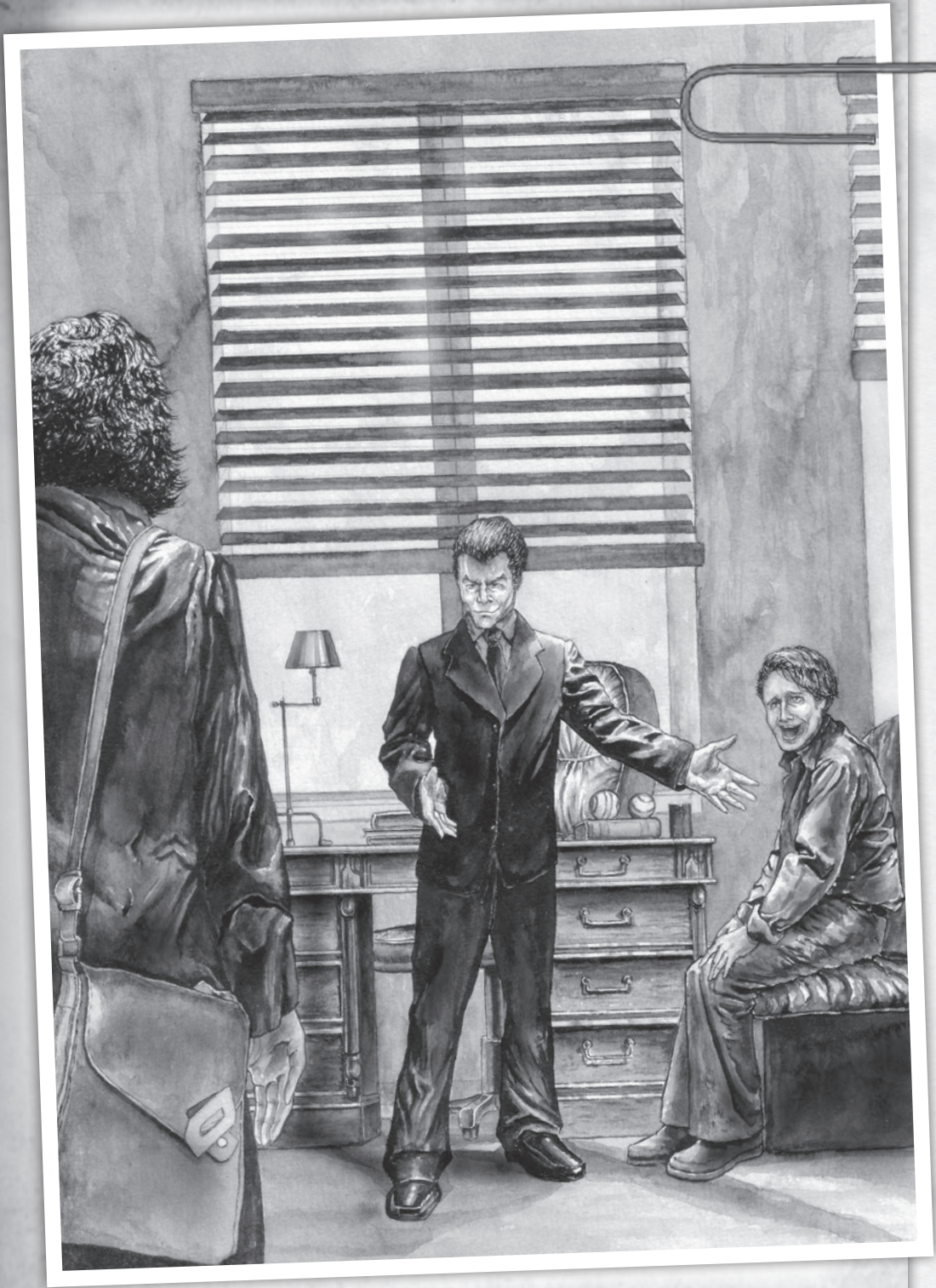
Anyway, I waited for about an hour, which was agonizing. Unlike a normal doctor's office, they didn't have any magazines. I guess the office was brand new, because I managed to entertain myself by peeling a price tag off the back of the couch.

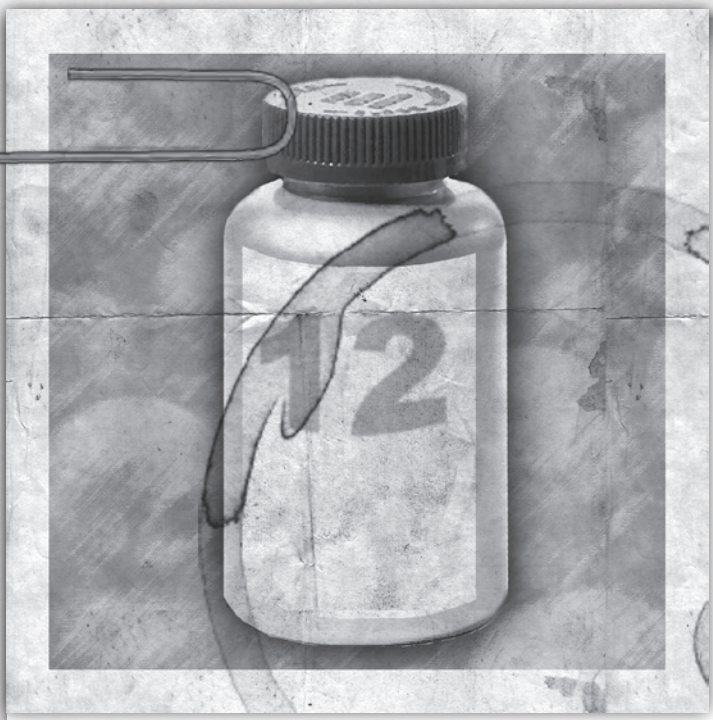
Then they both came out. John looked a bit different, maybe less dismal. His eyes actually looked around a bit and had lost the glassy character I've come to hate over the last few months.

The secretary said, "Dr. Logos wants to see both of you, together." So we squeezed into the back. It didn't really look like a medical examination room. It was more like a psychiatrist's office. There was even one of those Dr. Freud-style couches. (How much do those cost?) Dr. Logos was standing in front of the big leather chair he probably sits in. He shook my hand and pointed at the Freud couch. I sat down with John, who held my hand, really held it, with some warmth and softness instead of the furtive, token gesture that's been the rule for the past while.

We talked for about 15 minutes. Here's what I found out:

1. John's in. He signed the papers and has already had his first dose!
2. The drug doesn't really have a name yet, and he can't tell us the chemical composition because it's a trade secret, but it's been through animal and double-blind human testing. They've taken to calling it "Batch 12." This study is to get a more detailed picture of the drug's effects. They already know it works (!), but they want to know what effects it has day by day.
3. They want to see John at the office every day, for three months. Dr. Logos will provide counseling (this explained the therapist's setup) for an hour, and then John will spend an hour taking a bunch of tests to measure his emotional state. He even has to come on weekends. I thought this was going to be a pain in the ass, but John seemed to read my mind and said he'd drive himself (about time!).
4. Unlike a standard SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. I looked it up) Batch 12 should start working in a few days. If it does, I'll notice an improvement in his mood and energy level soon!






5. There are some side effects. John may have trouble sleeping (God, I hope so) and may behave "eccentrically." I got a bit worried here, but what this means is that Batch 12 tends to spark people's interests in things they weren't into before. John might turn into a racquetball junkie or something.

Basically, this is 99% good news. How many people get involved in a test for a drug that they know works? I think the possibilities are already having some kind of "placebo effect" on John. He didn't go back to bed when he got home, as he normally would. He grabbed the newspaper and thumbed through the Help Wanted section instead. He hummed a weird little tune to himself, too. It was dissonant and his voice was nasty and scratchy, but it was just about the best thing I've heard in ages.

Oh yeah: this is super-secret, by the way. I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement about Batch 12, John's treatment, etc. So more than most Friends Only stuff, this is just between you and me, okay? They seemed pretty serious about the whole deal.

**Date:** 09/04/2008 8:10 PM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

I just finished that big payroll contract last night (yep, that's action-packed accounting for you), so I gave myself permission to sleep in. I opened my eyes at 10:30 and rolled over to shake John awake — that's a habit I've gotten used to — but he was gone. So were the clothes he left on the floor. I chucked off the covers and looked for him. It was like

following a negative trail. John had cleaned up as he moved through the house, stacking loose books, folding towels and finally stopping in the kitchen — the now painfully white kitchen — where I found him making a couple of bacon and egg sandwiches.

He smiled, slid across the floor and gave me a peck on the cheek!

I was starving and didn't say much until I'd totally scarfed down my sandwich, but after that, we just sat in the kitchen and talked. I have to admit I couldn't really tell you what we went on about. Little stuff. Silly stuff. It was the kind of small talk and dumb little jokes I remember from the beginning of our relationship. I guess I was just a bit spaced through the whole thing.

Maybe I'd gotten comfortable with the idea that our relationship was falling apart, that we'd walk some long, lazy path to separation. I've thought about it a lot. I mentally earmarked the furniture I wanted to keep, thought of the little condo I was going to move into after we sold the house — everything but dating other men, and I hated, hated, hated John for still being here and placing that one barrier in my imagination.

He's been getting busier, smiling more, but he was kind of remote at first. Sometimes he seemed a bit spaced out, to tell the truth. He'd stand at a window with a book or dish or something else and just stop and stare. He told me this was Dr. Logos' advice. Whenever he has a negative thought, he's supposed to take a moment to mentally track it back to its origins. Today, though, he was my husband again, for the first time in a long time, so now it's up to me to remember how we got along before the depression hit. I have to smile without being afraid that any happy moment is just a respite between the self-hating tirades, the flat, weak, whispering apologies, and solitude, when he buries himself in bed.

Actually, let me go back on that a bit. He's not exactly the John I remember. He was never this tidy before. All this cleaning is nice, but it's freaking me out a bit. I want the house to have a kind of lived-in look, okay?

(He's coming up the stairs! Gotta go.)

---

**Date:** 10/04/2008 3:10 AM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

This post fits the "When I say Friends Only, I mean it" warning. No gossiping, period.

John came back from his therapy/testing session with flowers and beer. I can't stand flowers (I kill them; thanks to my ministrations, our porch garden is basically sand), but I like beer. Maybe we're not out of the woods with his depression yet, because he got this confused frown on his face when he gave me the daisies (or whatever yellow flower-things they happen to be — how should I know?) and even resisted a bit when I yanked the six-pack from his other hand. I can understand his defensiveness. Looking back, I spent a lot of time yelling at John during the worst of it. I even threw a shoe at him during one of my Get a Fucking Job rants. The awkwardness only lasted a minute, though, because he started smiling once I poured him his customary stein and popped mine open bottle only, the way I like it. The beer was the kind of Canadian brew-corp pisswater I made him promise not to buy after we first shacked up, but I guess it's easy to find. I can't expect too much out of him yet, can I?

The first part of the night was basically our third date all over again, with the beer, the big bowl of pasta with whatever we could chuck into the sauce, and a bunch of drunken excuses about how we shouldn't start fucking now, but maybe we could, y'know, neck a bit.

Then it was good. Good and…strange. It's been a while since we danced the conjugal mambo. Last time we went for it, it was a disaster. John talked about how he was a failure as a lover right after he came, and I slept on the couch for the rest of the night.

Tonight, though. Damn. It sort of reminded me of the beginning of our relationship, but it was also not like John at all, past or present. He was earnest and a bit fumbling, but he really seemed to be trying to make me happy without linking his performance to his ego.

Jesus, I keep trying to avoid using some clichéd "it was like the first time" description, but it was, though not in the silly pop-song sense. I guess I mean it in the "two mature people who don't know each other's tastes try things out" sense. John has changed. Maybe he's trying to see if I've changed, too. He did grab my hair at one point, which he knows I hate, but once I shook my head, he stopped. I'm not going to get into the messy details of John's new preferences, but there's one thing that stuck in my head. He used to like it when I said his name, you know? But this time he kept saying, "Don't call me that," over and over again. The more he did it, well, the more…excited…he got.

But it was still good. It's about time. Thank you, Batch 12.

**Date:** 14/04/2008 5:11 AM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

John's slept less and less since he started treatment. It doesn't seem to bother him much, since he's never actually sleepy, but it's odd to stretch out and not bump into his back in the middle of the night. This is the first time I've woken up to see his side of the bed untouched, though. I just wobbled to my feet to see if he's okay. He's not home. The car's gone and his cell's still on the nightstand.

What the hell?

Now I can't sleep, either. I guess it's Sudoku and cigarettes for me, until he gets back and I can gently remind him that it's bad manners to take off in the middle of the night.

**Date:** 14/04/2008 7:08 AM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

John's home now. He got a job! He's doing night security downtown. I had a perfectly good rant planned, but I guess the joke's on me. Dr. Logos apparently put in a word for him, since he knew John would have trouble sleeping, anyway.

It's good news. The only thing I don't like about it is that the job comes with a gun — and the gun comes home with him. He needs to keep it there because he's supposed to drive to a bunch of different sites. I took a handgun safety course ages ago, but ever since a burglar shot Scotty with his own gun (it was in his office desk; the thief got to it before he did), I decided I didn't want one around.

It's still good news. I made John promise to store the thing properly. Now, before Batch 12, I'd never trust my messy husband to follow through, but I think new, Neat 'n' Tidy John can handle it.

**Date:** 06/06/2008 4:25 AM

**Status:** Friends Only

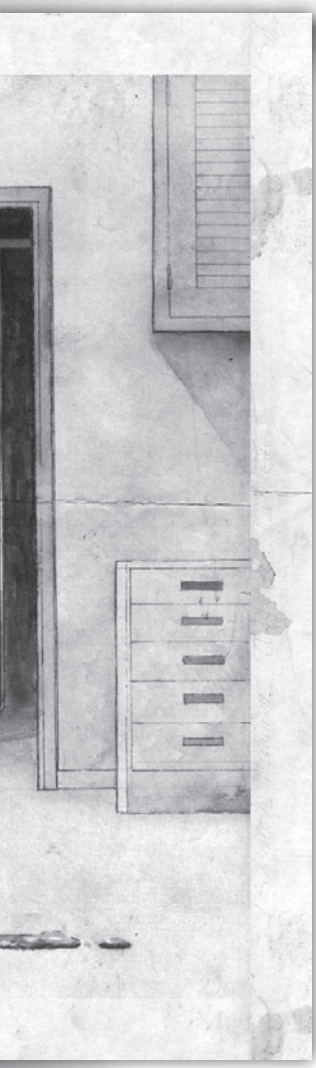
**Tags:** john, scotty

I am furious. I'm going crazy. He is crazy. I don't know.



I haven't made a John post for a while. For the first little while, it was because I was happy. Batch 12 was doing its job. No news is good news, right?

John never stops smiling. He never really gets angry. Sometimes he acts strange right after doing one of those "pause and think" exercises Dr. Logos has him on. Then he'll suddenly walk out of the house for an hour or three or try to get me into bed, but nothing ever really bothers him. When I say no to sex (as I have frequently over the last month — I don't like what he wants anymore), he shrugs and smiles. When somebody's rude to him, or even when he hurts himself, there's no frown, no bitterness, nothing but a little smirk. It's always exactly the same fucking smirk.



Last week I saw him drop a kitchen knife onto his foot. There was blood all over the titles. I think he might even have put a hole in the webbing between his toes. He didn't make a sound. He just got some gauze and a mop.

That brings me to today (or yesterday). I don't know if this was the worst day of my life or not. It's in the running. Maybe the day Scotty got shot was worse, or maybe it was the day they told us he wasn't going to wake up. Maybe it was when Dad blew his savings on keeping Scott warm and breathing when we all knew he was dead in all the ways that mattered.

Like all the other bad days, this one's about my brother, too. When he finally slipped away two weeks ago, I thought, "Finally!" Then I felt like a piece of crap for feeling so unburdened by his passing (or the end of his passing, I guess).

Today was the funeral, you see.

I think most of the family felt the way I did, but nobody said so. Dad was one exception; so were Sumera and my niece, June. None of them could stop crying.

John was having a fucking blast.

He started smiling and humming through the service. Afterwards, he ran up and gave Sumera and Jane big hugs. These weren't "condolence hugs." He acted like we were at a goddamned family picnic. He told Sumera that "she looked like she could take her pick of the guys now!" while she was staring at her dead husband's coffin. He mussed June's hair and asked her how gymnastics was going.

He slapped people on the back. He offered to go on a beer run. He kept smiling and humming, like he had no idea that my brother's funeral would be cause for sadness. Farouk (that's my brother-in-law) started shouting at him, but it didn't make any difference.

John was a regular social butterfly, touring the family and pissing people off with his attitude. I didn't get there in time to stop Dad from punching him in the face. John was still smiling when I grabbed him by the wrist and walked him out. Everybody looked at us like we were poisonous.

I screamed at him all through the trip back, so hard I couldn't drive properly. I nearly hit a cyclist. John's expression never

changed, no matter what I said, and I said the worst things I have ever said to him. When we got home, I fell on the bed and cried. John stayed in the living room.

I eventually worked up the strength to go and talk to him without calling him an insensitive, crazy asshole. He was cleaning his gun, still smiling, until I came out. Then he did one of his mental exercises and looked up with a totally fake-looking sad face.

"Dr. Logos said this might happen. It's a side effect. I'm very sorry. I love you. Work's expecting me early."

That was it. He got up and left.

I don't know what to do. I wanted this New John, but if he's just a new kind of crazy now, I won't be able to bear it. But like before, I feel guilty even thinking about leaving. I don't want to abandon a sick man.

I don't want to be a fucking doormat. God help me. I'm going to talk to Logos myself — without John. I don't know what he'll tell me, but I think I can get a feel for whether Gnosopharm's been screwing with him.

**Date:** 10/06/2008 1:13 AM

**Status:** Friends Only

**Tags:** john

Here's what I've found out:

1. I went to the office. It's empty now. (I wore a head scarf and sunglasses as a disguise. I realized what a dumb idea this was about 30 seconds after stepping out of the car. I looked like Audrey Hepburn, fresh out of a time machine from the 50s.) Even the furniture is gone. Neighbors say it's been like this for about a month, but John says he's been going there for monitoring and therapy every day.
2. Gnosopharm — the real Gnosopharm — was a software and data management company specializing in pharmaceutical-industry logistics. It filed a Chapter 11 three years ago.
3. Nobody named Logos is licensed to practice medicine in the state.
4. Neither Logos nor Gnosopharm have recent tax records.

Fuck this. I'm following him to work tomorrow night.

**Date:** 11/06/2008 6:13 AM

**Status:** Private

**Tags:** john

Oh God.

John is not John.

I borrowed Scotty's car. John's never seen it because Sumera stopped driving it after the coma. I parked it around the corner. The moment he left, I slipped my shoes on, but I waited two minutes before running over to Scotty's car. I was pretty sure he was going downtown; the fast food receipts in his pockets told me that. I had to drop the needle on the speedometer a bit, but I eventually saw him up the road, slowed down and kept about half a dozen lengths away for the rest of the trip.

He went downtown, then through and out to Camden. This made me a bit nervous, since the traffic dropped off (who wants to go to Camden at night?), leaving just the two of us for big stretches. If he noticed, he didn't show it.

He stopped at a big, long block filled with dirty brick apartments. I pulled up around the corner, threw on a pair of jeans. (Somehow, I felt okay following my armed husband into an urban shit hole, but I needed something tougher than my pajama bottoms to do it in.) I put on my coat and shoved the kitchen knife I'd taken along in the pocket, through the lining so it wouldn't rattle around.

There was a crowd further down the road. John meandered through it slowly, chatting with a throng of poor teenagers. He looked happy, but not like he has lately. It wasn't a plastic gesture. He had a loose-hipped walk, quick dynamic expressions — all the nuance he's been missing since Batch 12, even since the depression took hold.

The only problem was that none of the body language was John's.

I remember when I was a little kid, I used to get freaked out by this picture in National Geographic. In it, this woman was bent weirdly; her eyes were rolled up in their sockets. I don't even remember where it was from, exactly. Maybe it was Africa, Haiti — hell, maybe even Java. I'd look at the picture and then close the magazine really fast, over and over again, every time a chill hit the back of my neck. I knew something was in that woman, wherever she was from. It was making her move a way she would never move, pulled by a clumsy puppeteer.



I used to think that if I ever saw someone like that up close, it would be like the photo, but it's not. The photo only looks strange because it's a frozen moment in time. The truth is that when they move — when John moved — they look like anybody else.

They just don't look like the people you know. That's how I knew John was not John.

I can't talk about the rest right now. It'll have to wait until I get out of town.

**Date:** 13/06/2008 8:01 PM

**Status:** Private

**Tags:** john

So here I am, in Scotty's car. I've been sleeping here for an hour or two at a time, then driving, driving, driving. I don't know where I'm going. I hope those bullshit entries about taking a vacation will keep them off the scent. I've been posting with whatever wireless access I can steal from cafés, office buildings — whatever.

Of course, I'll have to erase this journal. I shouldn't be posting these entries, but it's a comforting habit. I'll have to print them out from a shop somewhere. From what I've read, the delete command just creates a very easy hoop for them to jump through, but let them jump.

Hell, maybe they can read my mind.

So, John.

I killed him. I didn't kill him. I don't know.

They let me into the club because I pointed at John's back as he was heading through the door. The door staff was a small woman who didn't blink. She smiled and asked, "Who is he, then?"

I whispered John's name, stopped and then on instinct, said, "Logos." She stepped aside and looked down at my feet. She turned from a tough broad to a submissive so fast I started to reach for her. When she saw my hand, she took a step back, like I was dangerous to touch.

There was no music. I was afraid of looking weird and shabby, but there were a lot of folks like that. I recognized one of them; she was a homeless woman I ran into once when I dropped off a hunk of forms for a client. There had been a whole row of people panhandling. She was in line that day, but she didn't say a word. She just lolled back and forth like she was sleeping even though her eyes were wide open, like a puppet that'd been thrown into a corner. Now, she looked just as dirty and tattered, but she was vital, tiptoeing from table to table.

There were rich people, poor ones, little kids and withered men in wheelchairs, members of all races. There was a stage, too. John sat on a chair there, along with two other people. They all stared straight ahead, but they weren't like that woman, the time I saw her on the street. They looked ready for something.

I stayed near the walls to avoid John and because I didn't really know what the hell I was going to do. I spent about an hour at this. Not much happened, except that one guy grabbed me hard and said, "You want to find a room and fuck? I'm just getting the hang of walking around in this one." I stepped away, looked away — he didn't bug me again. After that, John walked up with a shorter guy on the right and a petite woman on the left. Everybody shut up then and looked at the floor, like they were all going to say grace.

Maybe that's what it was. The three of them started *chanting*. I don't know the language. I couldn't even repeat it. They sounded

something like those Asian "throat singers," but there was more, things that sounded like animal calls, or maybe speaking in tongues. There were times when I almost thought I recognized a word, like it was from a language I *used* to know but didn't quite remember.

It hurt, too. It felt like a knife in my forehead. I knew that showing the pain would give me away. I bit open the inside of my lip trying to keep my face straight. Either it worked, or nobody was paying attention, anyway.

After that, they started talking. They all said the same words with the same tone, simultaneously. I remember it perfectly:

"Semen. Blood. Hair. Nail clippings. You all know the laws of the Art and the traditions we use to exploit them. We have all mastered the eternal rites: the God-lore we keep, and are given the power to exploit as we patrol our lowly protectorate. These sleeping, talking animals ensure our secrecy and safety — even from each other, when our differing visions of devotion make us argue. We used the bonds of images, the secret names and parts of our own bodies to forge chains between ourselves and our extensions.

"See how I control three at once? This isn't a stunt, but a casual exertion. I'm also enjoying a nice dinner with a dear friend at home right now, and as I talk to her, she has no inkling that many miles away, these shells are carrying my words to you. This might be possible for a true master, but, I regret to say, my own studies have always involved more breadth than depth. In fact, medical research provided the innovation that makes this possible. I know what many of you are thinking: ordinary medicine is half a lie — but you see, ordinary *people* are half lie, too.

"The technique has many particulars, but they descend from two general methods. The first is to find susceptible subjects through conventional psychology. All three of these people have problems that compromise their ego integrity. One is anorexic, one is clinically depressed, and the last suffered a significant brain injury. All of the unenlightened have these fragments of weakness. It might be in our interests to encourage a broad trend of increased mental illness. This makes them easier to exploit and flows into the second aspect: what I call sympathetic medication."

This was when I started to walk to the stage.

"I didn't have to kidnap these people and batter down their minds. They came to *me,* seeking treatment. I altered their behavior with simple emotional compulsions and ensured that they would see me regu-

larly and take their medicine. The pills were made of a representative sample of traditionally effective bodily essences: semen, blood and all the rest. I them processed into an innocuous form and added certain resonances using standard methods. Over time, this created a very powerful bond, while the emotion-shaping lowered their resistance to more vigorous control. I combined this with several exercises designed to lower their inhibitions. The middle one,"

(John. Oh, my poor John)

"was reserved, compassionate — a bit of a coward, really — but just a week ago, I used him to kill one of the enemy's arrows."

They all looked at me when I hopped onto the stage. I took out the knife and did it.

John wasn't John. I know that. He wasn't.

I thought someone would grab me or shoot me — do something. I thought of slitting my own throat, but nobody got up. Nobody did anything, because they didn't care. They didn't think I had done anything to a real person. Maybe, at most, I was being rude. I was a shell for someone else. I was a figure in a meat video game, killing another unreal thing.

They laughed and laughed as I walked out.

**Date:** 20/06/2008 12:01 PM

**Status:** Public

**Tags:** john, life

Just one more entry. I'm going to miss you all.

I'm gone. John's gone. We're not coming back.

I'll be fine. Don't look for me. The cops will ask you questions. Cooperate. I'm not going to be where you think I am, so you can't hurt me by answering them.

Nobody can hurt me. I've already been hurt bad enough and there's no cure for it. No faith, no surrender, no pills.

No pills.

I have a mission instead.

September 1, 2008

Dear Diary,

It's strange to write that again after years of blogging, but here I am, back to pen and paper. I'm torn between the need to keep my secrets and the desire to reach out. I'm lonely. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if I'd really left town, but I didn't. Intellectuals call my new digs "interstitial living." I call it "homelessness" in my head, though that isn't really true. I hope They think I've gone across country. I'm actually deeper in Philly than I've ever been.

(I call the ones who took John "They." I can't think of a better term. I like it. It keeps me paranoid.)

I live in this little alley downtown. There's a pointy, wrought-iron fence blocking it, but it's not really fastened to anything. You can pull it away and put it back behind you. Most people just assume it's fixed there, warning you from taking a shortcut through something so narrow you have to shuffle in sideways. What you wouldn't guess is that the alley widens. One of the buildings gets narrower about 50 feet in. That leaves space for a forgotten, grimy courtyard. No windows look out on it. I brought in lumber and bricks. I even found an outlet to power lights and my laptop. I sleep in a little shack while the cabs scream by. I only go out at night, or in the rain, when normal people don't want to go outside.

One of the things I've learned over the past month is that if you're crazy enough, another world opens up for you. You can't just rant and rave on street corners and beg for change, though I did that at first. Push on through, give your paranoia free rein, and you'll land in a place where the twitching and screaming goes away. You fall all the way through the cracks, into bigger spaces. You find places for things like my cabin. You learn when the bread trucks deliver and how to snatch something to eat before the restaurants and food courts pick up the pallets. You see patterns in Philly's chaos. I know that two blocks down, there's a streetlight where drunken lovers always go to argue. I know three Skinheads take a cut of the local panhandling. I know that They are everywhere, pulling puppet strings. I see people swerve on the street for no reason. Voices change just a bit. I've followed them as much as I can, and know They can only keep a grip for so long. They never stick to their people for more than a few hours. I hardly ever cry now, either.

I've felt clearheaded for about a week and I've managed to equip myself. I broke into Dad's cottage first. I stole his shotgun. I sawed it off in his tool shed.

I'm ready for Them.

---

September 3, 2008

Dear Diary,

John's funeral was a while ago. The papers said he'd been mugged. I didn't go, of course, but today it was raining hard, so I decided to visit his grave. The streets were probably going to be bare, anyway. It's a fair distance, but I have the car in storage. It's a crappy flat black now, but I haven't had a chance to steal new plates yet. I parked three blocks away from the cemetery to be safe. I took a long walk around the perimeter and made sure the place was deserted.

I spent maybe five minutes staring at the grave. I'd like to say I started crying or yelling or feeling something, but even though I reached deep in myself and replayed that night in Camden over and over, everything was blank, like a white sheet of paper in my head.

His little grave plate said, "He will find justice in the next world." God damn it, I feel the mission. I can taste how much I want to get at Them, but it's not for John. It's for me.

For a second, I felt like coming to the cemetery was a little triumph. I went where They didn't want me to go. That was stupid of me. I forgot that their bodies — the ones I see, at least — are just shells. They don't care about staying out of the rain, either. I wasn't alone.

I was pretty damp from the downpour, but this guy was positively waterlogged. He sat on a little stone bench behind a mausoleum: a blind spot in my patrol. People don't sit on benches in the pouring rain without trying to cover themselves. He was walking slow, probably thinking of some trick to get me to go somewhere with him. They like to be subtle, but you can use that as a weapon against them. The bastards are so used to living in the secret world, beneath the cracks, they assume that everyone else is just as scared of exposure, but I'm not. That's why I used the shotgun for the first time — as a club. Thank God for the element of surprise. It knocked him out with one shot.

He was a big guy. It took a while to carry him to the car. I tied him up with bungee cord and duct tape and took him to the storage garage. That was my second dumb mistake. They (that is, whoever or whatever possesses him) left the guy's body. By the time I ripped the tape off his mouth, I didn't have anybody to question. There was just this confused guy with a concussion and chills from hours in the rain. His name is Denny. I think I can still use him, though, and he's too sick to get away. I just have to find a place for him.

---

September 5, 2008

Dear Diary,

If They can possess hosts at a distance, They can probably track them down, too. It wasn't easy finding a place to stash Denny, but I finally settled on an abandoned gas bar about an hour outside of town. I blindfolded him in case They could use his eyes like some kind of remote camera. I doped him up on codeine, just in case They tried to make him attack me. (I don't know whether this really works, but I've seen Them get drunk, so I assume whatever affects a host causes some "interference," at least.) I chained him to an old radiator and waited just out back, but where I could see him and the road, once I busted a few boardedup windows open.

It took four hours for somebody to show up. I don't know what I expected exactly, but it wasn't a beatup hatchback. A big guy in sporty casuals got out. He had a gun. He didn't move like one of Them. Shooting him was the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

I ran up and pulled the trigger as many times as I could. The kick hurt the hell out of my wrist. I don't know how many times I hit him, but I guess I aimed



low. The buckshot ripped the shit out of his front. I thought he was going to fly back or something, like the movies, but he just keeled over. He screamed a lot. So did I. Denny groaned underneath the tape over his mouth.

It was easier to secure this guy. He had brought his own cuffs, along with pepper spray and a little gun in an ankle holster. I thought he might be a cop, but there was no wallet, no ID. He stopped screaming at some point (I guess he was going into shock), so I asked him who he worked for. Well, I yelled, "Who are They?" a lot. He said he'd just started, that his brother had powers. He owed people money. He was sorry. Please let him go.

(You have to understand, my Dear Diary, that things were breaking inside me throughout this episode. I feel I'm running ahead of an earthquake, trying to keep from giving up and dying. Maybe I'm dead now, in all the ways that matter, as if one of Them has me, except that — and I want to make this clear — I still have real feelings. I just have to ignore them. Maybe I can feel them later.)

I got his brother's address. It's a riverside condo. I searched the car and took his stuff. He had clothes I could cinch and cut to fit me, water bottles and a tool kit. He had spare ammunition for his guns, too. I took the firearms right away, along with the 100 bucks or so he had in his pockets.

I didn't kill him, though. It would be safer if I did, but I didn't. He's not one of Them. I left Denny, too. I hope somebody finds them.

---

September 6, 2008

Dear Diary,

I used my laptop to get online. The man's name was Mike Juarez. He and Denny are dead. They shot Denny in the head at close range. Not me. I didn't use Mike Juarez's gun. I'm pretty sure I didn't. Maybe they killed Mike Juarez,

too, but maybe his injuries took him. I'm not going to draw any conclusions, because if I did, it would hurt.

I'm staying "home." I'll try to sleep.

---

September 8, 2008

Dear Diary,

Somebody finally found out about my shack. Thank God I keep all the incriminating or valuable stuff in the car now. They took everything. I guess Mike Juarez's money is lining the pocket of some janitor now. I found a mall bathroom to cry in and stayed there until a security guard banged on the stall I was sitting in. You know, it's weird. I used to tear up at the drop of a hat, especially when John's depression was bad. Maybe that was all a performance. I was probably trying to emote at him to snap him out of the dark, selfish place he was in. For some reason, though, losing my spot hit me bad.

Anyway, I drove to Camden and robbed a little grocery store. It was easier than I had thought it would be, but I guess I'm pretty scary looking even without the gun. I caught a look in the big round mirror they use to see what's happening in the back of the store. I'm wearing chopped-up men's clothes. My hair is stringy. I'm pretty dirty looking. I think if I were a man, the guy at the counter would have yelled at me to get out right away, but everybody pities a bag lady.

I don't remember what I said to get the money, but he got the message. I wound up with 50 bucks and change. He hit me with a golf club (I guess he has it as an anti-theft measure) as I was leaving, but I waved Mike Juarez's gun around behind me and he didn't try to grab or chase me down.

Once I got back to Philly, I stashed the car. I took a chance and snuck into Philly U. I managed to take a shower, rip off some clothes from a women's change room and shave my head. I figured somebody has my description on file, so I needed to do something about my appearance. I'll buy a wig later.

I saw two of Them on the way out. Ever since John died, I've been able to tell who's possessed. It's easy to see when you know what to look for. The gestures don't quite synch up with the body type. They don't have normal self-protective reflexes, either. They're always scraping their victims up by stubbing toes or scratching themselves on sharp corners. I remember reading about lepers wrecking their bodies because they're too numb to sense injuries. I think if one of Them possessed a body for long enough, the victim would be a wreck, all cut up and bruised because They can't control them well enough — or maybe they just don't care.

I managed to cut through a connecting hall and follow Them. I know, my Dear Diary, it was a bad idea. It wasn't part of my plan. The robbery and my trip to Philly U were supposed to prepare me to get into the condo, but I'm tired of sneaking around, doing bad things to normal people. I wanted to punish Them directly, right away. For ages now, I've just kept my head down, biding my

time for a moment where I can really hurt Them by finding a leader like Logos, or some kind of secret that makes it harder for them to take people. I had that opportunity in Camden, when They were having some kind of meeting.

The real problem, though, is that They possess living people. They aren't all like John. Logos used the pills to eat his identity away, so there was no <u>him</u> left. The ones I followed were probably controlling regular college kids. Maybe they had mental health issues and heard about Batch 12, or whatever it's called now. They could probably be saved.

Trouble is, someone blessed me today, Dear Diary. I found this piece of paper in my pocket:

Follow them to the library. They're going to a meeting there, but nobody else is going to come. They can't drop their hosts in the meeting room. They can't use their powers.

You are not alone.

It was folded around a brass key — one of those old-style ones, with two big teeth.

I need some painkillers and sleep (in the car now) before I can write the rest.

---

September 9, 2008

Dear Diary,

Okay, I'll tell you the rest now.

They didn't even pretend to study. They went right through a door that said STAFF ONLY. Funny thing: the librarian on duty ran over to stop them, but one of them spoke in that strange, static noise language I heard that night in Camden, and she stopped, wheeled around on one heel and walked right back to her post.

I needed a way to sneak in, so I opted for a dumb, brute-force solution. I went up a floor, found a book cart, and as soon as I was out of anybody's sight, rammed it into a fire door. The alarm went off and I took long steps to the stairs. The librarian walked up past me and didn't even give me a look. There wasn't anyone filling in for her at the desk, so it was easy to follow Them down.

I had expected stacks of books and filing cabinets, but there was nothing but a neat little office, a set of stairs and a small plaque telling me that Board-

room B was down there. A chain went across those stairs, with a dull red sign that said CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS. I wiped a huge wad of dust from it with my finger as I stepped over the chain. I patted myself down to make sure I had Dad's hunting knife and Mike Juarez's gun, and used the lightest gait I could manage down the stairs. They were old, varnished wood and creaked loudly, making me wince with every step.

When I hit the bottom, I found a big set of carved double doors. This was an old place, probably part of the original building. The university should have included this spot on architectural tours, but I have a feeling They had finagled some way around that. Maybe They had even found a way to erase the room's official existence.

I pulled at the door a bit. It was locked. There was no real way to sneak in. I took out the key and the gun, but then I realized how stupid it would be to make a lot of noise shooting. Gunfire on campus wouldn't just attract attention, it would make this an official School Shooting, and they'd put the FBI on my ass.

So I put it back, took out the knife, turned the key fast, yanked a door open and ran in.

They were on a giant round table, fucking. I remembered that man in Camden, when They had the meeting. I guess stolen bodies provide the ultimate tool for consequence-free sex. I have to admit I felt a bit absurd jumping on the table, running at them with the knife.

The woman was on top. She wasn't distracted at all. She stared at me and used that voice again, the language that isn't a language. Below her, the guy stopped his thrusting and looked back at me, face upside down.

There was a little giggle in his voice when he told me to kill myself.

Let me try to describe the sensation. You know those earworms — those songs that get stuck in your head? It was like that, but it wasn't just the phrase. I could feel my muscles twitching, trying to yank me through a set of movements I could see in my head, over and over: Raise Knife to Left Side of Throat. Pull Across. Pull Back the Other Way. Keep Going Until You Die. Kill Yourself.

I wanted to do it. It felt like an itch I wanted to scratch, but the irony is that I didn't resist because I gritted my teeth and thought about my commitments. I think I'm probably going to kill myself when this is all done, you know? I just need to hurt Logos first. I know why I'm going to die, and it's not from some strange music in my brain. The command felt foreign right away. Once I felt the Magic Itch, I knew it wasn't me — I couldn't accept it.

One other thing distracted me: that piece of paper. They weren't supposed to have powers in this room. I was so angry. I thought that maybe They had tricked me. I looked around the room to try and figure out whether it really was special, all the while fighting with my body. It hurt. My arms were cramping up, trying to keep the knife down.

It was a beautiful room. It was round, girt with arches of dark wood. There were five bands of the same wood parallel with the floor, with Latin letters carved in them, along with some other symbols. I remember this one:

The whole effect is like being in a church, or a beehive. The only place the wood bands broke was at the open door. They both had a continuation of the banding on the inside, though.

If the paper was telling the truth, I needed to close that door. I shuffled over slowly, dividing my attention between my feet and fighting the brainworm. At one point, it was too much for my concentration. My hand whipped up and started carving into my neck, but I caught that just in time and pulled back. I think it took a second for Them to notice, because I was almost at the door when they jumped me. They were naked and sweaty, ripping at my skin with their teeth and nails. They started making those noises again, calling their powers.

Still, I closed the door. The suicide impulse went away.

I felt very relaxed. Things started slowing down. I stabbed the woman in the face and the man in the leg. When they tried to get out, I pushed my back to the door. I felt so strong. The man couldn't walk, but he still fumbled for my leg. I stepped on his arm and head over and over again.

I won. Then I did some stuff. I don't want to talk about it, but I found out what I needed to know.

---

September 13, 2008

Dear Diary,

I've been hiding out in the car licking my wounds.

The angel/ally/whatever scares me a bit. He could have turned me in or killed me. He knows all about me. Whoever he (or she) is, he left an envelope taped to my car. It had a bunch of stuff in it:

— $1000

— A newspaper clipping. (I'll tape it in here.

— Another note. (I'll add it, too.)

I'm helping local law enforcement look the other way, but you need to be careful. Get new clothes and a wig. Dress like you never normally dress. I'm trying to find more help for you, but my hands are tied.

If you want help, send me what you know. Put it in a manila envelope and drop it in the mailbox at Arch

and North Broad before 10 AM. Address it to Victor Johnston, at any city, street and state you like. I'll check daily, but if you try to find me, I can't help you.

Good luck.

September 13, 2008

Dear Victor

I guess "Dear Diary" is you now. I'm going to send you photocopies of these pages and printouts from my old online journal. I know you know about me, but I'm not sure how <u>much</u> you know. I can't justify everything I've done, but I think I can at least show the logic behind it all. I want someone to know how I got here. I want that person to believe me. Whoever you are, you fit the bill.

Thanks for the money. I have a wig of long black hair and a bunch of baggy bgirl clothes. I just let the girl at the store pick my outfits for me. I bought some first aid gear too. I had to: the bandage on my neck was looking pretty nasty.

If you've read everything, you know I've picked up a talent for seeing Them based on the way they move, talk and otherwise act. I've included a few signs, but the truth is I had to think pretty hard to write them out. It's mostly intuition. I used to be skeptical of intuition — I was an accountant, you know — but now that I know there are strange things in this world, I guess believing in it isn't so bad. Fortunately, when it comes to the two I caught in the library, I have more specific info to share. You were right to put me on their heels. If I'd just broken into the condo on the 9th, like I planned, I would have caught another puppet.

Here's what I found out from the man:

— They belong to an organization called the Pylon. It's some kind of Satanist thing. I guess the Devil is real. There are branches all over the world.

— There are rival groups of Devilworshipers. Maybe you know this, but that room is designed to be some kind of neutral meeting ground. Each side is afraid of the others' powers, so the "witchcraft" in the room seals visitors in their bodies and restricts their powers.

— I thought They might be demons after this (I was always an atheist, but anything is possible now), but he said they were human beings. They know

# FEMALE SERIAL KILLER SUSPECTED IN CAMPUS DEATHS

**Inside sources say fingerprints identify the same suspect in roadside, university slayings**

The *Standard Post* has learned that fingerprint evidence may link two double homicides to a female suspect.

On September 9th, University of Philadelphia staff found the bodies of Anita Drury, 19, and Scott Gill, 21, in a storage area in the college's main library. The event shocked staff and students, prompting a campus lockdown and SWAT deployment in case the killer was still on campus. Police described a white, bald, 5'9" man as a person of interest in the case.

A source inside the Philadelphia Police Department told the *Standard Post* that fingerprints recovered at the crime scene match those found on and around the bodies of Michael Juarez, 31, and Dennis Wells, 40. Their bodies were found at an abandoned building off Interstate 76, near Valley Forge National Park on September 6th. Furthermore, advanced chemical and orthographic analysis of the fingerprints indicated a female suspect, contradicting the assumptions of investigators.

The source noted that Philadelphia PD has not contacted the FBI, despite the fact that this is part of a standard procedure for investigating possible serial killings, and that the cases are currently the focus of separate investigations. The source said fingerprint evidence has not yet been considered for profiling purposes.

According to the source, Gill had been tortured to death. Signs of recent sexual activity, combined with the fact that neither Drury nor Gill knew each other, suggest they were forced to engage in sex acts before they were killed.

Department spokeswoman Sgt. Marcia Schmidt would not respond to repeated phone calls, but when intercepted outside her office yesterday, she called the source's allegations "premature."

"Aside from the serious breach of staff protocol, it doesn't help us crack either case," said Sgt. Schmidt. "We have many reasons to believe they are separate incidents."

*See **Dissimilar MOs**, page A3*

how to possess people, control thoughts and maybe do other stuff. I didn't understand a lot of what he said. He was kind of delirious.

— There's a big meeting coming, kind of like the one in Camden, but where it was just the Pylon group before, this time They're meeting a rival cult. They're called the Stricts. (Or Stricks? I'm not sure.) The Stricts possess people, too. They've been fighting for control of important people in the city. The Pylon doesn't know much about them. They're either another Pylon group or members of "the Pentagram."

— Logos is the leader but he and his Pylon branch are newcomers to Philly. They want to take over people in business and politics.

— They would have met in the library, but I screwed that up. Their standard procedure is to avoid a place that's been "compromised." He thinks it's going to happen at Daniel Juarez's penthouse instead. It's scheduled for the 15th, at 11 PM. (Daniel is Mike Juarez's brother.) They'll do something to turn it into the same kind of "neutral ground."

— Daniel Juarez was Logos' favorite host body. He was so far gone that he couldn't care for himself — even eat or drink — without outside help. Mike was responsible for feeding and cleaning up after Daniel while Logos performed his experiments. I killed Mike during one of those times. That's why Daniel choked on his own vomit. Nobody was paying attention to him.

— The Pylon's people are going to show up in person. There's no point in them using possession because of the "neutral ground" preparations, and it's easier for them to use some of their powers when they don't have to focus on controlling somebody else.

— There are six of them — well, four now, because of me.

Obviously, I'm going to the meeting. I'm going to kill Logos. After that, what happens to me doesn't matter.

You sent me the newspaper article, Victor, so you know what I did to Them — to the people in those poor kids. Did Their victims feel what I did, too? Oh God, I hope they were asleep inside their bodies. I didn't know what else to do. I was bleeding, hurt and scared they would come at me more. Even after I stabbed the girl in the face, she kept moving. She was like a bug with a needle stuck through it. She kept twitching. I had to make him talk and keep myself safe. If I hadn't protected myself, maybe I wouldn't have survived until now. I need to last long enough to finish the job. I had to cut him up.

If you send someone to kill me because I know too much, that's okay. Once I've finished my mission, I'm ready for that.

CLASSIFIED

# SUBJECT: XENOGLOSSIA

This document is an informal survey of current VALKYRIE research on the Xenoglossia PHFN phenomenon. As such, it replaces V-0203-PHFN: "Occult Vocal Phenomena." Destroy all copies of V-0203-PHFN according to standard protocols (incineration and disposal at an approved site; see V-0012-VOPS: "V Series Document Handling Procedures" for details).

**Note:** This document does not cover the field of Paracryptoanalysis. References to the untranslatable "sigils" and "runes" found among PHFNs are mentioned herein when they relate to Xenoglossia and may be a related phenomenon, but they receive a thorough treatment in V-0303-PHFN: "Paracryptoanalysis."

## 1.0: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.1: HISTORICAL AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Ever since early initiatives like XSOG and GLOAMING, agents and witnesses alike have reported the unusual voice phenomenon associated with Psychics and Human Fortean Nexi (PHFN). This phenomenon can be problematic for agents seeking to maintain a secure operations environment, because witnesses have greatly divergent experiences of the same vocal event. This even applies to veteran agents who have demonstrated a resistance to typical PHFN tactics.

Prior to this document, there was no consensus model on the nature of the phenome-

FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

non, or even a formal name, but new research has defined and designated it "Xenoglossia." (The reasons for the title are detailed in 3.0: Standard Terms and Theory.) We will explore Xenoglossia signs and effects in detail throughout the document, but you should familiarize yourself with the following summary before proceeding further.

### 1.1: Fundamentals of the Phenomenon

On occasion, a PHFN will "speak" in an unusual fashion. Witnesses typically describe one of five basic experiences, as rated on the Randolph-Carter Scale (see section 3.0), outlined below:

1. The PHFN makes speech-like mouth movements, but no sound can be discerned.
2. The PHFN speaks in nonsense sounds. This is a security issue, because two witnesses may phonetically transcribe or vocally duplicate completely different sounds based on a single event.
3. The PHFN appears to speak an unknown foreign language. This speech defies cryptographic or linguistic analysis. Witnesses merely intuit patterns that indicate intelligible speech, distinct from mere psychotic glossolalia. Once again, witnesses do not reproduce speech sounds consistently.

FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

4. The PHFN appears to speak an unknown language, as per case #4, but this includes sounds that cannot be reproduced by the human vocal apparatus.
5. BREACH EVENT: The witness describes partial comprehension of the PHFN's speech. You must report this event to at least two managing officers one echelon above yourself, as per V-0102-PR0C ("Exceptional Security Breach Cases"). If the witness is a VALKYRIE agent, you must execute Total Handling or Terminate as Hostile (TH0TH) protocols. If you are the agent in question, you must remand yourself to the custody of the nearest TH0TH-capable agents immediately.

Note: Xenoglossia retains its characteristics even after it is recorded. It is vital that you redact or falsify all externally accessible recordings of the phenomenon.

### 7.2: BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATIONS

The highly subjective nature of the Xenoglossia phenomenon meant it took time before operational research could even confirm that it existed. The breakthrough occurred when analysts cross-referenced accounts with the reporting agents' psychological profiles. Although the trends were identified via a meta-analysis of several standard psychological test scores, there is often a high

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

correlation between the reported phenomenon and agents' VSERE performance scores. VSERE testing reproduces the intense physical and psychological stress that might be encountered in the field (for example, see V-0344-V0PS: "Simulated Human Immolation Procedures for Field Training"). Therefore, willpower is a powerful factor in the witness' perception. The common breakdown is:

| VSERE Score | R-C Scale Perception |
|---|---|
| Below 84%* | Category 1 |
| 84%-92% | Category 2 |
| 93%-97% | Category 3 |
| 98%-99.5% | Category 4 |
| Above 99.5%** | Category 5** |

*Field duty requires VSERE scores in the 75th percentile or better, so data is incomplete with regard to lower scores.

** Agents with VSERE scores above 99.5 are barred from missions where PHFN contact is likely.

### 1.3: THEORY IN BRIEF

Section 3.0 presents a thorough exploration of Xenoglossia theory. Current research explores the following avenues:

Occult-Oriented Postulates (OOPS): PHFNs espouse these theories. They are supported by primary sources in occult literature, but remember that these are often composed by PHFNs themselves. They contain inaccuracies that are either the result of a non-scientific approach or have been introduced by

FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

PHFNs themselves in order to protect their cells and "spells."

Archetypal OOPS hold that ordinary human beings are "unenlightened" and cannot perceive an alleged hidden world of "astral planes," "spirit guides" and "the language of angels." Various sects have their own particular terminology, but most agree that non-PHFNs are spiritually inferior to normal humans, who cannot hear "the Tongue of Babel," "True Enochian," or whatever they happen to call Xenoglossia. OOPS adherents claim Xenoglossia is a comprehensible language with a distinct syntax, but that "cursed" non-psychics can't understand it.

There is no evidence that PHFNs can carry on a conversation using Xenoglossia, and all other evidence for comprehension can easily be explained as a post-hoc rationale. A PHFN may say he was speaking the "name of fire," but it's an easy thing to assert after a thermokinetic manifestation. Thus, we have little confidence in OOPS. It is included in this document to educate agents about the literature and testimony they might encounter in the field.

Human Denial-Resistance Reflex (HDRR): Anecdotal evidence suggests that human beings have an innate capacity to resist or nullify psychic or Fortean phenomena. Agents have witnessed PHFNs fail to manifest abilities in the presence of large crowds and often flee public view when they want to use their "powers." Furthermore, this resistance manifests most strongly in reflexively skeptical and nihilistic personality types. Heinig's Paradox (V-1023-VRND, "Paranormal Demographics and Scientific Discovery: Probability versus Fact") indicates that mainstream science should have persuasive evi-

FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

dence for paranormal phenomena, even though it does not. HDRR is a persuasive solution to the dilemma.

If we accept HDRR, Xenoglossia may represent a "bleedover" of the denial-resistance reflex. We know this exists in other contexts because in many cases, even direct witnesses have been unable to describe their paranormal experiences. Some forget the event completely. Others misremember it, and incorporate any residual evidence into a mundane false memory of the episode. It seems likely that this HDRR would conceal vocal evidence of a paranormal event, as it is evidence of a human (or para-human) source for the phenomenon. If a PHFN orders his victim to slit his own wrists, that indicates some kind of psychic control. If the witness hears only nonsense, he can attribute the event to mental illness.

There are some problematic aspects to HDRR. It seems inconsistent that high VSERE scores would correlate to an increased comprehension of Xenoglossial speech. That would represent a lessened denial-resistance reflex, but there is evidence that high scores correlate to an increased resistance to many paranormal phenomena, such as mind control and telepathic intrusion. No version of HDRR produced thus far incorporates all such evidence to the Research Directorate's satisfaction.

Vocal Psychic Invocation (VPI): As noted in OOPS theory, PHFN traditions link their abilities to a special language. For some, the "highest speech" may represent a psychosomatic requirement; they must vocalize to use their abilities. A psychic or Fortean manifestation influences the apparent sound and meaning of what is, in fact, pathologi-

FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

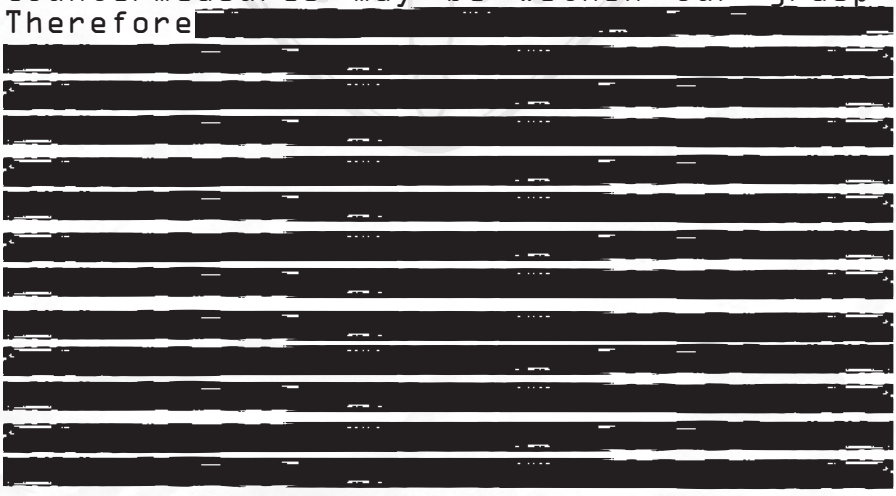
CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

cal glossolalia. The PHFN wants his words to represent true speech so strongly that he transforms them while triggering the paranormal event. It's a "phenomenon within the phenomenon."

This is most likely an unconscious side effect. The PHFN honestly believes he is speaking the "first tongue" and hallucinates a true meaning. Witnesses "hear" some part of the PHFN's intent, due to a form of low-level telepathy, a chaotic Fortean transformation of genuine vocalizations, or some combination of the two. Therefore, neither the speaker nor the listener can accurately hear what's being said.

It might be possible that sound is itself a kind of medium through which psychic phenomena pass. There are frequent correlations between PHFN activities, seismic and para-audible sounds (what BR0KENPH0NE disinformation ops have sold as "Satanic subliminal messages" to the general public). If key paranormal phenomena require a vibrational "carrier," practical broad countermeasures may be within our grasp. Therefore



FOIA EXEMPT: EXECUTIVE

CLASSIFIED

From: op3.pa.nj.de.md.msa@domops.projects.tfv.mil
To: pa.nj.de.md.msa.opbox@domops.projects.tfv.mil
Date: Sept 14, 2008 at 12:01 PM
Subject: Asset Report (Operation Homewrecker)
Attachments: dear_victor_1.pdf, homewrecker_threatB_prelim.pdf

---

Major,

I'm not writing to gloat. I know you were skeptical about picking her up as an asset, much less using her as a stalking horse for Homewrecker, but as you'll read below, she's supplied excellent intelligence without exposing us at all. More to the point, her success demonstrates that what I said at the August DomOps meeting is true: we have something to gain from letting ethical sentiments influence operational planning.

Let's be honest. You've spent months giving me shit about being "soft" because I'm not some SOF washout yelling "hoo-rah" every time "Destroy the enemy at any cost!" rhetoric comes out of your mouth. Your bully-boys would have been made the instant their boots hit Philly dirt. We both know that the PHFNs can spot those types of operators a mile away. (If you read 511-PHFN, you'll see that some of them even have assets *in* the staffing sources you use, like that "Nightfall" group.) Janice did it when you couldn't. I admit her wetwork was a bit sloppy, but thanks to her, we know when the meeting is going to happen and have a better handle on who the major players are.

All right: maybe I am writing to gloat after all. Let's get past that.

I gave her letter to local Analysis, but they don't have much. We assumed Threat B was another psychic sect. After all, PHFN internal politics are one of the most active and distinctive things about them. That was lazy thinking. It now seems clear that they're another type entirely. I know what the decomposition and target statements suggest, but that doesn't explain every reported phenomenon. Besides, hasty assumptions have already led us down the wrong path throughout this op.

In any case, the Threat B report contains some requisition requests. I'm going to treat them as granted because I don't have much time. I want to give her a chance. Before you think this is going to interfere with operational protocol, however, let me assure you that the plan is the same as it ever was. We won't expose ourselves and it'll still be a sink or swim situation for her.

Let's hope she swims.

MVS

CLASSIFIED

Dear Victor

I've been thinking: you're part of some conspiracy, I guess. Maybe you're a rival Sātanist. You can get into mailboxes, and I bet you don't have to jimmy a lock to do it. You've got connections. I've fantasized about you showing up with a SWAT team to kill the bad guys and save the day, but I'm not betting on it. I always turned my nose up at thrillers (any fiction, really; I'm an accountant at heart), but pretending I've got influence and power at my back is a morale booster.

It's inspired me to be less impulsive, too. I suppose I'm pretending that I'm on the front line of a secret crusade against Them — that I'm not just a lone, crazy woman. So instead of storming in, I decided to scout out the condo and find an easy way in for tomorrow night. I walked around the place twice: once during the day and once at night.

The building has two security guards and a concierge, day and night. They do a regular foot patrol of the grounds. The guards don't look like Them. They're not particularly attentive, either. They lock everything behind big, spiky gates, but one of the fences has a planter next to it. I think I can get a boost from that and climb over. There's a camera there, but when I took a closer look, it seems the wiring is all torn up. Thank God for human laziness. The guards don't seem to care if the loading doors are open all night, either. I guess it's easier than locking and unlocking it for anyone who wants to move furniture.

Aside from the crazy, supernatural things that are going to be in the penthouse tomorrow, the thing to be cautious about is sneaking up to the building. It's got its own laneway, surrounded by bare, grassy terraces. It's pretty deserted, even during the day — or it usually is. You see, I wasn't the only one casing the joint. That's what you <u>really</u> need to know about.

I had hopped up on the planter I was talking about to test whether I really could climb the gate when I heard footsteps. I jumped down and hid behind a concrete post as I heard them come closer but I snuck a look when they sounded fainter. It wasn't a security guard, but a woman in an evening gown. Her hair was all done up, but she was wearing muddy heels. She moved like one of Them.

Did I mention I've gotten a bit more confident? Foolhardy, even? I followed her. I kept myself glued to the wall the whole time, and while I don't think anybody saw me, somebody saw <u>her</u>. It was one of those security guards. I guess he was suckered by her formal style. He asked if she was lost and if she was somebody's guest.

She did this full body <u>undulation</u>, like she was having a seizure. The guard went for his radio but she grabbed both his hands — and this <u>stuff</u> came out of her. It was a kind of smoke or mist. It looked black until it hit the lights. Then it was dark and red: the color of old blood. There was a bit of a breeze off the river, but the mist just hung there, ignoring it. The guard tried to get out of the woman's grip, but it was no use. He was a big guy, too, so she must have been tremendously strong for her petite frame. The mist started to surround him. It made him look kind of pinkish. Its outline writhed. It was like watching a skinless muscle flex, or a microbe respond to some stimulus under a microscope. It poured into the guy's mouth and nose, maybe even his eyes. I thought I saw its fading outline take on different shapes: a big, twisted bird, a scream-



ing head and a clawed hand. The guard went limp, as if he'd been hit with a knockout punch, but the little woman held on to him still, keeping him suspended in the air for a second. Then they both fell down and stopped moving.

I did a crazy thing, Victor. I couldn't help it, I guess. I kept thinking of those kids and how I didn't want anybody else getting caught in the middle of this. That's why I ran over to them. Honestly, I don't even know what I was going to do. Was I supposed to kill her and call him an ambulance? Were they both corrupted by whatever was in the mist? I just wanted to do something *good* for someone, for a change.

Stupid mistake, I know. When I got there, it looked like they were asleep together. They both had closed eyes. The woman fell onto him in this loose embrace. Still, neither of them was breathing. I started whispering the rules for CPR to myself, as if a few pumps on the chest could fix *this.*

My hand brushed against the woman's arm when I went to roll her over. A long strip of her skin came off. It had the consistency of gelatin. I looked at her face and it was tightening, like I was watching a speed-up film of decades of aging. More skin started coming off in wet chunks. I stood there without moving a muscle. I don't know why. More chunks came off, and when they hit the ground, they started drying and crumbling. She was disintegrating. I couldn't look away until I felt the *guard's* hand.

He'd opened his eyes. I saw red smoke come out of his mouth and fall back in, but it wasn't breathing. His chest wasn't moving.

I ran for it. I didn't stop until I got in my car and I drove... I don't know where. I went in circles around the city, too fast. At some point, I saw Id buzzed by a speed trap in my old neighborhood, realized exactly where I was, slowed down and went to my new hiding spot.

This wasn't Them, Victor. Maybe it's the other people: the Stricts or whatever they're called. They were scouting the place, too. I don't know if the guard, or whatever was in him, got a good look at me. I hope not. Part of me wants to say, "Is *this* what you're sending me into?", but that's wrong. I'm sending myself. You just inspired me to be careful.

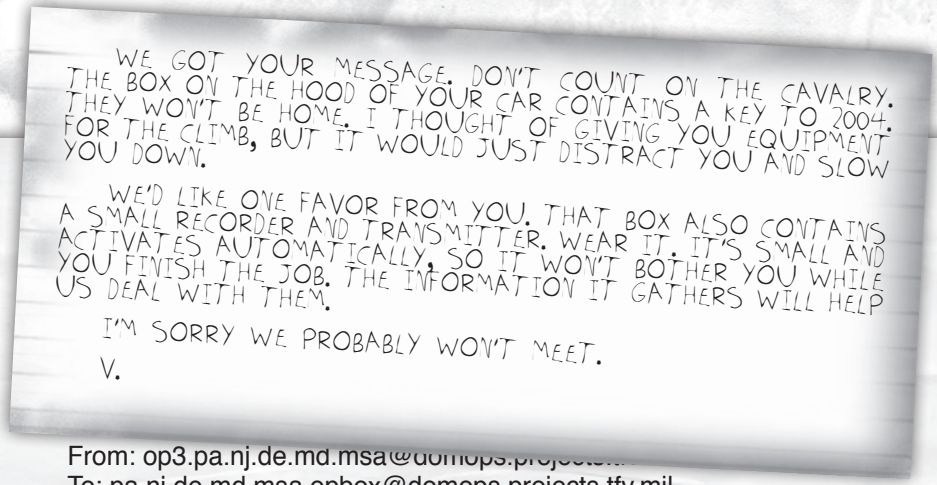
So here's my plan — one I hope you can help me with. I can get in at the ground floor, but if the building's like other upscale condominiums, you need a key to go all the way to the penthouse. I think I can climb up from the unit below it. There's all this faux Art Deco stuff I'll use to get up. I used to do some rock climbing, so I think I can do it, as long as you ignore the lack of equipment and the fact that I've never been that high before in my entire life. It doesn't matter. The fear that I thought would get in my way is nothing more than a gnat's whisper. I just want to attack Them. I want to kill Logos.

(Strange. In all my writing and thinking, I don't think I've ever said it so baldly, but yeah: I want to kill him. I want my revenge and don't feel guilty about it.)

You can help me by getting me into whatever unit is at the south side of the building, on the 20th floor. Please get me a key and a guarantee that the place will be empty. If not, I'll still find a way, but it'll be loud and messy.

Wish me luck,

Janice



WE GOT YOUR MESSAGE. DON'T COUNT ON THE CAVALRY. THE BOX ON THE HOOD OF YOUR CAR CONTAINS A KEY TO 2004. THEY WON'T BE HOME. I THOUGHT OF GIVING YOU EQUIPMENT FOR THE CLIMB, BUT IT WOULD JUST DISTRACT YOU AND SLOW YOU DOWN.

WE'D LIKE ONE FAVOR FROM YOU. THAT BOX ALSO CONTAINS A SMALL RECORDER AND TRANSMITTER. WEAR IT. IT'S SMALL AND ACTIVATES AUTOMATICALLY, SO IT WON'T BOTHER YOU WHILE YOU FINISH THE JOB. THE INFORMATION IT GATHERS WILL HELP US DEAL WITH THEM.

I'M SORRY WE PROBABLY WON'T MEET.

V.

From: op3.pa.nj.de.md.msa@domops.projects...
To: pa.nj.de.md.msa.opbox@domops.projects.tfv.mil
Date: Sept 16, 2008 at 6:00 AM
Subject: Phase One Complete
Attachments: dear_victor_2.pdf, AssetJ.pdf

---

Major,

I call it a success. I know it kicks our schedule forward a notch. I know I disobeyed orders, too, and I'm ready for whatever disciplinary action you see fit to impose.

Don't let her suffer for my mistakes. I've sent a request to the AD on her behalf. Details are attached. Please note the emphasis on income and counseling. Do not block it. Should you attempt it, I warn you that I still have a few cards up my sleeve when it comes to working around TFV bureaucracy.

MVS

*Dear Victor*

*It was better and worse than I expected. I know your people are going to examine that recording to death, so the only things I can really add are what I saw and thought.*

*Before I start, I want to thank you for everything. You always looked very concerned when you sneaked up to my car (I wasn't asleep <u>every</u> time, you know). I expected black suits and guns, but I think a guy in wrinkled khakis with a worried face is more comforting. It shows me you work hard.*

*The first problem was the guard from yesterday. He kept lingering at the spot where the smoke got him, right near my entrance point. He would look around very, very slowly. Sometimes he'd bend down and put his hand on the place where the woman had been (though there was no sign of her now, despite*

all the rot she left). He squatted with this odd, robotic maneuver keeping his back perfectly straight. I knew for sure he was possessed then. I watched him do it three times as he made the rounds. I was running out of time, so I went for Plan B. That sounds pretty sophisticated for "set off some firecrackers and run like hell," but it still worked. He took off to investigate the sound.

I hopped the fence, bolted through the loading entrance, got to the elevator and took myself up to the 20th floor. No problem at all. I was earlier than I thought I'd be, so after I got to 2004, I managed to sit down for a while. I even made a sandwich, if you can believe it. It was the first time I've been in a normal kitchen in months.

The utter normalcy of my surroundings threw me for a loop, Victor. I spent the last of the cash you gave me on some climbing gloves. I was putting them on when everything that had happened suddenly cycled through my mind. John's depression. The pills. Them. The red smoke. Your notes. The four people who've died because of me. (No, because of Them. It's always Them.) And here I was, getting ready to climb part of a 20-story building to fight monsters nobody else can see.

At that moment, you were the only reason I knew I wasn't crazy. Everything else could have been a hallucination. Otherwise, I could believe that I killed John because I was crazy, or I thought he was cheating on me, and I transferred the blame to Logos. Your notes are real, though. The money and the recorder are real.

Thank you, Victor.

I suppose this is why my letters are what they are. I don't even know you, but I feel like you've validated the reality of it all, so I can entrust my experiences to you. John and I never had children, and I can't see my family again. Someone has to know who I was and what I did, even if it's only to put it all in a file and lock it away afterward.

I couldn't climb from the balcony and the windows didn't open enough to let me through, so I had to break one. That took some work because it was reinforced glass, but I managed to pry its frame open and knock it out at the edges. After that, it wasn't that hard. I wasn't scared at all. I almost fell once because I was <u>too</u> relaxed. My grip loosened. I did consider letting go and just falling, but once I thought beyond the immediate situation and remembered Them, I yanked myself up really quickly.

I felt exposed on the big penthouse balcony, so I dropped to my belly, like I've seen soldiers do on TV. It was a good thing, too: the curtains were open and I could see right inside — and if They'd seen my silhouette, They would have seen me, too. There was a screen door ajar and the smell of cigarettes. I guess Logos didn't want people smoking in his former slave's home. There were four of Them inside, and they were arguing pretty loudly.

<V_Activation: 2008:09:15:22:48:01 >

<Wireless Connection: Active>

<Import Auto_Transcript Template: Homewrecker_IDs.txt>

<Start Auto_Transcript>

22:48:01: DESIGNATE ASSET J: (untranslatable)

22:50:11: DESIGNATE TALION: I don't understand why this meeting is even necessary. They are enemies of our will. We should find and eliminate them, like any other random element that gets in the way.

22:50:23: DESIGNATE LOGOS: We've already been over this. They might be a fellow Pylon. It looks like they make extensive use of mind techniques, maybe even a profane (untranslatable).

22:50:28: DESIGNATE ASSET J: Oh God, it's him. Oh God.

22:50:32: DESIGNATE TALION: So what? They're rivals. If we beat them, we'll prove we're first before the throne. That's the way they want it. Strength defines the hierarchy.

22:50:42: DESIGNATE CARDINAL: Not everyone believes as you do.

22:50:44: DESIGNATE VERITAS: Come on. We don't need to invoke ideological issues here. Strength is more than the ability to destroy your enemies, isn't it?

22:50:50: DESIGNATE TALION: It's nothing less than that, either.

22:50:53: DESIGNATE VERITAS: My point is that the throne rewards the ability to control others. Strength is the ability to bring the enlightened beneath your will. That kind of strength emulates the throne itself. The (untranslatable) prophecies say we'll ascend by emulating the (untranslatable).

22:51:08: DESIGNATE LOGOS: Yes. That's why you're my second, VERITAS.

22:51:14: DESIGNATE TALION: He's second because WERGILD and GANZIR are dead.

22:51:22: DESIGNATE ASSET J: I hope you found them lying in their own shit.

22:51:23: DESIGNATE LOGOS: They grabbed some young meat to fuck in, used the library facility to hide it from us and paid the price. They were probably lovers, you know. They concealed that. Doesn't that make them weaklings, according to your code? Why concern yourself with them?

22:51:40: DESIGNATE CARDINAL: The threat was there nevertheless, LOGOS. We're supposed to protect each other.

22:51:45: DESIGNATE LOGOS: I told you, I dealt with that banisher myself. We couldn't protect them while they hid from us, could we? We should only hide information from each other when we're making a play for power. I trust none of you are so foolish. Right now, it's our job to act with one clear intention. That's how we'll seize the advantage at this meeting.

22:52:05: DESIGNATE TALION: You are the Pylon's (untranslatable). Your will is ours.

22:52:10: DESIGNATE LOGOS: I don't care for your tone.

22:52:13: TFV AUTOTRANS ERROR: 9093 (V-0204-PHFN Class Phenomenon 65% Probability)

22:53:01: DESIGNATE TALION: (untranslatable)

22:53:10: DESIGNATE TALION: That hurt. Consider me chastened.

22:55:20: NO DESIGNATION: (untranslatable) Your guests are here, Mr. Juarez.

22:55:24: DESIGNATE LOGOS: They're early. Send them up, Keith.

22:55:30: DESIGNATE CARDINAL: Interesting. This place doesn't have real diplomatic bans, then.

22:55:35: DESIGNATE LOGOS: I wove in an exception for myself, just in case.

22:55:39: DESIGNATE TALION: You're a clever bastard.

Logos spoke in that voice they use to do things. The argument stopped. One of them started shaking, like he was having a seizure. He apologized when it stopped. I guess that's how witches keep each other in line.

If your people owe me for anything, Victor, it's for waiting. I huddled behind a bench, got really close and took my gun (Mike's gun) out. I could have shot Logos — just run in and pulled the trigger over and over again, until he died. He had powers, but I think they need to concentrate to do what he did to his subordinate. Perhaps that guy would even have helped me, since it didn't sound like he wanted Logos in charge. It's bigger than my own revenge, though. Waiting would help you get the information you needed, so even after I died, you could track down both factions.

Maybe Logos would have killed me in a second, with a strange word, and it would all have been totally useless. All I know is that I had my gun out and the opportunity, but I waited, for your sake. You owe me.

So the doorbell rang, and the one who'd had the seizure got up to answer it. When he opened it up, three people came in: the guard, a slow-moving man in a ski mask and a short, pale man in a rumpled suit. The last guy stayed near the far wall, but the rest paced around the big lounge area.

They exchanged some long-winded introductions. Logos and company used big titles — "Blood of the Dragon, Preserver of the Iron Throne of the Most High" — all kinds of pretentious bullshit. The Stricts just called themselves "the Stricts." They didn't even give their names, which seemed to put Logos' group off.

After that, everyone shifted back and forth between English and something the Stricts seemed to be more comfortable speaking. It sounded kind of Italian. I recognized a couple of French-sounding words, but that was it. That's why I can't tell you why Logos' people started getting more and more agitated (the Stricts were cool through the whole thing) until the little Strict man finally wandered near the window. That's when it all went down.

I want to say, "I've never seen so much blood in my entire life," but that's not true. I'll always remember those two kids, especially the boy and what I did to him. In that moment, I remembered them like they were in front of me. That's why I ran in, you see. Those last vestiges of fear went away when I thought of what I'd done, because I knew that as long as I got Logos, nothing else that happened to me would be undeserved.

23:14:10: DESIGNATE LOGOS: I understand that different societies have different customs, but it's customary to give a name.

23:14:21: DESIGNATE THREAT B1: I haven't had a name in a very long time. <Lingua_DB: Latin_1> You are heirs of Simon Magus and the Persian arts. You have the power of breath. You are not of the cross, the spear, the holy woman or the one god.

23:14:30: DESIGNATE LOGOS: <Lingua_DB: Latin_1> We know how to use those symbols, as we always have. Is that what we share in common? <Eng_Default> Your cult may go without names, but we need some basis to identify each other so we can stop treading on each other's toes. We can only be tolerant to a point. Look at what you've done to Keith, for example. In another time, possessing another man's sanctum staff would start a war. I'm willing to overlook that, but

23:14:46: DESIGNATE THREAT B2: Fuck trust. They're after the same bodies. You need to stay out of their way. I convinced them to come here instead of just killing you, to try and work something out. If it isn't, they'll let you leave. You're not their enemy, Magus, but you could be. This is your chance to decide.

23:14:51: DESIGNATE TALION: Funny, I think we're offering you the same deal.

23:14:59: DESIGNATE THREAT B2: You don't get it. My people thought they could resist them. They were wrong. If I don't serve them, they'll turn me into a fucking hand puppet. The same thing will happen to you. Tell them you're willing to back off.

23:15:14: DESIGNATE CARDINAL: Keith isn't breathing, boss. None of them are.

23:15:19: DESIGNATE LOGOS: Necromancy? That's sloppy. Here's what I think. You're a lead coin sect. You don't have a profane (untranslatable) on hand. You don't even have the skills to take puppets without killing them. Your methods are crude, and your reach exceeds your grasp. What do you think is going to happen when the mayor's office notices the Chief Administrative Assistant is rotting? Or do you plan to layer on spells to keep the smell away? Anyone with the sight will know something's wrong.

23:15:39: DESIGNATE VERITAS: Logos? Shit.

23:15:41: DESIGNATE LOGOS: You don't need us to stay out of your way. You need our help. You must know that you can't hold political leverage through a cast of walking corpses. It's absurd. Instead, we should act on your behalf, as allies.

We'll consider your political needs and put your talents to better use.

23:15:57: DESIGNATE VERITAS: Look at the window. Look at the window!

23:16:00: DESIGNATE LOGOS: What?

23:16:01: DESIGNATE TALION: The reflection!

23:16:02: DESIGNATE CARDINAL: Oh my God.

23:16:03: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: (untranslatable)

23:16:04: DESIGNATE THREAT B1: <Lingua_DB: Latin_1> Not God. Gods. We are gods.

In that time it took me to stand, the little man in the crumpled suit reached the other side of the room. I didn't even see him run the distance. He took the one who had yelled about the reflection by the throat. The Strict made a little wringing motion with both hands and the guy's whole body jerked. His neck broke and his head whipped back and down.

The guard pulled his gun and started shooting. So did I; my bullets busted right through the glass. I wasn't really aiming, but I hit one of Logos' people in the leg. I got the guard in the face, too, but at first, it didn't do anything. It put a hole right below his nose. A bunch of things broke in him. Teeth tumbled out, but he didn't even twitch. He carefully wiped blood out of one eye, aimed and shot the man I had hit in the chest. They fell at the same time. The guard hit the floor. The other one smashed into this delicate, expensive-looking end table and busted it up.

I threw open what was left of the door, took a step in — then I flew to the ground. Somebody had hit me so hard I saw double. I turned and saw him: he was the last of the Pylon's people except for Logos. He had a marble rolling pin in his hand, but it almost slipped out when he raised it overhead. He was going to cave my head in. I punched him in the thigh with my gun and pulled the trigger. I did twice more while I pulled my way up, hitting and shooting. I would have done it one more time, too, but the gun just clicked. It was empty. I dropped it on him and picked up that goddamned rolling pin.

I staggered over to Logos, but I was having trouble with my balance. I slipped on the guard's blood. For a second, I looked right into the wreckage of his face. I saw he had some kind of makeup on. Underneath it, he was very pale. I think I saw a little white grub slide out from the wound. After that, there was a little wisp of the red smoke. That scared me more than anything else. I got back up.

Logos and the little man stood across from each other, staring. Logos was singing in that terrible language. The little man was so pale up close. He was screaming, so I could see a bunch of twisted, sharp teeth in his mouth.

I picked the rolling pin up again, but I realized that was dumb, because I had my knife in my waistband. While I made that mistake, the little guy stopped yelling. He

walked over to the busted end table, picked up a leg as casually as you might grab the newspaper from your doorstep and started stabbing himself in the chest with it, over and over again. Logos stopped singing and started laughing. His nose was bleeding, though, and there was sweat all over him. Whatever he had done took something out of him.

He even closed his eyes. He only opened them when I started stabbing him.

That wasn't hard at all. It wasn't like John, or like the possessed kids.

Victor, I've rewritten this next part over and over again because I want to be honest with you. I have to be honest with someone. In the first draft, I wrote that I didn't feel anything. A part of me that urged me to say that and make this a morality tale where there's no satisfaction in revenge. I thought I could get away with dignified numbness, but that wasn't truthful. Then I spent a couple of drafts pretending that killing him felt good, but bad, like a hot, disgusting pleasure I could beg forgiveness for having. That way, I could confess that I didn't feel so righteous after all and pretend I was scrambling for some shred of compassion after the fact. That's a lie, too.

I think this is the truth: it was the greatest experience of my life. It wasn't like love or sex, or even the kind of pride you feel once or twice in a lifetime. It was a crystalline sensation: pure, precise, laid out in straight edges and brilliant facets. I think it's what New Age types describe when they talk about "enlightenment." I was in a place without doubts and fears, but I wasn't really happy in any way you could fixate on and mess up with words. His blood even got on my face, on my tongue, but it was all right.

23:19:19: DESIGNATE LOGOS: You're the woman from the ministry meeting. Oh God! Oh God!

23:19:22: DESIGNATE ASSET J: I am? (laughter?)

23:19:23: DESIGNATE LOGOS: You were 12's wife, too! No. Don't.

23:19:24: DESIGNATE ASSET J: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Victor, you should know that witches, or whatever they are, can make their injuries go away. The first couple of times I stabbed him, the wounds sort of wriggled back together. That was okay — I kept going. But he was still strong enough to look at me, just like he had stared at the monstrous little man.

My head started to hurt — actually, hurt is an understatement. I felt like there was something slithering and bucking in my skull, trying to disconnect all the bones. It was enough to make me drop the knife. Logos reached up and grabbed both sides of my face. He pulled me close and spat. The pain kept

*getting worse and worse, until the man in the ski mask grabbed him by the hair and pulled him away.*

*He threw Logos down and stomped on his face with a big boot. That knocked him out. I finished stabbing him. The man in the ski mask just stood there.*

*Red smoke started filling the room. I'm talking about the smoke I saw before, that moves like it's alive. It came out of the guard. The little man was laid out on the floor with the table leg in his chest. I tried to get up, but I couldn't; my legs felt so weak. I guess I passed out.*

*I don't know what happened to man in the ski mask. I was out cold until you got me.*

23:50:05: DESIGNATE ASSET J: I know you. You can kill me if you want, but show me your face.

<TECH_LOG: User deactivation request (power switch toggle) 2008:09:15:23:50:10. Awaiting server response . . .>

<TECH_LOG: Error 401 (Unauthorized)>

23:50:11: DESIGNATE ASSET J: See? I was wired, but I turned it off. Nobody can hear us now.

23:50:13: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: This will not give you peace.

23:50:15: DESIGNATE ASSET J: Oh, John.

23:50:13: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: No, but I know him. He wouldn't leave this body. His (untranslatable) fought me. I sent it to (untranslatable), but part of him will still not leave. I know you. Why should I know you?

23:50:21: DESIGNATE ASSET J: John? John?

23:50:23: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: No. He's made me impure. His body rots, but I cannot abandon it. <Lingua_DB: Latin_1>I should kill you and please myself with fresh flesh, but the desire disgusts me. Why is this? <Eng_Default>Your name is Janice.

23:50:31: DESIGNATE ASSET J: Yes. What are you?

23:50:35: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: You cannot know. I took this corpse to investigate the other body stealers, because one of them used it as his servant. Your John has poisoned my (untranslatable). Now, I feel with his heart. But when the rot eats

that heart completely, I will be free. I will take a better body and forget these emotions.

23:50:47: DESIGNATE ASSET J: I won't fight you. I did what I needed to do. You helped me.

23:50:52: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: I have to take the blood drinker with me. He's our slave. If you see blood drinkers and other signs, stay away. I love you, Janice.

23:51:03 DESIGNATE ASSET J: John? Oh God, John!

23:50:52: DESIGNATE THREAT B3: He loved you. He's dead. Don't follow me.

JANICE,

I GUESS I SAW YOU IN THE END. I'M SORRY THERE WAS NO CAVALRY. THERE'S JUST ME, AND I WASN'T EVEN SUPPOSED TO COME GET YOU, BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT TO EXPOSE OURSELVES TO THE ENEMY.

THIS IS A WAR OF LIARS. THEY HAVE CONNECTIONS, MONEY AND UNNATURAL ABILITIES, BUT LIES ARE THEIR BEST WEAPONS — AND OUR BEST WEAPONS, TOO. WITHOUT THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, WE'RE NOTHING BUT FLESH, BONE AND BRITTLE HUMAN FEELINGS. WE'RE SO FRAGILE, BUT I GUESS THAT'S THE PRICE WE PAY FOR STAYING HUMAN.

I'VE MADE SOME ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOU. THE COPS WON'T BE LOOKING FOR YOU ANYMORE. YOUR FAMILY THINKS YOU'VE BEEN IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL. THIS FOLDER ALSO CONTAINS A BUNCH OF DATA WE GATHERED ABOUT YOU. IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT WE KNOW, SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES MIGHT GIVE YOU SOME PROBLEMS FURTHER DOWN THE LINE.

YOU'RE A RECOVERING MENTAL PATIENT NOW, SO, NATURALLY, YOU SHOULD ATTEND GROUP THERAPY. I'VE FOUND A SUPPORT GROUP FILLED WITH PEOPLE WHO'VE HAD EXPERIENCES LIKE YOURS. I THINK IT WILL HELP YOU.

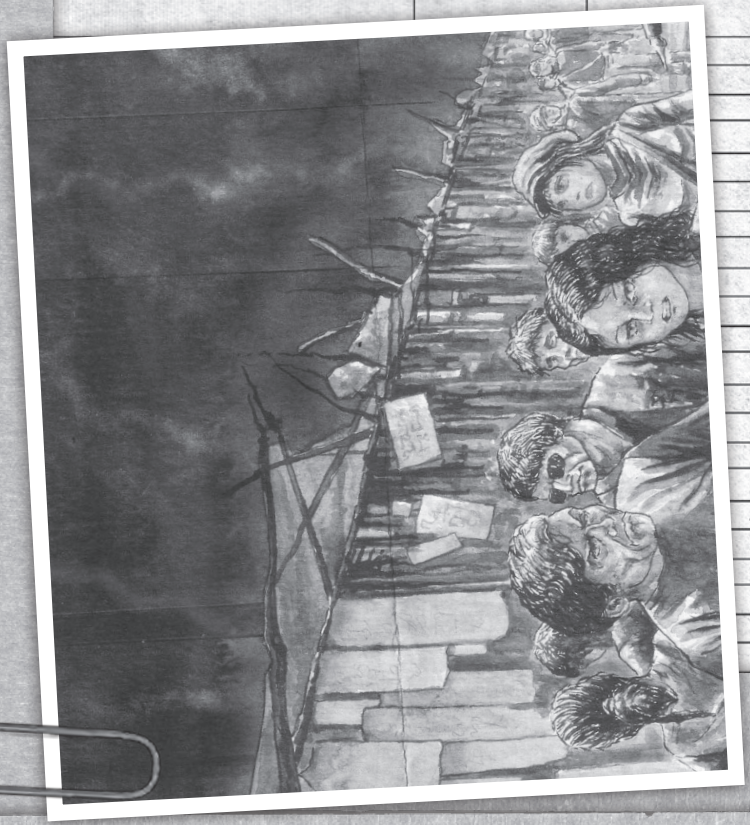
THANK YOU.

VICTOR

P.S. MY REAL NAME IS MARTIN.

# THE MARKET

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



CASE FILE HRG 00009

04/15/08

Some days, I don't have to look for the shadows. The shadows come to me.

I've seen some strange things when I've joined the others, but this is the first time anything's happened to me directly. It just goes to show that all of this is just below the surface.

I'm getting ahead of myself. I need to keep things in order, get my thoughts in order. When I get everything in order, maybe I can make sense of what actually happened.

A man came to my desk at the bank. To be honest, I didn't think he looked like the kind of guy who'd have an account with us. We're hardly the most exclusive bank, but he looked like he hadn't changed his clothes in a month, and his bed was a Dumpster. Told me he needed to speak to the manager. Jenny – that's my manager – was off sick today, I told him, hoping he'd leave it for now. Instead, he told me he needed into his safe-deposit box, right that minute. Just my dumb luck. I got him to sign, checked his photo – he looked just as bad in the picture – and handed over the key to box 101. The stupid thing is, I saw his name on the screen, and I don't remember it.

I didn't trust the guy. I mean, his photo came up associated with the box, and the rent was paid every month, but I got a strange feeling about the whole thing. The smell didn't help, like rotten meat. That's not to say I looked – if I knew what some of our customers had in their boxes, I'd be fired a hundred times over.

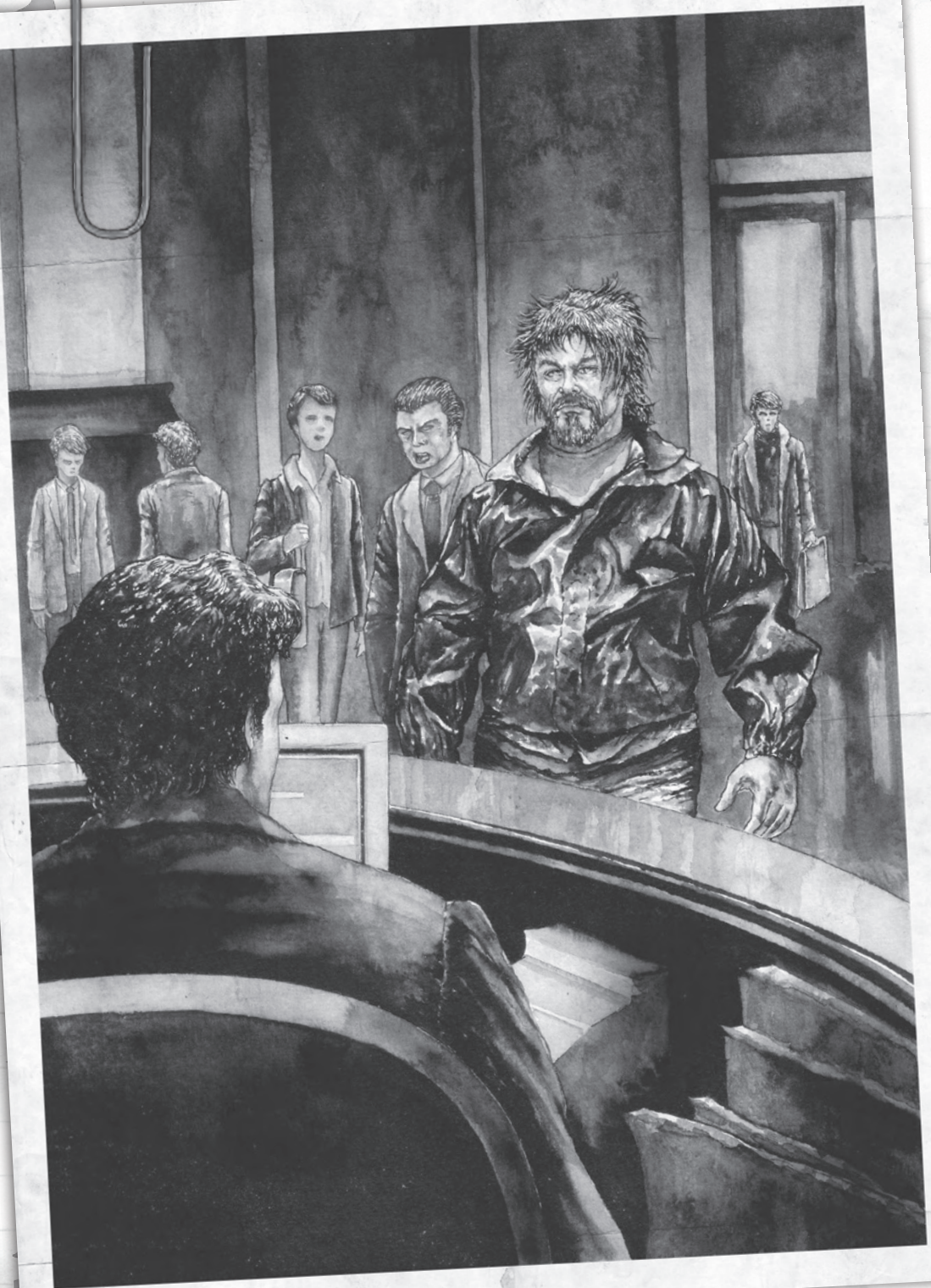
You know how sometimes you don't do the normal things? You don't put the weird shit behind you; you don't keep your nose out of things? Well, that's what happened. Donnie, the security guard, owes me a couple of favors. I couldn't get a copy of the tapes, but he did let me review the camera in the vault while he went for a coffee. The guy stuffed a paper bag into his box, and it dripped. Dark liquid.

Donnie's a decent enough guy, even if he does like his job a little too much. He once told me, "Everyone wants to make something that works, so it takes a special kind of mind to think of ways to break things. That's why nobody thinks about security." Take the safe-deposit boxes. I've got one, and it's a moment's work to get into the vault on the pretext of updating a document. If you don't think you're doing something wrong, you stop acting suspicious. Which is how I came to accidentally swab up some of that spilled liquid on a scrap of paper. Looking at it now, it doesn't take a forensics expert to tell that it's blood. I dread to think where from.

---

04/16/08

Donnie printed me off a still from the video. It's enough to remind me of what the guy looked like. I still can't remember his name. At work today, I tried to look up the owner of box 101, but the database was down. I mentioned the guy to Jenny, and she just shrugged. He pays the rent on his box – why should we bother him?



I've got this feeling before. The others at the support group have mentioned it as well. There's something there, something strange and quite possibly very scary, and everyone ignores it. Weird guy comes in to stick a bloody package into his safe-deposit box? Shit happens. He's got the right to privacy. Some serial killer leaving his victims entirely drained of blood? Freak, sure, but the word "vampire" is entirely taboo.

It's like we're sitting on a beach with a vast ocean of truth right behind us and most people shrug off the spray as just an early rain. Janice called. My cell was downstairs, so Helen answered. It was the first time she's spoken to any of the group. I might be paranoid, but I thought I heard a note of suspicion in her voice. What should I expect? I'm the one who's taken to staying up late, keeping a secret journal, and going out at a moment's notice. I'm lucky it's been this long before she got suspicious. I just hope she could see the truth in my heart when I told her I wasn't having an affair, that Janice is just someone from my support group.

I had to go see Luke's principal after work. Apparently, my son's been getting in a lot of fights – not starting them, not yet, but the way he's reacting to insults means it's only a matter of time before he's picking on other kids. It's the first time I've been able to go; Helen's always dealt with it in the past. The school counselor thinks Luke's after attention. Only now do I see that I'm starting to drift away from him. Or is that just another spark of paranoia?

Two in the morning. I'm tired and overanalyzing things. I need to sleep on it.

---

04/20/08

Box 101 got even more interesting today. Two police officers stopped by and presented me with a warrant for the search. Jenny told me to go along with them, as I was the one who'd dealt with the box last.

I opened the vault, and the detectives took a crowbar to the box. What they found inside scared me. No mysterious bag, no stains, no nothing. Just a fistful of 20-dollar bills and a birth certificate in the name of Morgan Black. I'm pretty sure the detectives didn't notice me studying it hard.

Once they'd gone, I checked the logbook. Nothing. The only boxes anyone had checked since this Morgan had been in were on the other side of the vault. He hadn't come back, and nobody else had been in box 101.

I mentioned the name to the others at the support group, but nobody knew anything. Didn't recognize his picture, either. Most of them don't doubt something really quite strange is going on, but they can't shed any light on it. I've asked them to keep a lookout and to let me know.

When I got home, Helen was waiting for me. To put it simply, we fought.

"I don't want you going to the support group," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because I said not! They're a bunch of kooks and it ain't healthy for you."

"I don't know what you're talking about." I didn't mean to shout, didn't want to shout, but that's how it came out.

"This is just what I mean," Helen said. "You come back full of weird ideas, you spend all your time talking to them or working on things for them – things you haven't told your own wife about. And then if anyone dares question you, they're just flat-out wrong."

"That's not true."

"Yes, yes, it is. When did we last go out for dinner? When was the last time you went to a PTA meeting at Luke's school? When's the last time you helped him with his homework?"

To my shame, I couldn't remember. "It's just not a good time –"

"There's no such thing as a good time, not since you started going to that damn group. So you saw a ghost. Lots of people do. But they don't ignore their family. They don't turn into a completely different person."

I could see the tears in her eyes, but they didn't stop me. "Of course. I don't act like you want me to, so I'm the problem. You never try to see the bigger picture."

"You're not the man I married. Not now. It feels like I don't know who you are anymore."

I didn't need her to tell me that I'd be sleeping on the couch tonight. Sitting here with late-night basic cable and my journal, I can't help but wonder: what if she's right?

04/23/08

Things remain frosty with Helen. We're speaking, but it's just functional. I thought it'd be a one-shot flash of anger, but apparently I was wrong. Luke can tell, but he doesn't ask. He just looks at me, accusing me of making his mom upset.

I've heard nothing more from the detectives who wanted in to box 101. Jenny, my boss, doesn't think anything will happen. Transfer the old stuff into a new box and it's as good as new. At least, that's what I thought. On my way home, I caught a glimpse of the man in the photo, Morgan Black. I was waiting for the bus home when he walked past. I thought about leaving it, just letting him go. No. He's the one responsible for the problems with Helen. We were fine before this shit started.

Perspective. Think before you write, Andrew. Get it straight.

I followed him. He didn't make it easy, but every time I thought I'd lost him, I saw him again. After 20 minutes, I got too close. Either that or he got suspicious. I ducked into a store, bought a pack of gum for no good reason. The air in the store was still and dead, and I could smell the cigarettes on the old guy's breath. Back outside, my head started to throb. There was something big in the air, like a storm waiting to hit. I could feel it.

*Black cut down a couple of alleyways, turning left and right on a route he'd obviously walked plenty of times before. I tried to remember which turnings he took, tried to make note of landmarks along the way, but there were precious few to see. If I'd been prepared, I'd have brought a stick of chalk or a piece of string. Hell, maybe I could take the GPS out of Helen's car to record the route. I should remember that.*

*We ended up behind a warehouse of some kind. He snuck in through the back door, and I followed before it closed. Only now do I figure that he knew I was there. I'd have been pushing my luck to think I could follow him all that far without him seeing. The warehouse was set up like some market for dropouts and wasters, stalls with nothing but worn-out old junk. A few just had signs and covers, like the fortune-tellers. I didn't see much more. The whole thing was just too much. I had to leave, though I took a few leaflets with me.*

*Still on the couch. Helen wasn't too happy with me getting back from work at the wrong side of 11.*

From: Bryan Rafferty

To: Andrew Kaplinski

Date: Fri, Apr 25, 2008 14:12:13

Subject: Re: Market of Junk

---

On 04/25/2008, Andrew Kaplinski wrote:

> The market's in a disused warehouse. I couldn't tell where.

> <snip>

> People were selling and buying everything. Everything from rusty old knives to broken toys. Professionally weird. Attached is a scan of a flyer. Thoughts?

I don't know of any warehouses in the area, and certainly not anywhere big enough to hold a market of the size you describe.

Regarding the flyer, it could be a bunch of nutjobs. Some kind of student prank? But it certainly does warrant looking into: you could be on to something. If you can remember your way back, take a camera. Try talking to someone, see what's on offer. There's bound to be evidence when strange shit is going on.

I won't be there tomorrow, but see what the others say.

# MEMORIES

## BOUGHT AND SOLD

We trade in all kinds of memories, good prices paid for all. No trace guaranteed. As a Limited Time Offer we can provide a number of backups for any bought memory: postcards ($10), photographs ($25); clothes and souvenirs ($varies). Any memories sold will net $$$. All traces removed or your money back.

If you want:

- **FAMILY VACATIONS**
- **DAYS ON THE BEACH**
- **A NIGHT IN A LOVED ONE'S ARMS**

# COME TO US!
# TABLE 53.



04/25/08

Helen called me at work today. She asked me to come straight home, said we needed to talk. She might as well have held a knife to my balls. No way I'm talking to her when she's in this state. It's just a bad patch. I'll be off the sofa soon enough. Let's face facts: the market's far more important than any of that.

I made my way back there tonight. I didn't have to follow anyone. It took me twee attempts to find the right alleyway, but once I did, the rest came flooding back. I'd been there once. For some reason, I felt like it wanted me to be there.

The warehouse is bigger than I first thought. I couldn't see the other walls from the doorway, mostly due to the smoke and the fog. From the sound and the smell, some of the stalls were cooking food. Maybe I've seen too many movies, but I didn't dare look too close. Away from the food, people bought and sold and haggled. The only rule I could see was the rule of the Almighty Dollar: sell what you don't need, buy what you think you want.

Several of the stalls are piled high with what most people would consider junk. They aren't priced in dollars, as I found out soon enough. I tried to pay, but I nearly got my hand bitten off.

The chipped mug, how much?" I held 10 bucks out as I asked.

"What? What for?"

"These." I waved the bills, feeling too conspicuous for my own good.

"Pah! No. They've got no worth, only value. You want something with worth, you offer something with worth. What use do I have for value?"

I backed away before I caused more offense.

After a while, I stopped seeing people's clothes or the things on each stall. I focused on the people. That's what they are, in this market, just normal people.

I took a few pictures, but I doubt they'll provide any enlightenment. Everything there – and I do mean everything – is junk. Old newspapers, empty cigarette packs, beer bottles full of suspicious liquids and sealed with wax. People still trade for them, and they still trade for time in the tents with the fortune-tellers.

Tomorrow. I'll get some more perspective tomorrow.



---

04/26/08

I haven't seen Helen all day. She got up and went out, took Luke with her. Left me a note.

I want to say I don't have time to deal with this now. I want to put it out of my mind, just focus on the market, but there's this niggling doubt. What if they're in more danger when I'm not around? Then

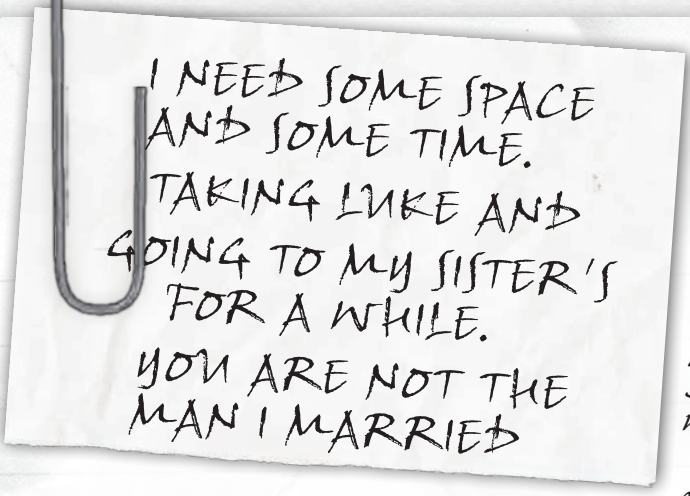
again, I'm probably just being paranoid. Her sister lives out of town, away from all the weird shit. It's probably for the best. I've just got to soldier on, try to ignore it.

Group today was interesting. Nobody had any concrete theories on what's going on, but we could confirm there's nowhere in that part of town that could hold the market. For that reason, if no other, I'm going to keep it under observation.

Looking at the pictures, I can't help remembering something. Everyone there accepted me. Nobody thought I was out of place just because I wore a shirt and tie. Hell, I might have been the only person in the place who had showered in the past month, but nobody cared. They noticed me, a couple even talked to me, but that was it. There's a guy in one of the pictures slumped over, either asleep or halfway through an overdose. I tried talking to him, asking him some questions, but he didn't want to say anything. He didn't look scared, just kinda blank.

I wanted to go back there, but the others dragged me along to a bar instead. I didn't feel the urge to trade after a couple of beers. I didn't feel much, and to be honest, that was pretty darned good. I had another beer, followed by a scotch,






then came back here.

Back to an empty apartment, back to a hollow life where all I care about is driving my wife and son away from me in case something takes an interest in them. Back to that damn note.

I had to do it. If anything wants to take a shot at me, I can't have them hurting Helen and Luke. But I've got to hurt myself if I want to keep them safe. I guess nobody ever said the world was fair.

---

04/29/08

The market's addictive. I can say that for certain. Every day I think about it, every night I have to remind myself to come home, rather than looking for those alleys. Whatever lies behind the stalls has its hooks into me.

Of course, that reminds me that I'm not like most people. I recognize that it's hooked me, and I want to know why. I want to know what it's done and what danger it poses. All because I want my wife and child to be safe.

Today, I ignored the stalls and the size and all the strangeness that so amazed me on my first visit. That's the one thing I tell newcomers to the support group. You have to see the strangeness, then look beyond. People trade things they think are worth something. Ignore the things, and look at the people. If you do that, you can find a hell of a lot.

The people walking the floor all had something in their eyes, a burning need. After a while, I saw the pattern. They each fixated on one thing. Maybe it was a piece of trash or a bite to eat. A few wanted in to the strange, enclosed tents on the outskirts. One lusted after something I couldn't quite see to start with, but when I looked, I saw a man's arm, wrapped in old newspaper. Everyone there had something they needed.

Watching for longer, I could see nobody got what they went in for. People traded for things, then traded them away, but the market's not running a fair game. Like a casino, the house always keeps its cut. Apparently, I've become part of the market. I caught up with Morgan Black, the man I followed here. He'd traded himself out, and I offered to get him a cup of coffee.

We found a diner close to the market, and I kept us in coffee and cheese steak. The waitress didn't like having Morgan in there, but I slipped her a

*20 when she brought the coffee and she sweetened up., I told Morgan he had to answer some questions in return for the food, and he seemed fine with it. I don't think he knew I recorded the whole thing. Dropped the tape off with an old friend who owed me a favor and he got the transcript back to me today.*

**Andy:** When did you first visit the market?

**Morgan:** I don't really remember. I've been going there every few days for so long, I've kinda lost track of time. I know the Steelers had just won the Super Bowl, if that helps.

**Andy:** That's a couple of years ago now.

**Morgan:** Yeah. Steelers won, I found out I was shot through with cancer, all in the same week. No insurance, no stable job…you can see where I'm going.

**Andy:** Yeah. You tell this to everyone who buys you a cheese steak?

**Morgan:** No, but you've been to the market. You know what it's like.

**Andy:** Kinda. I only got there from following you.

**Morgan:** But you couldn't have followed me if you didn't need to find the market.

**Andy:** Is that how it works?

**Morgan:** I think so. I don't know for sure.

**Andy:** So what is it you're trading for?

**Morgan:** [pauses] Something I need.

**Andy:** Something that drips blood when you take it to your safe-deposit box?

**Morgan:** Ah, fuck. I suppose you know plenty already. I've been buying new organs, one at a time.

**Andy:** And putting them in a safe-deposit box?

**Morgan:** That box is the first thing I bought. Any organ I put in there goes straight into my body. I've got a liver, a lung, and two kidneys so far. It's a fucking rip.

**Andy:** How so? More coffee?

**Morgan:** Sure. And…everything's worth something, right? But I ain't never seen a trader give a good deal.

**Andy:** But how can that work? I mean, without money, how do they profit?

**Morgan:** You're still new. They're not in it for profit. They've got a need, same as everyone else. They need our desperation, same as I need another lung. That little sinking feeling in your gut when you realize they've got you over a barrel? That's what they're really after.

**Andy:** You know this shit better than I do.

**Morgan:** Damn right. The market's got you because you need something, something it can give you. But if you start trading before you know what that is, they'll take everything you have and leave you with nothing.

**Andy:** Take the shirt off my back?

**Morgan:** If you're lucky. I've seen men slumped between the stalls. They don't know who they are, why they're there. Some don't remember how to speak. I don't care if you're a good man or a bastard, nobody deserves that.

*Something about the market calls to the need within people. It gives a man hope to know that one day, he can afford the thing that will make his life complete. If that's the case, why do I feel drawn to the market? Is someone there selling the truth? I doubt it. What do I need?*

---

*05/02/08*

*Looking at the question in that last entry, the answer's been staring me in the face all this time. I'm a fool for not seeing it.*

*The stupid thing? The whole investigation has just made it worse. I mean, sure, ever since I started going to the group, things have been rough with Helen. The market's the straw that broke the camel's back – and our marriage. I've kidded myself that the investigation matters, that I'm keeping them safe by driving them away, but let's face it: that's bullshit.*

*It's not like she doesn't believe I saw a ghost. Just that…she doesn't understand why that's a big thing. Lots of people see ghosts and go on with their day.*

Maybe they start going to church, maybe they stop, but they let the rest of their lives go on. I didn't do that. I hooked up with the support group and let my marriage go to hell without ever thinking about it. I mean, my reaction to Helen's note is typical: it's a shitty situation, but it's for the best. I've put my own needs ahead of her, to the point where I don't think I can get her back.

If I don't have Helen, if I don't have Luke, then I don't have a reason to go to the group. I could think that I'm just losing my mind, that a long weekend vacation would set my head right. With them in my life, I've got someone to protect. Someone to worry about, someone to care about, someone to save.

I love them. I need them to love me. I need my family. Why didn't I realize that before?

And the fucking market got under my skin, increased my need. It gets in everyone's head. It makes itself the only solution: whatever you need, it can give you. The market, the stallholders, everyone in that place. Parasites, drawing you in and drinking you dry.

I could tell the group. I'm sure we could do something, break the market up, maybe burn the place down. But if we do that, who benefits? Not the people looking to buy. They're getting ripped off, but if we take away the market, we take away their hope. We're not helping the dregs, the wastrels between the stalls. Without the market, they'll just end up on the streets. If we break it up, the only people who benefit are the people who run the stalls. Those bastards walk away rich and set up another market in another place. We just get a hit, a bit of feel-good from the bust.

And damn me if that isn't what we end up needing. We break it up once and we feel like heroes. Six months, a year later, someone else in the group needs something, makes their way to the market, then we break it up again. Then it happens again. A vicious cycle. We pay out all our need in that one raid, and they take us like the mugs we are.

Tomorrow night. I'm going to go prepared. I need something of worth if I'm going to bring anything back. I think we've still got one of Luke's old teddy bears in the attic. That should be worth plenty to get me started.

The market needs people who are down on their luck, people who need, and they skim what they can off the top. Thing is, I know what I need. And unlike most people, I've worked in a bank for 20 years. I know more than enough about moving money around. They think they've got a good system going, but I think I can beat it.

I've just got to keep my need in mind.

---

05/03/08

My first day of trading, and one thing sticks out in my mind: Morgan wasn't joking.

The stallholders – I'm starting to think of them as "The Market" more than the location itself – really want to gyp new traders. It's like they instinctively know how much each thing is worth. Walking the halls with Luke's old bear, that's like strolling through downtown after midnight with a roll of hundreds in plain view. One of its eyes is missing and a patch of fur worn away from the back from where he'd rub his face, when he got chicken-pox. He freaked out when we washed it afterwards, because it didn't smell right. I thought the damn thing had fallen apart, but I guess it's tougher than I thought. Everyone's watching me. They know I've got something big.

I see other people walking around and they trade as best they can, but they don't understand their situation – they're working toward an ever-changing goal. It's not like I could haggle on a price for my marriage then work my way back along the chain. Value isn't a constant here, so there's no way of mapping out a path to your goal.

That first trade was easy. I talked the Market up to a hubcap from a 1973 Cadillac, rebuilt by one owner who died when he crashed it. The stallholder didn't want to let go, but I pointed out that the bear was my son's constant companion for years, and that sealed the deal. The hubcap's heavy with the weight of memory. Hell, I think I'm starting to feel the worth, like others in the market.

I'm not just in this for me. I have the beginnings of an idea, first formed over coffee in a late-night diner.

I spent most of the night looking for someone who'd take the hubcap for the right price. Plenty of people wanted it, but nobody had anything good to trade. They had crap, and I was after something worthwhile. One guy had just traded away a knife with a handle made from human bone, but that was about it. I told people to look me up tomorrow night, and that they'd better have something good to trade.

Group tonight. Straight there from the market, the hubcap weighing my bag down like an albatross around my neck. I kept waiting for someone – anyone – to pick up on it. I'm getting nervous, and with good reason. The Market's hardly a healthy place to be, and if I'm spending more and more time there, then the group has plenty of reason to worry. I know what I'm doing, though.

Nobody said anything. For the first time, I think I might get away with it. I might just get lucky.

Then again, isn't that what every gambler thinks?

**GreenLight:** Haven't seen you in a while, man.

**AndyK1978:** I know. I've had a lot of things going on.

**GreenLight:** So much that you couldn't even join the rest of us for a beer?

**AndyK1978:** It's personal.

**GreenLight:** Anything to do with this weird market?

**AndyK1978:** Yeah. Don't tell the others, but I've started trading.

**GreenLight:** You sure that's wise?

**AndyK1978:** No.

**GreenLight:** Then at least you're keeping everything in perspective.

**GreenLight:** Do you have a plan, at least?

**AndyK1978:** Yes. I tell you about Helen?

**GreenLight:** You did.

**AndyK1978:** I'm trading to get her back.

**GreenLight:** …

**GreenLight:** You are insane.

**GreenLight:** What the fuck is wrong with you, man?

**GreenLight:** Why don't you just *talk* to her?

**AndyK1978:** You think I haven't thought of that?

**GreenLight:** You're not being rational.

**AndyK1978:** I'm being perfectly rational.

**AndyK1978:** The Market took her. I'm playing it at its own game to get her back.

**GreenLight:** You're fucked in the head.

**GreenLight:** I'll cover for you this once.

**GreenLight:** You've got to do what you've got to do.

**AndyK1978:** Good.

**GreenLight:** Though I'm going to keep a very close eye on you.

05/05/08

*I met Morgan at the Market today. Told him I had a suggestion for him, that he should meet me in the same diner as last time. Of all the folks in the Market, he's the only one who's spoken to me outside the context of a transaction. That could mean he's a trap, or it could mean I have a real chance to help him out. I've got to assume the former, or I'll end up a paranoid wreck.*

*He told me something that set my brain on fire, all for the price of a cup of coffee.*

The Market's prices, the acceptable trades, vary according to need. If you really need something, you need to trade more for it. If it's just another step on your journey of transaction, then you get a better deal than if it's your end goal. It's the Market making sure it always has plenty of need to feast upon.

I don't know if it's the atmosphere of the Market or simple human nature, but most people are only out for themselves. Morgan didn't want to know, not to begin with. He had the same reservations as everyone – why would I help him? He started to come around when I pointed out the holes in the system. That I'm going to help him just as much as he helps me is just the icing on the cake.

Tomorrow, I'm going to hit a whole bunch of antique shops. I wonder if my newfound sense of worth carries over outside the Market. I hope it does, because that'll make my plan even easier. Getting my family back is only one goal. I've got to do something, got to scream and shout until the Market recognizes me.

One of the best ways to do that is economic warfare. Dump counterfeit goods – everything from antiques to the generic crap in a pawnbroker's window – into the Market, and suddenly the people doing the buying move to an economic strong point. Everyone who wants something can afford it. Do it suddenly enough, and the whole thing collapses. One or two people getting what they want, that's a quirk of the system. A casino has to pay out sometime. I heard of one place in Vegas, con men got to every game and stacked the odds against the house. Just one night with everyone winning put that place bang out of business. That's what I'm doing, in a nutshell. Tonight, I'm stacking the odds.

I can see the others in the group looking at me funny sometimes. Sure, I go along and I help out when I can, but everyone else brings skills from their outside life. I'm just filler. Not anymore. This one's all on me.

I still haven't made up my mind whether I'm going to tell them, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. When I've got my wife and son back.

---

05/07/08

This is getting insane. Everything I'm trading, everything I'm building up, it's gone through weird and out the other side. I mean, tonight I traded for a baby's hand. Someone removed a baby's hand after the kid died, so they'd have something to carry around. Sealed it in gold. And when I think that's weird, I look at Morgan Black, trading for a set of organs that aren't fucked through with cancer.

I'm surrounded by it. I've got a set of Johnny Cash 8-tracks that supposedly have someone's dead husband talking in the background. Somewhere in my car, there's a bunch of keys from an old asylum, the only thing keeping the madness locked away.

When the fuck did this become normal to me?

05/08/08

Reading over my last entry, I realize I never got around to explaining either facet of my plan. It's simple, really. The Market's set up to take worth from individuals, increasing their need all the time. If two people work together, they can switch their goals. I'm currently trading hard, haggling over every item. I'm on my way to getting Morgan another lung. I don't need it, so it'll be cheaper for me.

The main part of this scheme, giving people extra worth – that's harder. I can't afford enough to drown the market, but I can trade for it. Everything I'm picking up along the way has to be a set or a group, something I can subdivide and trade only part back on. That way, I can build up a stash I can share out when the time is right.

My car's full of crap. Really full. Every time I open the door, I've got to shove the pile of 8-track tapes to one side just to sit down. I think I traded my phone away; either that or it's under the piles in my car. It doesn't really matter, though it would have been handy. I'm not spending too much time at home. Our apartment – never "my apartment"; that reeks of failure – reminds me of my goal, but hanging around isn't productive. I should have checked the mail sooner.

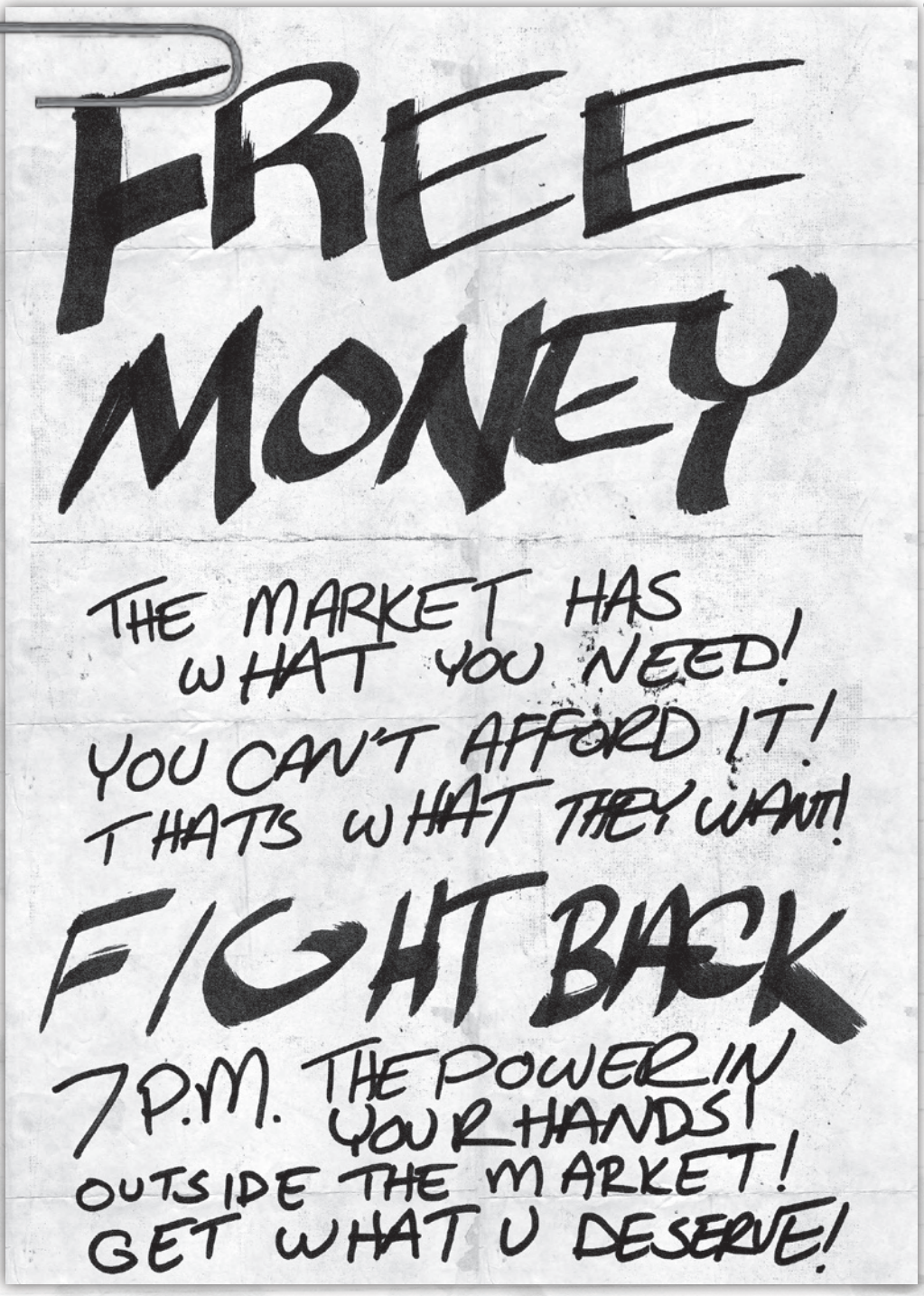
I haven't been to work for the past couple of weeks, since the Market dug its claws in. That's a bad thing. I've been fired. I don't have a job or any kind of stable income. Fortunately, Helen hasn't stopped her payments on the mortgage, not yet, but I need to move my plan into the end-game.

Not having money is fucking with me. I can't buy anything I need, so I've started stealing things – stuff nobody will miss, but stuff that has the right "feel" for the Market. I can justify it however I like, but that doesn't change the basic fact: I'm stealing other people's stuff for my own benefit. Strangely, I'm fine with that. When I was younger, I was always so aware of everything I did, always wracked with guilt at the tiniest thing, and now here I am breaking the law and feeling just fine.

No letters from Helen. That's a good thing, in a way; it means she hasn't decided to make our separation final. No phone calls, either. That's not so good; she doesn't want to talk. Means I'm right to use the Market against itself, means I'm right to do everything in my power to get her back. I don't know when I got so driven – probably sometime after going to group, the same time I lost that undefined guilt complex – but it feels good. It feels like I'm doing something right.

I'm destroying my own life out of love. The group can wait this week. I've got things I need to do.

05/09/08
TOMORROW THIS ENDS.



05/10/08

It's done. I feel like shit.

I feel wonderful.

I don't know what I thought would happen, but I saw it all with my own eyes.

Getting all this down on paper will help me remember. I think.

My carful of crap finally came in handy. Everyone who came with a flyer got to pick whatever the hell they liked. A few, the long-term inhabitants, tried to give me something in return, but I waved them away. Free stuff. They thought I was mad, like I was standing on the street corner giving 50 dollars to everyone around. Didn't matter.

I got inside and made my last trade. The mummified hand, in exchange for a bag containing a human lung. The Market didn't know it wasn't for me. By the time I saw Morgan, the cracks were already starting to show. The faces behind the stalls had a look I hadn't seen on their faces before. Fear. They couldn't work out how everyone had suddenly got so rich and so lucky. They couldn't con anyone, because people could pay any price. Everything flowed to each person according to his need.

I caught up with Morgan by a closed stall and handed him the bag. He took it with a grin and handed me a copper coin. He pointed to a tent. The stalls may be fucked, but some of the darker trades would continue – people would pay any amount to forget. I nodded and we parted ways. I didn't see him again. I hope he got out.

Inside the tent, a wizened woman sat in front of a bubbling pot. At first I thought she was a statue, but she snatched the copper coin from my hand with inhuman speed. When she spoke, her voice sounded like she smoked 80 a day. Just like my grandma.

"What do you crave?"

No pleasantries, no bullshit. Straight to business. My mouth went dry, but I managed a response.

"My family...my wife's left me, and taken my son. I want to make things right."

"You want her to love you again?"

"Yes. No. I don't know." I licked my lips, wishing I'd brought a hip-flask. "I want things to be better between us. Like they were six months ago."

"There's a price."

"I've paid every price!" I didn't mean to shout, but I couldn't help it.

"No. You paid to see me. The change you want has another price."

"What is it?"



"Sacrifice. You must cut loose something close to you."

"Anything. Anything for Helen and Luke."

She spat into the pot. "It's done. Now go, before the Market brings vengeance on you."

I did as she said and ran. The stallholders noticed me and tried to give chase, but people stood in their way. I'd done something for them, and they did something for me.

When I got home, there was a message on the answering machine. Helen. She wants to meet tomorrow. I don't know what I'm going to tell her.

---

05/13/08

I didn't tell her about the Market, in the end. I couldn't. It'd just poison the waters between us.

I told Helen I'd gone to pieces after she'd left, lost my job and lain low. The day she came back, I applied for another job. I've had interviews, and I'm going to start working in another bank next week. I tell her I'm glad to be rebuilding, and that's the whole truth.

I haven't been to the group for a while, and I don't think I'll go as often as I have been. I mean, it's a useful place, but I've seen just how far obsession can go. I've got my life back, and I'm in no hurry to throw that away again. I guess that's my sacrifice – watching out for my family.

Truth be told, it's scary as Hell. I can't talk to her about the weird things I've seen; I can't tell her about what really scares me. Luke's going to grow up in one hell of a world, and he can't know the half of it. That's the price I paid for my family – knowledge I can't share with them.

# RE-OPENING SALE!

AFTER SOME MINOR SETBACKS AND CONFUSION, THE MARKET IS BACK IN ACTION!

WE SELL EVERYTHING YOU NEED AT VERY COMPETITIVE PRICES. YOU CAN'T FIND WHAT WE'RE SELLING ANYWHERE ELSE.

TO CELEBRATE OUR NEW LOCATION, WHY NOT SAMPLE SOME OF THE WARES AVAILABLE AS PART OF OUR ONE-DAY SALE?

FOR ONE DAY ONLY, THIS SUNDAY, EVERYTHING IN THE WHOLE MARKET HAS HAD ITS PRICE SLASHED.

WHAT WOULD ONCE HAVE COST FIVE YEARS OF YOUR LIFE WILL NOW ONLY SET YOU BACK THREE!

YOU GET MORE FOR LESS,

BUT IT'S FOR ONE DAY ONLY!

YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND US.



CASE FILE HRG 00010

# THE OGRE

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



You've gotta know before you read this: it's not just that door in the bar. It's ~~any~~ door.

—MC

Dear Jacob,

I tried emailing you back at the address you pinged me from, but got a bounce, so I was really happy to hear from you. Truth is, I've kind of been living on Ramen and tap water for about the last six weeks, and I'm going a little wall-eyed out here in Left-of-Asshole, PA. Maybe we can meet up for a chat online someplace? I know some pretty secure sites.

Anyway, I wanted to thank you for your response, and for helping us patch the holes in our security. That help came too late for my people, of course, but that's not the point. We were stupid, and you really stuck your neck out to point that out to us. I'll tell you, it really underlines the difference between "geek" and "scientist" that we were all more concerned with which filters to try in what order than with just getting some info, and that, I think, is what fucked us more than the security breach.

I'm going to stop before I ramble. I've only got so much paper here, and no Internet connection, damn it all. I needed a break, anyway, but given enough time away, I'll get the shakes. Guess I could always drive up to the highway to the sandwich shop. They've got Wi-Fi.

Right. Rambling. Sorry.

Sincerely, Emma

Dear Emma,

Okay, we need to establish a couple of things right off. First, don't bother pinging that email address ever again. I created it only to warn you and your buddies, and then I signed it up for a bunch of lists, porn sites, whatever. It's totally flooded with spam now, and that's what I wanted. Second, if you want to stay alive, you don't leave footprints, and the Internet is just one big footprint waiting to happen. Third, if you're in hiding, don't give me clues as to where you are. If one of these things catches me and I have even the slightest inkling about your whereabouts, it'll pry the information out of my skull before killing me (or worse).

That's the thought that needs to sober you up, and fast: *these things are in the driver's seat.* All our research shows they've been here a lot longer than the legends about them indicate, and they're really, really good at playing people against each other. As scientists, we have to accept that we don't have enough information to make any informed decisions yet.

Now, I understand you folks are coming at this from a different perspective, and I can respect that. But I can't really respect filming these things and putting it on the goddamned Internet. Never mind monsters, think about cops! Think about Federal agents, the FCC, HomeSec, anybody who monitors this kind of thing. They might not be in anyone's pocket, but is that the kind of luck you want to test?

I don't mean to preach, and I'm truly, truly sorry that I waited as long as I did to say anything. I would really love to continue this correspondence with you, but you'll understand if I'm not willing to do a face-to-face, and I'm sure as Hell not willing to do it online. We'll need to keep this written for the moment.

Sincerely, Jacob

Dear Jacob,

No problem. Thanks again for all you've done. You asked once before about giving you a lit-

tle bit of background. I'll try and keep it to the stuff you don't already know, but I'm bored, so if I ramble…you know the drill.

Originally, we got sent to Philly at the request of someone on the "Revolution" radio station (not naming names – see, you're helping already!). [redacted] Okay, never mind that. We got out here and listened to the broadcast, and it's talking about how there's this bar in South Philly that's got a door that leads "somewhere else." So we find the place – mostly a local sports bar, lots of Eagles fans – and we set up a little way away with enough equipment to see the door in question. And we're there, manning it (remotely, of course) 24 hours a day for something like three weeks. Nothing happens.

But then this guy walks up to the door. I was on shift that night, and I immediately called in the others, because it's obvious this guy isn't normal. For one thing, we've never seen anyone use the door from the outside. It's always from the inside, always employees leaving or going out for a smoke, because the door comes from the kitchen. We know all the employees by sight, we've done basic background checks, nobody's very interesting there. But this guy isn't an employee. He's big, stocky, face like a bulldog and wearing an Eagles jacket. He knocks on the door, and we're thinking he's delivering some hoagies or something, but then the door disappears.

Damn, but I wish you could see the footage! We got this on film, you know. The door didn't open. If you zoom in, you can still see the hinges in the same position. But the door itself disappeared, and you don't see the restaurant kitchen on the other side. You see plants. Bushes, I guess. We don't have a lot of focus on that, because we were all staring at this guy.

Okay, this is great. He steps through the doorway, and suddenly he changes. Like, physically changes. He's still stocky, and his face is still smushed in, but now it's really smushed. His skin is gray. I don't mean pale, I mean like stone gray. His arms get longer, my hand to God, and his knuckles drag down almost to the ground. And then he walks away. We tried to keep a camera on him, but he turned and



walked out of our view, and suddenly the door reappears and the plant-place is gone.

I know you said keep this to text, but I have a couple of screencaps we printed off. This one's not a bad picture of him.

And then we did some really stupid things. We rushed right in and started taking readings, dirt samples, recordings of all kinds, banged on the door, went into the bar and bought a drink…Jesus, what were we thinking?

More later.

Sincerely, Emma

Dear Emma,

Some of what you're describing is consistent with some of the other data I've collected. Thanks for the picture, by the way. I'll break my own protocol for a second here and give you some solid information.

The guy in the picture is Robert "Bob" Nikolaidis. Greek ancestry, but thoroughly American and lifelong South Philly resident. He's got an interesting history, though.

Four years ago, he vanished without a trace and stayed gone for nearly a month. And then he reappeared, having lost 60 pounds and (get this) *his ability to speak English*. Remember, lifelong Philly resident, and he spoke a little Greek because his family was from Athens, but never more than conversational. And then he disappears for a few weeks, and suddenly all he speaks is Greek. I got this information, by the way, from speaking to folks on the corners, and to his old Greek school teacher, and enough of the details matched up to make me think we weren't dealing with a hoax.

Immediately we start thinking abduction, but Bob is actually better off than he's ever been. Before this, he's never held down a job for more than a few months, and he was always drunk. Now he's immersed himself in Greek culture, he's working for his uncle and making good money…so what gives?

Your information actually makes things even weirder, because in the photo, he's clearly bulked up again. And he's a real twist: three years ago, about a year after the initial disappearance, Bob disappears *again*. Only this time, he's last seen in the vicinity of the bar you mentioned, he's obviously upset, and he made a reference to someone being after him. I recorded the conversation, but I don't want to send you a tape right now (no offense, it's just not safe, not to mention that I don't have any reason to think you speak Greek), but I'll quote the relevant bit:

**Interviewer:** Who's after you, Bob? What did you do?

**Bob:** I didn't do anything! It's not fair. This isn't fair. All I did was what I was supposed to do. And now I have to go, and what's he going to

do, anyway? He couldn't do my job. He couldn't make this work like I have.

**Interviewer:** Bob, slow down. We can help you.

**Bob:** Like hell you can. Get the fuck away from me. You'll just lead him to me!

At that point, Bob pulled a shard of glass out of his sleeve (though one witness insists he pulled it "out of nowhere," his sleeves were quite long enough to hide the weapon, so I prefer to go with the more likely hypothesis) and slashed at us. He didn't manage to wound anyone but he did get away from us. And then he disappeared again - only to reappear, outside your bar, six months later, by my calculations.

Please tell me more when you can.

Sincerely, Jacob

Dear Jacob,

He was here, then gone, then skinny and Greek, then gone, then back but strong and American?

You figure maybe the gray-skinned thing stole his form? Tried to, I don't know, squeeze into it? Like maybe it's a doppelganger or something?

—Emma

Dear Emma,

It's important that you not make up facts to fit theories. As to the "doppelganger" question, I don't mean to sound pompous,

but we kind of have a policy against using folklore terms to describe supernatural creatures. A couple of reasons for that: some of it's about not empowering them any more than we have to, but mostly it's about preconceived notions. Call a creature a "vampire," and suddenly everyone thinks all we have to do is shove it out a window into the sun and we're done. And maybe that's true, but maybe it's not, and if it's not, well, we're screwed.

Sorry, I don't mean to preach. I just want to *win* this fight, you know what I mean?

Anyway, as to your general theory: yes, it is possible that something altered him, but it looks to me like the alteration was to the original person. Let's assume Bob always was a monster (the gray-skinned being you saw), but something changed him into the slight, Greek-speaking man I met. Then, whatever effect made that change wore off, and he changed *back*. That would explain his hysteria the night I made that recording, and it would certainly explain the changes in personality, but it does leave several questions unanswered. Notably: what *is* Bob Nikolaidis, and is it possible (and wise) to change him back?

I'll refrain from further speculation. I would, however, like you to elaborate on the night that your companions died.

Sincerely,

Jacob

Jacob: friends. They were my friends. Not "companions."

Dear Emma,

I'm sorry. I understand what it's like to lose someone, I really do.

Let's maybe take a break from this for a while.

Sincerely,

Jacob

Dear Jacob,

I know it's only been a few days, but I wanted to answer your question. I know I kind of freaked out with that last one. I guess it just all came crashing down.

Okay, no sob stories. You wanted to know about the night my friends died. For this to make any sense, we have to back up to the second time we filmed the gray-skinned guy. Bob Nikolaidis, I mean. We didn't know his name then. We just called him Bulldog.

We'd set up outside the bar again, this time with more expensive and elaborate equipment. We'd already put out the video, but blurred out the guy's jacket and avoided making any mention of what city this took place in. We figured we were being smart there, since we were still investigating. But then we put the damn video online — how smart was that?

It was a week or so after the first sighting that Bulldog came back. This time, though, he didn't approach from outside. He came out of the door to the bar, and it was in the wee hours of the morning, just after dawn. The bar was closed and empty. The door "opened" the same way; the physical door didn't move, but the doorway appeared and we saw the plants as before. Bulldog came through with a small sack. It looked like it contained oranges or something like that. As he stepped from the doorway, it faded almost immediately, as compared to last time, when we were able to



see the brambles for a good minute or so. And, as before, he changed from that gray-skinned thing back to a (relatively) normal-looking man as soon as he stepped away from the door.

We had a lively debate over whether to follow him. We were set up for stationary surveillance, but we're pretty good at improvising that kind of thing, so one of us tailed him just so we didn't lose him and I threw together a field kit – basic digital camcorder, shotgun mic, 35 mm for stills, that kind of thing. No special filters, but since all the weird stuff we'd seen so far had been visible with the naked eye, we figured we'd trust our luck on that.

I ran on ahead, trying to catch up to our tracker and get some footage. The others stayed behind to get some data on the door, this time a little more unobtrusively. That was the last time I saw them alive. When I went down to the morgue later to identify their bodies, the cops were sure we were into

something illegal — drugs, porn ring, something — because they'd found all this video equipment, completely destroyed, and my friends each shot in the back of the head.

But whoever shot them didn't know that all the video was being recorded directly to our servers. Actually, the video itself was pretty useless, because the cameras were all pointed at the door. But the audio on that recording gave me some clues.

I'm getting ahead of myself. I didn't know they were dead until later. I followed our tracker, and caught up with her a few blocks away. Bulldog was sitting at on a park bench, chomping on a gyro he'd bought from a nearby shop. Another guy came up and sat down, and we turned on the mic to hear their conversation. Problem was, they were across the street, next to this electronics store, and we were getting feedback from somewhere.

The other guy who sat down was skinny and about the whitest guy I've ever seen in my life. Not that milky-white that albinos get, but just so pale you could almost see through him. No hair, dark glasses, and he carries a leather satchel with him. He sat down next to Bulldog and they talked. Transcript's below, but like I said, we didn't get it all:

Pale Guy (PG): So?

Bulldog (BD): Yeah, there's something watching the bar. (At this point, our tracker phoned the others, but got no answer.) I talked to (inaudible; sounded like "a dog") and it said there were (inaudible).

PG: Do I need to go find them?

BD: (inaudible, shaking his head)

PG: You say that now. Suppose they're looking for you?

BD: They're just watching the bar. They're probably just Feds. I always told Steve the DEA was going to bust down his door. If they do, fuck him.

PG: Which door are they watching?

BD: Huh?

PG: Are they watching the front door, or our door?

BD: Shit, I didn't ask.

PG: (standing) I'm (inaudible). Stay (inaudible) and don't go back there (inaudible).

We were all panicked because we thought the pale guy was going to go to the bar, but then he just walked into the same sandwich shop. He came back maybe 20 minutes later with a bottle of soda in his hands. They exchanged some words, but we couldn't get the mic up fast enough to record them. And then they parted ways. The pale guy walked into the parking lot, got into a car and drove off, while Bulldog just sat there a couple of minutes.

We didn't follow the pale guy or try to get his information, because honestly, we were



panicked. The pale guy couldn't have gotten back to the rest of my friends, not in the few minutes he was out of sight, but we also couldn't reach them. We were on our way back when we heard the reports on the police band: multiple homicide near the bar. And my heart just sank, because I knew it. We'd finally got sloppy. We turned around and went to the hospital, and the tracker waited in the car while I went in. She was pretty hysterical at that point.

And there they were, shot in the back of the head once each. Not quite point blank, but pretty close. Their backs had been to a wall, though. There was a window, but it was bricked up. There was no way someone came through that.



The police grilled me for a while, but I stuck to our "documentary" story. We even had the permits to prove it. You know, we thought we were so smart for doing that, until you pointed out that they can use permits like that to track us down.

Jesus, Jacob, are we totally fucked, or what? It seems like they get us coming or going; no matter what we do, they always have a way to find us. And it's not like it takes a wooden stake or a silver bullet or a magic spell to kill us. One in the brainstem seems to work just fine.

Or excessive pressure to the neck. I got back to the car and found our tracker dead. Something had snapped her neck like a twig, apparently from behind. The car was locked from the inside, her gun was in the holster, she'd never touched the panic button on her phone. She was just…gone.

I got your email two days later, while I was going over the data from our servers. And then I think I spent another day

drunk, because I felt like such a fucking idiot reading what you wrote about security. Why didn't we think of this stuff? Stay together, keep moving, have a clear goal. It's not like we're not smart.

Sorry. I'm kind of burnt out. I may add to this later, or I might just send it.

Sincerely, Emma

Dear Emma,

I wish I had words.

You know, I've never lost anyone doing this? I saw the supernatural for the first time when I was overseas, and the creature I saw didn't kill anyone. It wasn't even threatening, per se, though at the time it certainly seemed terrifying. I don't want to go into the particulars, but it was enough to make me question what I'd believed all of my life. My questions eventually led me to a group called Null Mysteriis, other people looking for the same answers I was.

And over my years with the group, I've read about, and taken testimony about, more horrors than I care to consider. But it's always been at arm's length. I've always counted myself lucky that *they*, as you put it, have never noticed me. I don't know if that's because I'm careful (and lucky) enough to avoid notice, or because I'm simply beneath their notice.

In any event, when I saw what had happened to your friends, I realized I should have acted sooner. I had noticed the activity outside the bar, and of course had been mounting my own investigation of Nikolaidis.

I'm sorry. I have no other way to say it.

In answer to your other question, no, I don't think it's hopeless. If I did, I'd join them.

Sincerely, Jacob

Dear Emma,

It's been a while since our last correspondence. Please send me some indication that you're still around.

Sincerely, Jacob

Dear Emma,

This will be my last attempt. If I don't hear back from you, I'll assume you've either gone into deeper hiding, been compromised, or that this message delivery system has been discovered. I hope our paths cross again.

Sincerely, Jacob

Dear Jacob,

My name is not Emma.

I want to say that right off the bat, because I have a feeling I may forget. I'm writing this letter...I don't expect to live long. I have discovered where the door leads.

This door leads to someplace horrible. It leads to nightmares, Jacob.

I went back to the bar after I got your last letter. I wanted I don't know what I wanted. Maybe I wanted to destroy the place, burn it down or blow it up. Maybe

I wanted to find Bulldog and hurt him. I don't know.

I walked into the bar and I paid the bartender to take me into the back room. He thought I wanted drugs. I hit him over the head with a sap and then walked to the back door. There was no one there. I tried to open it, but it just led to the alley. And I looked out and realized that from here, I could see that bricked-up window in the building across the street. It looked big enough to admit a person. But it was bricked up.

I waited for a few minutes, and then I stepped out of the door into the alley. The door was still open. And then I heard a car pull up, and I shut the door and hid. Bulldog walked around the corner, looked around, knocked, and that doorway thing opened again. There he was all gray and monstrous again. He walked into the doorway, and I followed.

I'm such an idiot. I'm here bleeding and

I followed him. I stepped into the doorway and then he turned around and asked me what the hell I was doing here. I said you killed my friends. He said yeah, well, your friends were following me and my boss doesn't like people like you following me.

I rushed him. It was pathetic. He punched me in the head and I blacked out. I woke up with this note pinned to me, so I just have this one piece of paper for right now, but it's weird because the more I write, the more paper I seem to have **WHAT IS GOING ON?**

You can see his note on the other side of this sheet.

I stood up and it was dark. The doorway was gone. It was right behind me, and now gone. And I started thinking about what to do. I figured I'd better walk and try and find a way home.

That was hours days ago. I don't know who where I am. I'm Emma sometimes, but I just made her up to talk with you. So you wouldn't know I was me. I was, me. I might be Emma now. I don't think I'm really a girl yet.

But when I saw that woman behind the thorn-curtain, I tried to push through and I felt something TEAR away from me. I looked back and saw parts of me hanging on the thorns, and then those parts faded away and I was left with just me. The woman was beautiful and she looked up and said, "What's a young girl like you doing out here?" Am I Emma? Was I ever Mike? If she saw me as a woman, then is that what I am?

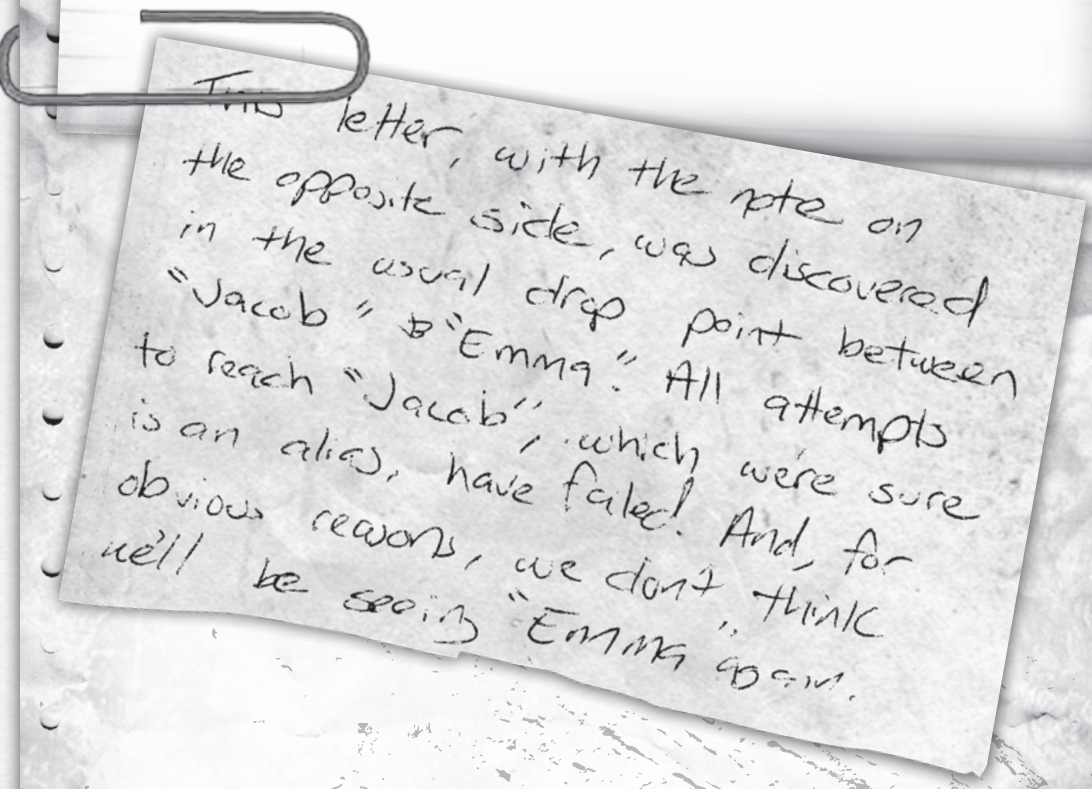
And as I'm writing, why are my hands getting softer? Are there, or is that just the blood? Leaving my hands, making them white and pale?

I followed him in here, and now I can't get out. I don't know why I'm even writing this. It's not like you'll ever see it.

Tired sleepy now

Sincerely, Emma

YOU CAN WALK AROUND OR JUST WAIT. THEY'LL BE HERE SOON. ONE MORE AGAINST MY DEBT.



CASE FILE HRG 00011

# SHY'S KILL

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |



To: crod@yahmail.com

From: bry@phillyunderground.org

RE: Holy shit

---

OMFG. Go to the place where they serve those awesome drinks. Look in our drop. I left you a file that got almost literally dumped into my lap. Whoever picks it up, send a mail to this address so that we know someone's got it.

The file is from a guy who just called himself "Connie." (Yeah, *him*self. I figure it's short for "Conrad" or "Converse" or something.) He just handed it to me on the subway, said "Figured you could use this," and then vanished into the crowd. No idea if he's trapping us, setting us up, helping us…but seriously, read the file.

I read it, and then left it because I thought I was being shadowed. That was a few days ago, so if Connie and his folks were tailing me, maybe I lost them. And then again, maybe I'm a total paranoid freak HA HA HA.

-- B.

To: bry@phillyunderground.org

From: crod@yahmail.com

RE: Re: Holy shit

---

Yeah, Rafferty, I got it.

Carol

# FIRST DATE

*Hickman: Likes wine. Sexually experienced. Pretty eyes. Works for police dept but not a cop. "Forensic accountant." Articulate, well educated. Supernatural experience: investigated a case three months ago where money traced all the way back to 19th century. Case was dismissed and all files went missing. Might be vampire, might also be Faustian deal, might also be nothing. Hickman did independent research and found similar cases, but too scared to go public. No friends/allies.*

*In conversation, he mentioned "Mr. Darlington," sits on museum board of trustees, has money trail going back*

*100+ years. "Susan," investigated in drug sting, infusions of large amounts of cash correlated with travel to Atlantic City — devil's luck? "Gray wolf of north Philly" — urban legend. Reluctant to talk about it.*

*Asked for second date. Wouldn't mind.*

# INSTRUCTIONS

Linda,

Don't accept another date, at least not yet. We'd like to know a little more about Hickman's background and where his loyalties lie. It might be best to just avoid clueing him in too much, especially to the truth of our existence. For the moment, make something up and tell him you'll contact him later. If we do wind up using him as a contact (and we'd like to; his position in the department and his skills as an investigator make him a very attractive prospect), we don't want him scared off. We also don't want him so infatuated with you he can't think straight.

No offense, Linda, but it does seem to happen.

- Strader

# NEWS OF THE WIERD
## WOLVES OF NORTH PHILLY?

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Is a pack of wolves hunting deer in Philadelphia's Fairmont Park? Late last night, witnesses from several points around the park called police in response to strange noises, variously reported as "howls" or "screams." The report that drew the quickest response, however, was of gunshots. A spokesman for the Philadelphia Police Department stated that responding officers found no evidence of gunplay.

"It's not impossible that someone discharged a weapon in Fairmont Park last night," said Sergeant Al Ginn in a prepared statement, "but [the police] found no evidence of foul play, no shell casings and no blood. It's just as likely at this point that the witnesses heard a car backfiring."

As to the reports of wolves, Sgt. Ginn was amused. "Fairmont Park is a big place, so I guess it might have wolves, bears or even tigers,"

he said, chuckling. "But I've spoken with park officials, and they don't think it's very likely."

One of the witnesses, though, remains unconvinced. Bartholomew Hartford, 42, of North Philadelphia, was one of the witnesses who called police last night, and is disappointed with their response to the events. "I heard howls, and then screams. Screams of pain, right? The wolves got somebody. And then there's more howls, and then gunshots. Sounded to me like someone found [the wolves] eating someone, and then shot at them. There could be wounded people and man-eating wolves in Fairmont, and we'd never know because that park is, like, 40 miles across…And what are [the police] doing?"

A park official, who asked not to be named, said that while there are no known wolves in Fairmont Park, the park is large enough to support them, and hikers should take care to leave the park before sundown. He stressed that wolves do not eat people, in any case.

Find out who "park official" is and track down Hartford.

## STATEMENT TO THE POLICE

**Date:** 6/16/1998
**Precinct:** 21
**Officer:** Lemmon
**Badge:** 334
**Statement:** My name is Linda Chatzi. I live at 98 Cotton St., Philadelphia. Is that okay? Okay. I was walking home tonight — I work at one of the new bars that just opened on Main Street. I was walking home when this van pulled up, and the door opened and three guys pulled me inside. They were all white. One was dressed in a suit, but the other two were wearing blue jeans and sweatshirts. I think one had a Flyers cap. They kept telling me to be quiet, and they didn't hit me or threaten me, but they held me down in the back of the van. I never saw the driver's face, but I think it might have been a woman.

They drove me toward the river. I was too afraid to scream. Finally, the man in the suit said, "Linda, we know who you are, and we don't usually do this, but you're in great danger. Someone found out who you are and who you're descended from, and now she wants to kill you." And then

one of the other men interrupted and said, "You're going to scare her. She doesn't even know yet."

They stopped by the river and told me they were all descendents of Satan, and I was too, and they had to train me how to use my powers to fight other demons, and one of those demons was trying to kill me. They said she could turn into animals and she was hunting me down to kill me.

I told them they were crazy and that I wanted out. They drove me back to Main Street and let me out, but they followed me home. I got inside and found that my apartment had been broken into. The door was smashed in, and I could see broken glass on the floor. I didn't go in; I went across the hall to my neighbor and called the police.

I didn't get the license number of the van, and I didn't see it when I went downstairs to wait for the police.

Signed: Linda Chat[illegible]

I can't believe we managed to get this file. We owe that guy big time. No more grabbing people into vans. —Jesus! what were we thinking

# OVERHEARD ON MAIN STREET

2 GUYS, ONE BLACK ONE WHITE, DRESSED FOR CLUBBING BUT CLOTHES LOOK WORN. BLACK GUY HAS BEEN HIT ON A LOT SINCE HE CAME IN. WOMEN AVOIDING WHITE GUY. WHY? BOTH LOOK HANDSOME/STRONG/BUFF.

WHITE GUY HAS TATTOOS ON ARM, NECK. WHITE INK? BLACK GUY HAS INK ON CHEST, BUT MOSTLY COVERED BY SHIRT.

WHITE: RIVER'S RESTLESS.

BLACK: YEAH. WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.

WHITE: HOW MANY TIMES DO WE DO THIS?

BLACK: AS MANY AS IT TAKES. (SAID SOMETHING ELSE, TURNED AWAY, COULDN'T HEAR)

WHITE: SOMEONE'S GOING TO NOTICE.

BLACK: THE FUCK CARES?

WHITE: SHE'LL NOTICE.

BLACK: WHO? ROSS?

WHITE: MAN, YOU NEED TO SHOW SOME RESPECT. (SAID SOMETHING IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGE – GERMAN? DUTCH?)

BLACK: WHY? BECAUSE SHE'S OLD? FUCK HER. SHE LOST HER PACK. SHE LOST HER EYE.

WHITE: SHE'S TAUGHT US.

BLACK: LOOK, MAN, THAT "HONOR THE HIGH" SHIT IS THE SAME SHIT I'VE BEEN HEARING ALL MY LIFE. SHE TAUGHT US SOME SHIT, FINE. THAT MEANS SHE CAN KEEP HER LITTLE TURF UP IN NORTH –

WHITE: (MORE WEIRD LANGUAGE, LOOKING AT ME, THEN BOTH LEAVE)

NORTH PHILLY? RUMORS FROM BILL BECK: WOLF-CREATURE THAT WON'T CHASE YOU IF YOU DROP WEAPONS AND RUN. RUMORS COME FROM NORTH PHILLY. GRAY WOLF? WERE THESE GUYS WEREWOLVES? MOON HALF FULL. CHECK WEATHER PATTERNS RE "RESTLESS" RIVER. CHECK MISSING PERSONS FOR THIS TIME OF YEAR.

# LOCAL MAN FOUND MURDERED IN SCHUYLKILL

PHILADELPHIA, PA — A man found floating in the Schuylkill River yesterday morning has been identified as William "Bill" Beck. Beck, 39, was a part-time cab driver and a lifelong Philadelphia resident. He was discovered in the river in the early morning hours, and was initially believed to have fallen into the river and either drowned or frozen to death. Police now believe that Mr. Beck was dead when he went into the river.

A member of the police department, speaking under condition of anonymity because this information has not yet been officially released, said Beck's throat was "torn open," probably by a saw or a serrated knife. Witnesses at the scene also report the words "SHUT UP" written in black on his forehead.

The police department has no official comment on the murder, but sources in the department say Beck may have had ties to organized crime figures within local union chapters.

That's one way of looking at it. Where the kill were Beck's "union" buddies?

# PLOTS

Strader,

I had Linda go and cozy up to the ME working on Bill Beck's autopsy. It's pretty much what we thought. That was no knife. His throat was bitten open. The police don't want to hear about it, of course; they think this was a mob hit or something.

In answer to your earlier question, Bill Beck got into a row with some of his comrades about a woman in a bar and left to walk home. You don't have to be a genius to see what happened there - they played the men against each other. Same tactic we use, which is more than a little sobering. And that's something we need to watch out for ourselves. I'm not saying that you or I are especially susceptible to the honey-pot, but can't you just see Linda getting all gooey over some handsome devil?

It's interesting that they went after Beck and not Gabe, since he was the one at the bar that night. They have to have noticed him staring and taking notes. Gabe's about as subtle as a kick in head. If they didn't kill him, it means they either think we're a threat or they think we're not worth killing, and either way, they're trying to warn us off.

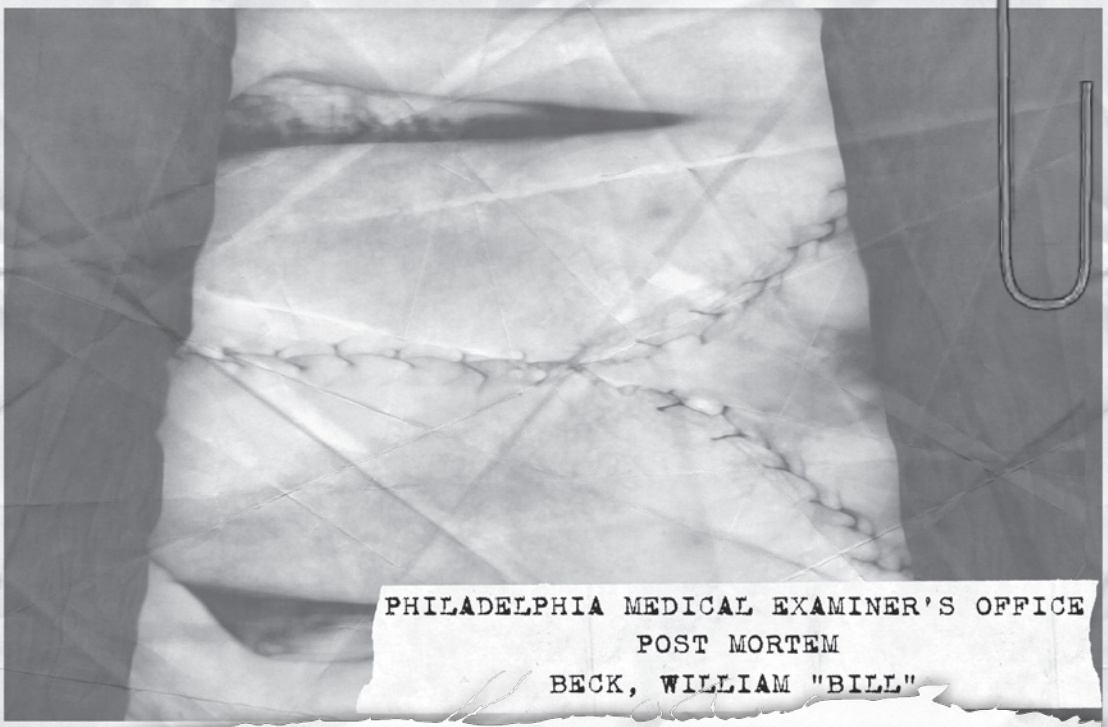
Let me know what you think. I'll be back in town in a week or so.

- Darren

# MUSINGS

Darren,

I can't help but think this is somehow related to the night we clued Linda in to her heritage. The thing looking for her was unquestionably a skin-changer of some kind, and there was a body pulled out of the river not




a fortnight after our rather clumsy contact with Linda. That body died of drowning, yes, but my sources tell me the man was thrown into the river and that it was done as a sacrifice. To what? I imagine to L-cifer, or to a less-powerful demon, but I can't know for certain.

The river and the werewolves are connected somehow, and I think this will take some time to play itself out. In the meantime, we should do as Beck's murderers obviously want us to do, and stay out of it. Let's keep watch, do our research, consult the archives (remember that there was a great deal of werewolf activity in this city some 30 years ago), and stay out of sight. L-cifer's reach <u>always</u> exceeds his grasp. We'll find something we can use eventually. Until then, take no action. I'll pass this along to the others as well.

Of course, we can't expect Beck's compatriots to exercise the same amount of caution. We will act in an advisory role to them. If they want information about the Fairmont Hunts of the 1970s, we'll provide it, and if they need shelter, we can offer it, provided they aren't leading the wolves to our doors. Beyond that, let's keep an eye on them. Have Linda keep contact with the ME you mentioned. Also, it might be time for her to go out with that Hickman character again.

I look forward to your return.

— Strader

# OUTSIDE PRESSURE

To: Det. Steven Lemmon, PPD Gang Task Force
From: Quentin Sonders, ADA, City of Philadelphia
RE: Arson
Dear Steve,

Last night should have been the wake-up call we need. The fire was contained, yes, but the press and the citizens have already figured out it was yet another case of arson. There's either a firebug in town or this is gang related, and judging from the spots that are getting torched, I'd say it's more likely the latter. I know you're devoting a lot of time and energy to the gang activity down by the river, the drug trade on Main Street, and so on, but we need you to find us some answers about this arsonist (or arsonists) as well. This is, after all, the fourth fire in as many weeks. By grace of God, no one's been killed, but I heard that last night's fire left four people hospitalized, so that might change soon.

The press is talking about how people reported hearing "howls" right before the building went up. Weird battle cry, maybe? Recorded sound effects played on a loud car stereo? I don't know. I seriously doubt we've got wolves in the city, but we've heard those reports before.

I don't like weirdness in my city, Steve. I like nice, normal criminals who just deal drugs and shoot each other. Let's try and wrap this up.

Thanks,
Quentin

# ATONEMENT

I, Gabriel Church, take full responsibility for the actions committed by myself and my assistant, Skye McMahon. Without authorization from my superior, I engaged in a reckless and dangerous hunt, accompanying several unaffiliated persons belonging to "the Union" into North and Northwest Philadelphia. The object of these hunts was to find the being or beings responsible for the murder of Bill Beck.

During these hunts, we discovered evidence that at least one pack of werewolves is active in Philadelphia. We attempted to track

their movements along the Schuylkill River and along the bars of Main Street, since I witnessed two of them discussing drowning people in the river some weeks ago, shortly before Bill's death. We believed that if we could find them, we could kill them, using a technique designed by the Union. This technique involved surrounding the creature and setting it ablaze with a makeshift flamethrower, while other members of the hunt used spears to keep the creature from running. We attempted this technique four times, and were unsuccessful. I here make a full confession in hopes that my soul might be cleansed of their deaths.

We found and positively identified one of these demons leaving an abandoned building. I asked that we capture it alive to interrogate it as to why it killed Beck, but the Union members wanted nothing but to kill it. We surrounded it, with my assistant, Skye, and I operating spears. The creature assumed the form of a wolf and leaped straight up, scrambling onto the roof of a nearby building and evading us. However, the man wearing the flamethrower had already begun to depress the trigger, and the building caught fire and burned to the ground.

Two nights later, I received a phone call from the Union, indicating that they had found the werewolf again. I again identified it, and this time we followed it to a vacant lot. We attempted to surround it, but it again assumed wolf form and fled. Skye, posted as a lookout, kept pace in his car, and saw the werewolf slink into the back door of an electronics store. Again, the Union proved too zealous – they hurled Molotov cocktails into the store in an attempt to force the werewolf out. We did not see the creature leave, however, as we had to flee the area in order to avoid capture.

The third failure happened nearly a week later, and I am unclear on the details, as neither Skye nor I were present when the fire started. According to the Union, they saw the creature feasting on a man's corpse in a blind alley, and again attempted to burn the creature. It somehow escaped, but it crossed my path as Skye and I arrived. It turned and looked at us, baring its fangs, and then assumed its human form and ran off into the gathering crowd. We were able to follow it, however, and saw that it ducked into a bar on Main Street. The bar, called "Shy's Kill," was still in the process of renovation, and was not yet open. We informed the Union of what had happened, and convinced them to stake the place out rather than burning it.

We saw no activity at this bar, beyond the workman and other staff making it ready for its opening, until last night. As the moon rose, I saw the werewolf we had been pursuing leave the bar, walking slowly and purposefully toward the subway station. I instructed Skye to follow it, while I called for backup. This time, I was determined we would capture or kill it.

The creature rode the train to a stop near Carpenter Street and walked nearly four blocks to a burnt-out shell of a house. It entered the structure and then, according to Skye, knelt on the floor and appeared to pray. The Union members and I arrived

shortly thereafter and stormed the building. The creature, however, remained calm. Seeing this, I realized we had been set up and yelled the abort code, but the others refused to listen. Skye and I fell back as the creature grew to nearly 10 feet in height, its fingers sporting horrible claws and its face becoming that of a wolf. The demon howled, and the flamethrower that one of the Union members wore collapsed, falling apart as the burning liquid engulfed the poor man. He burned alive, and at that moment, I saw something in the room change. The air seemed to shimmer, and a huge blast of fire engulfed the remaining hunters, burning them to cinders. Skye and I were already outside the building at that point, and so we ran, hoping to escape the demons and their hellfire.

The conflagration spread and consumed two nearby houses before it was contained. The fires claimed the lives of two civilians (both died at the hospital the next day; neither could afford proper medical treatment). The bodies of the hunters were not found among the ashes.

I set this down on paper so that I can accept my punishment, and any punishment that She might choose to mete out for Skye.

May my suffering serve to teach others.

# SECOND DATE

*Hickman seemed reluctant to go out again, but my excuses for dodging him for a while held up. Need to be very careful about lying to him; he's not stupid, and he spooks easily. Got him a little tipsy and he spoke more freely about the "gray wolf of North Philly." Story passed around among cops in PPD: gray wolf lives near/in Fairmont Park, but never attacks cops and sometimes knocks down or even kills fleeing criminals. Joke among local recruits is that she (Hickman says that all call it "she") watches out for rookies and undercovers. Need to have our guy on the inside of the PD find out if there are any official reports, but Hickman says it's basically a luck charm or a spook story.*

*Gray wolf — demon rebelling against Lucifer?*

*Mentioned "Shy's Kill" bar to Hickman, too. He said he could look into the construction/financing if he has time.*

# OFFER OF REDEMPTION

Gabe,

We have work for you to do, if you're up to it. Mind you, although you've been absolved of your sins, the fact remains that we're all a bit leery of trusting you. Prove us wrong, please.

We received word from our contact in the police department that, yes, criminals are occasionally disabused from reporting incidents with the Gray Wolf of Philadelphia. The District Attorney's office looks at these stories as attempts to cop insanity pleas, and the public defenders make it a point to talk accused criminals out of making any formal report on the creature. The criminals are quite willing to tell the stories to each other and to their acquaintances on the streets, however, and the stories grow ever more fanciful.

I took the liberty of sending Skye on a fact-finding expedition on this subject, and what he reports is typical (and frustrating). The tales of the Gray Wolf are inconsistent. In some stories, she talks like a person. In others, she is a literal wolf. Some witnesses attribute supernatural powers (often causing cars or guns to malfunction with a glance), others do not. No living witness reports harming or attempting to harm her, though some do state that people they were with tried to shoot or strike her, whereupon she attacked, killing the offender or dragging him off into the shadows. No one reports seeing her in human form (which isn't so surprising; Skye reports that the word "werewolf" was never used in his discussions). The general stories do synch up between cops and criminals, though: the Wolf apparently has a vested interest in keeping the streets clear of crime (though her success rate is hardly impressive — most of those she apprehends are free within a day, and she apparently makes no attempt find them again), does not harm policemen, and will not harm those who do not attempt to harm her.

All of this indicates that the Gray Wolf may not be a threat, but your initial report of the two "men" in the bar seems to show some connection between those creatures and this one. We should note, though, that the werewolves that you and the Union members tried to kill were not the aggressors, and the evidence you had that they killed Bill Beck was hardly conclusive. I tell you all this not to shame you further, but just to remind you not to jump to any false hypotheses this time.

The next order of business: Shy's Kill. The name of the bar and the general atmosphere indicates something sinister, and Strader's dreams suggest the place is a haven for

demons of some kind. Since the werewolves you discovered in the bar spoke of the river in terms of offering it sacrifice, this bar might be a potential link.



What I would like for you to do is this: see if you and Skye can establish between the werewolves that you saw the bar and/or the Gray Wolf. Looking over your notes, the name "Ross" appears. I've asked Linda to push Hickman into researching the finances of the bar and its owners, so we'll see if anyone named Ross pops up. I'll pass along any information I find. In the meantime, you know what you need to do.

— Darren

# SHY'S KILL & ITS PATRONS

Dear Linda,

At your request, I looked into the Shy's Kill bar and followed some of the transactions back to see whose money paid for the land and the renovations. I'm sorry it took me this long, but without authorization from the police department, I can't move as quickly, both because I can't devote as much time to it and because I need to cover my tracks. But after some digging, I can say with a fair degree of certainty that the bar's money is coming from one or more individuals, not corporations, none of whom have anything untoward in their records. I found no evidence of fraud or tax evasion, and no suspicious activity that seems to point to organized crime. The bar seems to be just that: a new bar on Main Street that is doing well.

In fact, the only thing I found that was at all strange was a receipt for a jackhammer rental during the construction phase. No other equipment of this sort was rented or purchased, and the permits the owners acquired didn't make any mention of excavation. This particular bar sits very close to the shoreline, and as such they have to be careful when digging or building - unstable foundations could wash away if we get heavy rain. So I'm not sure what they needed the jackhammer for.

Hopefully, I'll see you again soon.

Love,

F. Hickman

# THE GRAY WOLF SPEAKS

Just saw Gray Wolf. Hiding now. Need to write this down.

Skye and I went to the bar in the morning, broke in. Found hole in basement floor leading to river. Strange symbols written on walls of basement — Sumerian? Took photos with phone to show Strader later.

Walking out, an old woman approached. Missing left eye. Glared at Skye, and he ran — still not sure where he is. She told me I was courting death by being here, and asked what I wanted.

I told her I wanted to kill demons. I had a hard time lying to her. I think she would have known if I had.

She told me her people weren't demons, and that what they did, they did because the river demanded it. She asked if I was prepared to deny the river its due. I couldn't answer that.

She told me that she had been watching me and Skye, and that she had considered killing us after the fires, but since we'd stopped hunting, maybe we'd learned our lesson. She warned me that snooping around the bar would get us killed, since "the pack" uses it as its lair. She wouldn't tell me anything about the pack.

She asked about a charm, a medal of St. Francis — need to ask Strader about that, too.



# FAREWELL

Dear Fred,

I'm sorry, but I can't see you anymore. Please try to understand. My life is complicated, and I really can't explain.

Thank you for being so kind to me, and for all your help. Thank you, too, for listening. It means more to me than you know.

Sincerely,
Linda Chatzi

# REPORTING TO THE MISTRESS

I, Alton Strader, do set down this report to the Lucifuge. I hope that the information found herein is useful to You, and serves to continue the fight against S-tan's loyal minions.

As you know, my fellows and I have been operating in and around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for some time. Other people in this city have taken up the fight as well, some for good and noble reasons, some for short-sighted acts of vengeance, and some for profit and cupidity.

Over the past few months, my fellows have discovered evidence of a pack of skin-changers in this city. The archives from the 1970s tell a detailed story of these creatures. They fought a war among themselves, and the carnage paved the way for us and others like us to kill many of them. The city's nights remained unbroken by the howls of wolves until recently, when a string of events led us to our discovery.

We have, thus far, identified three werewolves in the city. Two are young men, one Caucasian and one African-American, while the third is an old woman who has gained some notoriety in the city. It is this latter creature I am most perplexed by, for she is not the ravening beast our teachings hold she should be. She has, on several occasions, worked to aid policeman and battle injustice and greed, but has also torn other hunters limb from limb. She does not harm those who do not attack her, however.

My fellows believe she and the two men are part of the same pack, that she is a kind of "alpha bitch" to them. I see evidence to the contrary, both in the scattered clues that my fellows have assembled and in my own dreams. I see that the men murder people and feed their bodies to the Schuylkill River, though what they gain from this eludes me. I see they have already summoned up fire from Hell, fire that claimed the lives of a group of men dedicated to fighting the same evil we do. But most importantly, I see that these young men do not show the Old Wolf respect, and that strikes me as odd, if they are family.

The Old Wolf recently contacted one of my fellows, the same one who wrote you in shame some months back. His name is Gabriel Church. The Old Wolf mentioned something about a St. Francis medallion, and I remember from the archives a mention of such a trinket taken from the body of a demon. If the central archives have anything on this object, I would love to know more about it. It might prove to be the clue that unravels this mystery.

I fear, however, that these secrets may remain hidden. My dreams of late have grown more intense, and I sense my own death is imminent. I see hints that I have underestimated one of my fellows, and I suspect that it might be Gabriel. I see betrayal coming, and I see a great bird watching me in my dreams, a bird that knows my secrets.

If You have any light to shed upon these matters, I humbly implore You to impart it.

# RESPONSE FROM THE MISTRESS

*All of them must die, save the betrayer.*

*Herein, find the medallion.*

*May you have more luck than its previous owner.*

*– L.*

# THE REST IS SILENCE

To: crod@yahmail.com
From: bry@phillyunderground.org

RE: Re: Re: Holy shit

I read this through and I did a little digging. Check it out:

I found a record of a Checker cab, you know, one of those freaking solid land whales from the 40s or something, purchased by one Skye McMahon. And then, a week later, I found missing persons reports. Skye McMahon, Gabriel Church, Darren List, Alton Strader, and Linda Chatzi. All reported missing within a few days of each other, all gone without a trace.

It seems like we're missing something here, but looking over all of this, maybe they went after those werewolves and got themselves killed? Anyway, we know where to start. I'm going to check out that bar tonight. See if my failed journalistic instincts don't kick in.

--B.

CASE FILE HRG 00012

# SNAKE VS BIRD

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



I used to write books. Articles. Fringe press stuff. You can find them if you look hard enough. But I don't write for the masses anymore. What I do now is more specialized. I put information directly into the hands of whoever needs it most. Even if, while I'm writing it, I don't yet know who that is.

I no longer consider myself a journalist. I'm a connector of dots. An excavator of facts. I don't document. I put pieces together. What it means and why, I leave that for you to figure out.

I don't accept payment for this. I don't ask anything in return. I'm convinced that you need this information, so here it is. The transcripts are from that psychologist's files. They seem like they were written by Ernie Fish, the guy who made the recordings. The other documents, their sources are self evident or unimportant.

Do the right thing with what you learn.

- Isak Bleak

## **TRANSCRIPTION:** ROBIN GARTER
## RECORDED 9-23
## TRANSCRIBED 9-29

Some of you guys will remember Robin Garter. Was in a cell over near University City. Remember we traded some information with them, about the so-called Man in the Coat?

I knew him because he was a hot, hot jazz piano player. I mean, he could do things with two hands that five other guys couldn't do. Anyway, I ran into him the other night in an after-hours club. He looked terrible. We were both waiting out the huge storm that was going on, and we got to talking. I showed him the new digital recorder I've been using. He tells me to turn it on, he's got a story to tell. Says he wants to get it out because he thinks "something's about to happen to him." So we grabbed a quiet table and talked. Mostly he talked, I stayed shut and let him go. In the transcript below I've left out my "um"s and "mm-hmm"s, and us ordering drinks and stuff. — EF

Ernie: How are your hands?

Robin: No better. Can't play like I used to. Anything too complicated and they start to shake. Ever since the Man in the Coat…so it's easy chords for me, piano bar stuff…

E: Sorry, man. You were saying?

R: So, the other night, I have a quick drink after this gig, walk out onto the street. It's warm for September. Lots of people walking around, traffic, couples eating at outdoor tables. I felt this restlessness that was hard to resist. I decided to take a walk.

E: That's when you saw them?

R: You know me, Ernie. I notice things. I observe. These three people sitting on a stoop in front of a shuttered-up antique shop…a guy on a cell phone. An old, well, older woman, a young guy…And I can't tell you why, but something about these people, their body language, the way they watch the street…I'd seen this before. This was a cell and they were set up for an ambush. And I'm thinking, walk away. Walk away now.

So what do I do? I start walking. Right up to this trio on the steps. I hold this pack of smokes — nice face. Yeah, I started again. I come up to these guys and I say, "Hey, how's it going? Any of you guys happen to have a light on you?"

The younger guy digs into a shirt pocket, tosses a book of matches my way.

I say thanks, light up. I flip him the matches back. I take a draw. I lean on the railing like I'm waiting for a bus. "I oughta carry a lighter," I tell them, "but I don't." Another draw. "Sometimes I carry a candle, though, if you know what I mean."

E: You said that?

R: They don't flinch. The guy with the phone in his hand goes, "Yeah? You carry a candle? Where, exactly?"

"West side," I say. I'm starting to think this wasn't such a good idea. But I can't stop myself. "We had a few blocks that we tried to keep clean." I've had enough of the cigarette; I stub it out on the edge of the steps. "So, like, is this block wit'?"

"Not if we can help it," the young guy says. The woman scowls at him. The other guy talks to his phone: "Theresa," he says, "Maybe you better come over here."

That was the first time I saw Theresa. She walked across the street, Ernie, like a cat, to use a cliché. Lithe and light on her feet. Dark eyes, long dark hair. Slim curves and elegant hands. Lovely and deadly.

E: Suddenly you're Mickey Spillane.

R: Yeah. "What do we have here?" she asked, all business. It was clear she was in charge. Her voice resonated down to my gut, like a Coltrane solo.

"Look," I told her. "I don't want to get in the way. I can see you've got something going down." She was looking right into my eyes. Right into my eyes. I caught a scent of gardenias and female sweat. "I'm just saying, you need an extra pair of hands, I can help. I've been around the block."

"You just happened to be in the neighborhood, right?" Cell Phone Guy says, smug at his cleverness.

Then Teresa eyed me up and down. "Okay," she says. "We can use him. The car's due in about five minutes. You come with me." And like that, we were walking across the street, Theresa and her new puppy dog.

We took up a spot next to a Dumpster. Never have I been so happy to share space with a couple of hundred pounds of rotting garbage. "I want you to stand and watch," she tells me. "I can't spare anyone else, so it would be helpful to have somebody to just watch everything. For future planning."

"I can do that," I tell her. At this point I'm feeling that adrenaline rush. That sick feeling, you know, that gnawing that tells me something awful going to happen that could very well kill me — but isn't it great to be alive and breathing while you wait for it?

E: I think I'd consider getting the hell away.

R: I did consider it. But the high was too strong.

Anyhow, here's how it goes down: at the far end of the block, some old Buick pulls into the street, in the lane that's not blocked by sawhorses. Two seconds later, another vehicle comes around the other corner, going the opposite way. This is our target, Theresa tells me.

That does not make me feel good. Because the target is a big, black hearse.

So the hearse tries to veer around the sawhorses, but it can't, the Buick is there. Tires squeak. Now a third car, a brown and dented station wagon, pulls behind the hearse. Blocking it. This all happens in the space of 10 seconds, and it's beautiful choreography. Theresa is suddenly up and running; she and about seven other people are converging on the cars.

I move closer. Some of Theresa's people have pulled out firearms. I get close enough to look over their shoulders.

Nobody is driving the hearse.

Nobody. No driver. No passenger. It's empty. The engine is still running.

"Open up the back," I hear Theresa saying. "The rest of you, keep watch."

Then I'm standing behind the car, and they've got the back open and inside —

E: Not —

R: Yeah. A coffin in there. I watch, but I feel sick.

So two guys take the coffin by the — what do you call those handles on the side of a coffin?

E: I don't know.

R: Whatever, they grab them and slide the box out the back of the car and then start walking it away.

And then the coffin is starting to shake.

E: Jesus.

R: Yeah. I back away but someone's behind me. "Hold it! Help them!" Theresa yells. Too late. The casket slips from their hands and it slams to the asphalt. Its sides splinter, the lid flies open and I get one, maybe two seconds to see and register what's inside before everything turns into a nightmare.

The coffin was full of birds.

## TRANSCRIPT: WHHY FM Fresh Radio Program 12-09

HOST: And we're back. You're listening to Fresh Radio on WHYY. I'm Marty Gross and if you're just joining us, our guest this morning is Randall Hersh, ornithologist and author of the new book, *Hidden Birds of Pennsylvania*. We have lots of callers waiting, so let's get right to it. First we have Meredith and she's calling from Fishtown. Meredith, thanks for calling Radio Times.

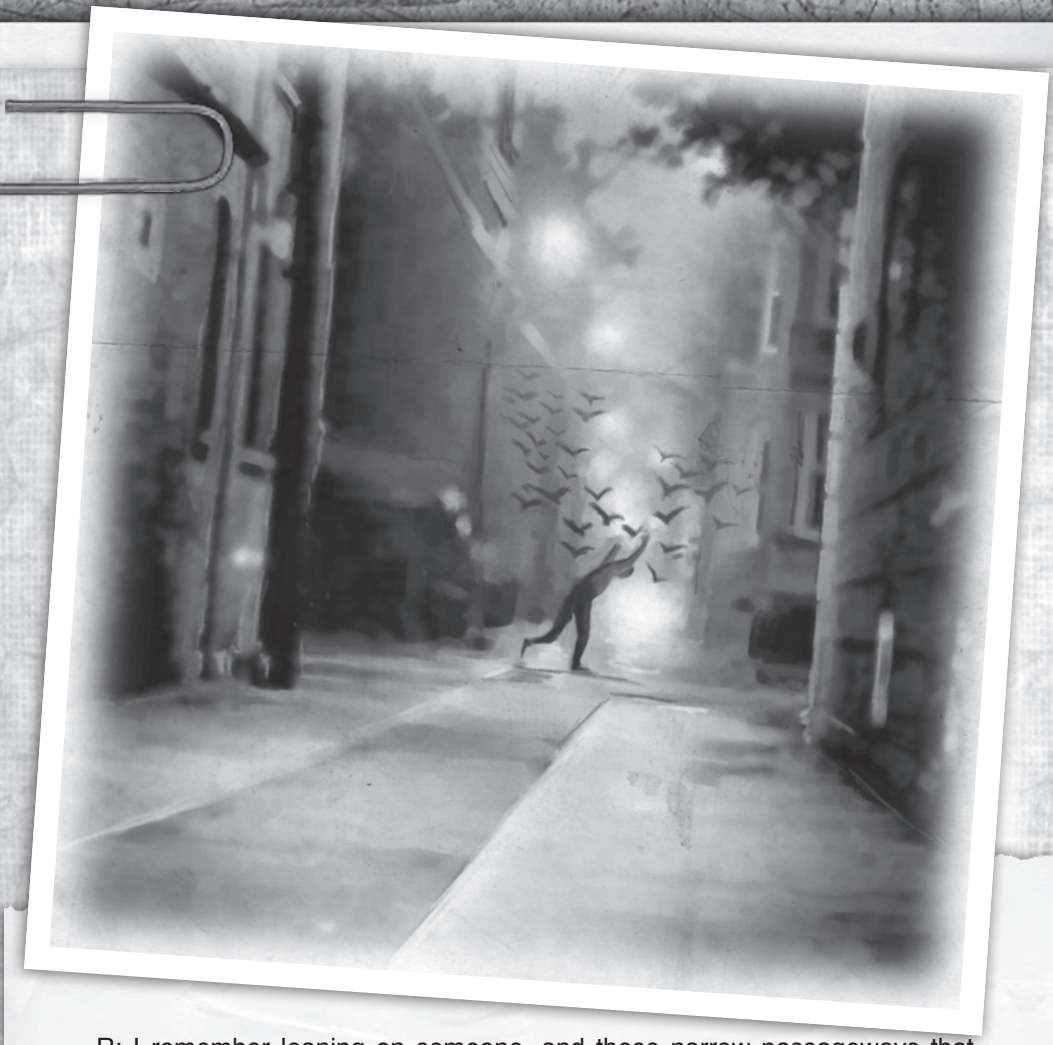
CALLER: Hi, Marty. First, I have to say I love your show.

HOST: Well, thank you. What's your question for Professor Hersh, Meredith?

CALLER: Well, I was wondering if you know anything about flocks of crows in the city. A while back, I was out with some friends one night, and we were bar hopping in the center city area. And we ended up down this side street somewhere, and down the block we could see, like, this huge flock of crows. I mean, like, there must have been hundreds and hundreds of them. And they were, like, swirling around the middle of the street, like, diving and then circling and diving again. And all, you know, cawing like they do. My one friend said she actually saw some people and cars in the middle of it all, and the birds were, like, attacking them. But it was twilight and hard to see exactly what was going on. We actually got scared and ran back to where we came from!

HOST: Sounds like something out of Alfred Hitchcock, Meredith. Professor, what do you think about that?

GUEST: Well, crows are good scavengers that can do well in an urban environment. They're very social creatures and do congregate in large groups. However, crows are rarely very aggressive toward humans. Often they communicate with each other in a very noisy, raucous display. That might be something that looks aggressive to an observer.



R: I remember leaning on someone, and these narrow passageways that smelled wet and moldy. My ears were ringing from the screaming of the crows. The scratches on my face and neck were burning and itchy. I came out of this daze, and I struggled to my feet, waving my arms, like that tornado of black wings and needle talons was still coming at me.

We were in a little room. It had a wood floor, old wood, you could tell. Worn smooth like stones at the bottom of a river. No windows; plaster walls; a low ceiling. Five of us: me, Theresa, Cell Phone Guy, a couple others. Everybody was scratched up and bloody. This lady had collapsed to the floor, sobbing. "Peter's eyes," she heaved. "I saw them tear out his eyes…" A guy in a raincoat put his arms around her. The only light was from a kind of work lamp plugged into some sort of battery. It was low to the floor and made weird shadows.

"Where…" I rasped. My throat was dry. "Where in hell are we? What is this place?"

"We're underneath Carpenter's Hall," Cell Phone Guy says. He tries to stretch out his arm, gasps in pain.

"We're where?"



"When this country was founded, friend, there was a secret meeting. Right here in this room." I could tell he was half dizzy himself, so I didn't bother to interrupt. "The founding fathers decided to cast their lot with the Serpent. The ancient spirit of wisdom. 'Join or Die.' 'Don't Tread on Me.' But the war dragged on; the way of the Serpent is wise, but not always direct. The colonial leadership grew impatient. Regretted their choice. So the United States realigned itself with a new patron. The Bird. Power over wisdom, strength over knowledge, the imperialism of the eagle. And so it's been ever since."

"Ever since?"

"Whose sign is on your money, Mr. Garter? On the great seal of this nation?"

I stared at him for a moment. "Look, I've obviously made a mistake. I have no business being involved in this. I wasn't much help, anyway." I noticed Theresa in a corner. She not only wasn't saying a word, but was sitting in a cross-legged yoga pose, eyes closed, whispering something I couldn't hear.

"You're wrong," Cell Phone Guy says to me. "You've been a great deal of help, friend." He points.

E: At what?

R: At my left hand. It was there. In my hand. A silvery globe the size of a grapefruit. I hadn't even noticed. It seemed to have no heft, no texture. It was like holding air.

E: What — where did it come from?

R: I remembered, then, seeing it on the ground, in the wreckage of the coffin. Reaching for it while a thousand birds were screaming all around me. While I'm staring at this thing, someone — the woman, I think — whispers, "The egg." "It's been lost for a hundred years," Cell Phone Guy was saying. "Now we have it. The Bird's strength is fading. The phoenix must renew itself or die. But it can't do it without the egg."

"Yeah," I said. I had to force myself to look away from the "egg," or whatever it was, and that scared me more than anything that had happened yet. "So here," I said. "Take it the hell away from me." Nobody moved to take the thing. So I tried to put it on the floor. Didn't work.

E: What happened?

R: My hand wouldn't obey. It wouldn't unclench. It wasn't like the egg was glued to my hand. It was just…I could not…make my hand let go. I tried to pull my fingers off it with my other hand…no luck.

E: Shit.

R: Yeah, Ernie, that's what I said. Then Theresa says, "The egg has been waiting a hundred years to awaken. The first step is for it to attach to a human soul."

I was pretty freaked. I started talking, but she interrupted me. "He's coming," she said. The light flickered and dimmed to almost nothing. Everybody slid back to the sides of the room; I did, too.

And then there was a shape in the middle of the room. On the floor. White in the gloom. A snake. Thick, like a boa constrictor. Snow white, even its eyes. So white it almost glowed. It curled into a double-S, slid around itself, its tongue flickered in and out.

E: Sounds terrifying.

R: Yeah, but I wasn't afraid. There was a feeling of calm in the room. It wasn't some monster…it was barely five feet long. It moved slowly. And then…and then…

E: Robin?

R: I…was falling. Or the room was falling, leaving me behind. A million stars in the sky and the milky was the snake's back.

…I'm sorry. Looking back, words fail. This thing was enormous and I was a mote in its eye. Its voice was inside me, talking not in words but…deeper. It said…

E: Said what?

R: I can't…Just like that, the room's back to normal. The thing was gone. "I saw him," the woman was saying. "He said I shouldn't be afraid, the cancer is really gone." "I saw him, too," the guy in the rain coat answered. "He said I'll be seeing Marion soon."

Theresa put her hand on my shoulder. “I’m so sorry you’ve been drawn into this,” she said. “But I’ll do whatever I can to get you through it.”

The egg was still in my hand and I couldn’t let go.

Theresa says, “The egg’s bonded to you, and to tear it away would mean your death.”

I was staring at it again. It was beautiful…

“There’s a way,” Theresa went on. “We have to weaken the egg. Draw off some its power.”

“Yeah? I asked her. “And the bad news?”

“We have to go into enemy territory. There are spiritual gates…passing through them will dampen the egg’s power enough for it to release you.”

I said I didn’t like the sound of that.

“If you like, we can just cut off your hand,” interrupted Cell Phone Guy. “That’s what the Bird’s servants will do when they find you.”

So we drove. It was Saturday night, more people coming into the city than out. I tried not to think of the Schuylkill Expressway as a giant snake spitting me out into the dark.



CHESTER COUNTY LODGE OF THE EAGLE

Ever Vigilant, We Guard the Gate

MEETING DATE: 9-22

MEETING MINUTES

MINUTES TAKEN BY: Mrs. Snyder

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jones, Fredricks, Fenstermacher, Haas, Wilson, Spangler, Dent, Callahan, Reverend Martin.

Opening Prayer: Reverend Martin

Captain’s Report: Thank you all for coming. We haven’t had a meeting in a while, so there’s lots of ground to cover. First of all, I think we all feel that

Sergeant-at-Arms’ Report: Brother Dent

Thank you, Captain. You all know we had an incident two nights ago, of course, but not everybody knows all the details. So if you'll bear with me, I'll try to get through this. Volunteers Roberts, Pringle and myself were on patrol that evening. We sighted an unknown vehicle parked at the end of Arrowhead Road. We moved in closer to get a look and saw two people leaving the woods. We decided to intercept.

The trespassers were a man and a woman wearing casual clothing. The woman was carrying a backpack. I could see as soon as we shone a light on them that they didn't look like good Christians. The woman struck me as some sort of Muslim, and the guy, he -

Brother Fredricks: Really, Einar, you need to get out more. Or get a satellite dish on that cabin of yours so you can see what the rest of the world looks like!

Brother Dent: Point of order - I believe I have the floor? Thank you. Well, as I was saying, we approached these two strangers. I had my shotgun out but I carried it with the action open, nonthreatening, you know how we do it.

Well, right away the woman starts giving us lip. Says how this is public land and they had every right to be there if they wanted. Brother Pringle, he says to them, "Ma'am, you don't know how dangerous these woods are at night, it's not safe." The woman shoots back, "I know what's in these woods. I know about the Red Gate." Brother Roberts jumps in, cool like he always is - was - damnit. Excuse me, Mrs. Snyder, Reverend. He says, "There ain't no gate, all that bullcrap about the gate to Hell, it's just an old wives' tale." He...

Captain: You need a minute?

Brother Dent: No, no, I'm sorry. Where was I? Okay. Well, right about then, she starts to call us "servants of the bird," and I start thinking about Reverend Martin's dream. From the night before, how Saint John the Evangelist come to him in the form of an Eagle, warned him to - what were the exact words, Reverend? Some of the boys may not have heard you tell it yet.

Reverend Martin: "Beware, for the Serpent is coming. Do not let the Evil One or his servants near the gate."

Brother Dent: Right. The reverend met with some of us that morning to tell us about it. You know when he has dreams like that, we better listen...So anyways, I'm thinking of this and trying to size up this guy while Roberts talks to the woman. And I notice his hand. His left hand. It's all curled up, the fingers curled, I mean, like into a claw. And that made me think of something my daddy told me - no, no, let me say this, because it could be important. He told me once that when he was a boy, when the Lodge had chapters all through the county, not just this one, they'd recognize each other with secret hand signs. And one of them was to curl your hand into a claw. So I'm thinking about that and I take a closer look at this guy. It was almost like he was holding something I couldn't see...

That was when we heard the screaming in the woods.

You know Eddie and Hank, they're young fellas, I mean...they took off into the woods and somebody had to stay with these two strangers, I mean, maybe if I'd gone with them, Eddie would be...I don't know. I don't know. Excuse me. So, uh, I'm standing there with these strangers and I close up the shotgun, you know, and I tell them they just better stay put until we get this sorted out. And then I hear another scream from the woods, this scream that's not normal, not something any person or animal can make, and then there's gunshots and all. And I think, heck with it, and I start running toward the trees, and shouting for the boys. And...I practically stumble over Hank and he's lying there, and his eyes are open and he's shaking, just shaking. And I...I start waving the flashlight all around, calling out for Eddie, you know, and then I see this...the thing...the thing like a huge owl...and I see Eddie...I see his...I see Eddie's leg.

Just his leg.

I...I'm sorry. I...that's all.

# THE SECOND GATE.

The following document is a retyped version of a manuscript sent to me by a woman I know only as "Helena." It's a piece of automatic writing she produced in her sleep on the night of 09-20. She frequently sends me her writings; as per my agreement with her, I've destroyed the original, handwritten document. JB

I'm in a tunnel. Under a bridge. Wish Theresa would come with me. She says this gate is too unpredictable. Her presence might screw it up. That thing at the last one…don't think about it. It's dark — light from my flashlight is just getting swallowed up. Keep walking, Rob. It will be all right. Halfway through now. No. Can't do it. Turn and run away…

Don't run, coward. The Man in the Coat. Stayed behind then. Coward. Shouldn't even be alive.

The tunnel stinks. Garbage. Water is dripping. Piles of trash backs. Engine parts. Wires. What's that? Just junk. Made me jump. Weird shapes. Keep the light on the ground in front of me.

Exit ahead. Far ahead. Barely there. Feet getting wet.

Keep walking. Get through this thing.

THAT'S REAL PRETTY, MISTER.

My legs won't move.

THAT'S REALLY PRETTY. The voice…soft. A girl's voice. A young girl. THAT THING IN YOUR HAND…SO NICE. CAN I HAVE IT?

Oh God. Behind me. Run. Run now.

I take one step.

MISTER. Closer now. MISTER, DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?

Oh God. Oh God. My feet glued to the ground. Please. Don't come closer.

WHY WON'T YOU TALK TO ME, MISTER?

I raise the flashlight. The light across the side of the tunnel. I see mold spots. Graffiti. Two words visible: "Dead girl."

"P-p-please," I stammer. "Please, I just want to walk through. Please."

YOU CAN'T WALK THROUGH, MISTER. THERE IS NO WAY OUT. The air to my back, ice cold. Like an open meat locker.

I take another step. A half step. "N-no," I stutter. "There's the way out. Right ahead." Another step.

WAIT, WAIT. DON'T GO YET. STAY AND TALK TO ME. And every muscle in my body locks up like rigor mortis. IT'S LONELY HERE. Pain in that voice. Anger.

"I…please. Don't come any closer."

STAY HERE, MISTER. STAY WITH ME. Something brushes the back of my neck. Cold, wet, smooth, like a knife left out in the snow. Oh, no. No, please. STAY AND TELL ME IF THERE ARE STILL STARS IN THE SKY. IS THERE STILL A MOON?

"Wait," I say. "Wait. Let's go look at them. Let's go look at the stars. Right now. Together." I'm able to lift my right leg about an inch off the ground. "I'll show you."

OH NO, NO, NO. THERE'S NO WAY OUT. I CAN'T FIND THE WAY OUT.

"I can see the way out!" It's getting harder to talk. Like I'm forgetting how. "I — the — just follow me. Follow me and we'll…we'll go."

A rustling sound. Something scraping on the ground, the dirt and gravel. TAKE MY HAND, MISTER.

Cold air to my right. I turn my head away. Fix my eyes

on the pale tunnel exit. "All…all right. I —" But the flashlight is in my hand. I drop it.

It's like holding sticks — no, bones — bones made of ice. We walk. Cold travels up my right arm. "What's your name?" I ask her, shivering. Can't feel my right hand anymore.

I DON'T KNOW.

The end of the tunnel seems a mile away. Goddamnit. Why should anybody have to spend eternity under some bridge wondering if the stars are out? "Come on," I say. "We're almost out. Hold on."

I'M SCARED. Her grip loosens. I could let go and run, just run. "Keep going," I tell her. "Close your eyes if you have to. Let me lead you." So cold. "I'm going to call you Alice," I said to her. "Like Alice in Wonderland, okay? Do you know that story? Alice found herself in a strange place, just like you. A place where nothing made sense."

WAS IT COLD THERE?

"I — don't know. Probably some parts of it were. And… I remember she'd run and run and not get anywhere." My lips are numb. Keep talking. "And there was a cat. Do you like cats, Alice?"

I HAD A CAT ONCE.

"That's good." We've been walking for…hours? The tunnel mouth isn't any closer. "Alice," I said to her. "Hold on. We're almost there."

MISTER…WHERE ARE WE?

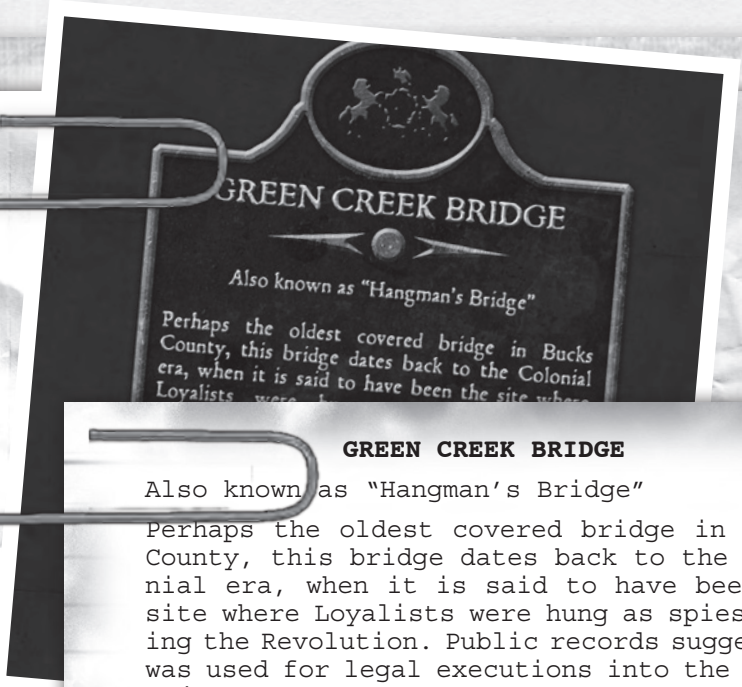
"I don't…" Her hand lets go of mine. And like that, in an instant, the cold is gone. Like it never happened. I'm on a road, under a night sky. We're out.

I spin around. "Alice?" For a second I see — something. A shape running off to the side of the road and away. The weeds and tall grass close around it. Then nothing.

A woman is running toward me. Theresa. Her car is parked farther down the road.

"Rob!" she calls out. "You're there!" She come up to me, grabs my shoulders. "Oh, thank God. You disappeared. I drove through the tunnel and back and through again. And here you are." She puts her hands to my face, my head. "I'm so glad. How do you feel?"

I look out past the road. Is someone standing there, looking at me? Trick of the light. "It's hard to say," I tell her. "Hard to say."




**GREEN CREEK BRIDGE**

Also known as "Hangman's Bridge"

Perhaps the oldest covered bridge in Bucks County, this bridge dates back to the Colonial era, when it is said to have been the site where Loyalists were hung as spies during the Revolution. Public records suggest it was used for legal executions into the early 19th century. In 1849, the bridge was nearly destroyed by fire. Makeshift repairs continued through 1901. In 1972, the newly formed Eastern PA Historic Covered Bridge Association raised funds to renovate the bridge to its original state. Despite its colorful history, today the bridge still contains more than 50% of its original wood.

Topic: Project Updates

—Video tips

—Having Technical Issues

——Re (15): Having Technical Issues

Hey, don't knock unmanned video. I've had some luck placing small weatherproofed camera and sound systems at various sheltered outdoor locations. One of the most interesting and exciting captures happened just a few weeks ago, at a covered bridge in Bucks County. Check the FTP site for the file (it's big). The sound is hard to hear, so below I'll paste in my best interpretation. The interesting thing is that when the man steps closer to the camera, you can almost see a third figure standing a few feet in front of him. Also notice his left hand…it has this weird pixilation to it through the whole clip.

MAN: I think I see something…

WOMAN: What…what is that?

MAN. Oh no. Oh no.

WOMAN: It…it can't be…

MAN: No. Not here. Not him.

WOMAN: Please don't. (She sinks to the ground, crouching, covering her eyes. She seems to be crying, but doesn't speak again until the end of the clip.)

MAN: It's the Man in the Coat, Theresa. How can he be here? Why? He's dead. I saw it. I…

MAN: Waiting for me?

MAN: No, you're not. You're dead. I saw it. That's right. That's right. No, no.

MAN: Shut up. I waited outside the house because…someone had to. We didn't know you were home. I was supposed to watch for you.

MAN: Because it was taking too long. Nobody was answering me. I went in the house and I saw…they were all dead. All the blood. And you… (trails off)

MAN: They hurt you, you bastard! You were lying there quivering, and I…

MAN: Oh, God.

MAN: I had to do something. Your coat, we knew it was…and then I saw. I saw. I saw it. It was skin. Your coat made of skin. Stitched togeth-



er and I bent over and started pulling at the threads. Pulling them apart, the pieces of skin. And they started to bleed. The coat started to bleed. My fingers, the blood on them…oh, God. Stitches of barbed wire. Oh no. And there were faces stitched together and they were crying and my fingers wouldn't work and I…

MAN: I did it, goddamn you! I took it all apart and you crumbled into dust!

(At this point, he's backed his way closer to the camera. You can just make out a vague shape, some kind of distortion, about two feet in front of him.)

MAN: Okay. Do it. What do I care? Do it!

MAN: Do it! Do it! (He starts walking away from the camera, toward the distortion.) I don't care! You want to kill me, too? I'm ready! I'm ready! (Now he practically rushes forward, out of the camera's view. The sound becomes hard to hear. Then we see the man walk back into the frame. He stands next to the woman, helps her up. Then they walk slowly away.)

MAN: What did you see?

WOMAN: Someone who came into my room when I was a girl. But it wasn't really him. It was a (unintelligible)…looks like whatever it was we are most afraid of…end (egg?).

*E: You don't want to talk about these "gates"?*

*R: I can't. I just…can't. Let's say we drove all over. We found them. We ended up with no car, walking, exhausted, not sure what to do next. Finally I asked Theresa, "When we first met…you did something to me, right?"*

*"We needed someone," she said after a minute.*

*I asked, "Why me?"*

*She said, "I can't choose who the spirits will influence. I had no way of knowing who would answer the call. Or if anyone would."*

*So I said, "The sad part is you didn't even need whatever mojo you used. Because I'm a miserable, fucked-up thrill junkie."*

*We seemed to be walking uphill now. But I wasn't about to turn around and go back. Then I told her...*

*E: Maybe we should stop here, Rob.*

*R: No, I want to get this down. I said, "I'd trade this life for something else if I could. But you don't get to do that. Not when you've done what I've done."*

*E: What you've done?*

*R: What I tell her is, "I let them go into a monster's house while I waited outside like a coward. My brother. My wife. Our friends. It was supposed to be empty. But I was too afraid to go in. And now they're all dead. And there's blood on my hands."*

*E: Rob…*

*R: Then I stopped walking. I raised my left hand. It was clenched into a fist. I opened it.*

*E: The egg?*

*R: In my hand was a small oblong stone. No bigger than a chicken egg. Pale and smooth. I took it out of my left hand, held it up to the moonlight.*

*Theresa said, "It's gone completely inert."*

*We walked uphill for a little more, until we couldn't do it anymore. We found a patch of grass off the trail and collapsed. I could hear the birds chirping just before I fell asleep.*

*When I opened my eyes, they were standing there. Three of them. The sky was light but the sun wasn't quite up yet. They were dressed in black suits and jackets. They wore white papier-mâché bird-face masks. Hooked beaks, angry eyes.*

*"Stand," one of them told me. The other two held Theresa between them, gripping her upper arms.*

*"Now," the front guy said, his voice kind of muffled by the mask. "One of you is going to give us the egg. And every time I have to repeat myself," he took something out of his jacket pocket, a kind of garden tool with curved metal tines and pointed ends, "we do a little digging." He waved it in my face.*

*"Wait." For the first time, Theresa's voice sounded just a bit panicked. "Don't. You can have it. We'll give it up. You can have it."*

*"Theresa —" I didn't want them to take it. I don't know why.*

*"Over there, in my jacket. The right-side pocket."*

*The bird-guys didn't say much. In the almost-dawn light, I could see that the stone, the egg, it was blue, robin's-egg blue. One guy held it at arm's length, stared for a good 30 seconds. "It's real. They put it to sleep, like we thought," he said.*

*After that, they just, well, basically they just walked away. Down the hill. No gloating or threats. Like we didn't even matter to them anymore.*

*Theresa slipped into her jacket. "Come on," she said. "We have to get out of here." She grabbed her pack, started to half run up this rocky trail.*

*"Wait," I yelled to her.*

*Then I heard it, a low rumble. Then again, louder, closer.*

*E: Thunder?*

*R: I caught up with her, I said, "If there's a storm coming, we should be going to lower ground, huh?"*

*The trail got steep. We had to bend over to keep scrambling upwards. I heard the thunder again. It wasn't like normal thunder; it repeated — it was almost rhythmic.*

*We were almost at the top. "I thought there might be cover on the other side of the hill," Theresa said. She crouched to the ground, pulled me down. She was digging for something in her bag. "I should have…I didn't think…"*

*A wind was picking up. I said, "Let's head back down. Those freaks are probably long gone by now."*

*She wasn't listening. She took a small jar out of her pack; it rattled as she un-*

*screwed the lid. She poured stuff out of it, onto the ground in wide arcs. I thought they were pebbles at first.*

*"Teeth from the Parker collection, at Temple," she told me. "Stay in the circle. They may protect us…birds don't have teeth…"*

*E: You mean these were human teeth?*

*R: Yeah. And…that was when the shadow fell over us. I thought it was a low-flying airplane. I looked up, saw the wings, the black feathers…*

*Native Americans call it the Thunderbird.*

*It circled us once. Each flap of its wings was deafening. And the wind — I tried to stand, but the wind pushed me off my feet. Theresa was shouting. I had my hands to my ears. She stumbled toward me. She was pulling me, pushing me; the wind was kicking up dirt and gravel — it made my eyes sting. I took a step, fell again. The noise was ripping through my head. I could see Theresa throwing the jar of teeth my way. I looked up and it was just black, this big black shape eclipsing everything…*

*R: And then the loudest sound in the world, mingled with my scream and a white-hot flash that seemed to burn the skin off my body.*



*E: Whoa.*

*Theresa: Yeah. I woke up with every muscle aching and my ears ringing…while I was puking my guts out, I saw the circle of teeth all around me. They'd each turned black. I tried to shout, my voice was hoarse…Rob was nowhere to be seen. I shouted as best I could, but nothing. Nothing.*

*Eventually I found a road…the rest is not that interesting.*

*E: Jesus, Theresa. What do you make of it all?*

*Theresa: Good question.*

*(Silence for about a minute.)*

*E: Well, what about Robin? Have you seen him since? Or his cell, snake-cult, whatever they were?*

*T: No. But you know…I think about that first time I laid eyes on him…walking across the street to see what was going on. He seemed so confident. But in the end, he gave up the egg so quickly. Didn't even try. And it makes me think, what if the whole thing was a feint?*

*E: What?*

*T: A gypsy switch. You know. Birds aren't the only things that hatch from eggs. Anyway…*

*E: Wait, sit down. I have to ask. What was it the snake told you in the vision?*

*T: Here, I'll write it down. I can't say it out loud.*

*E: You said there was something about to happen to you…*

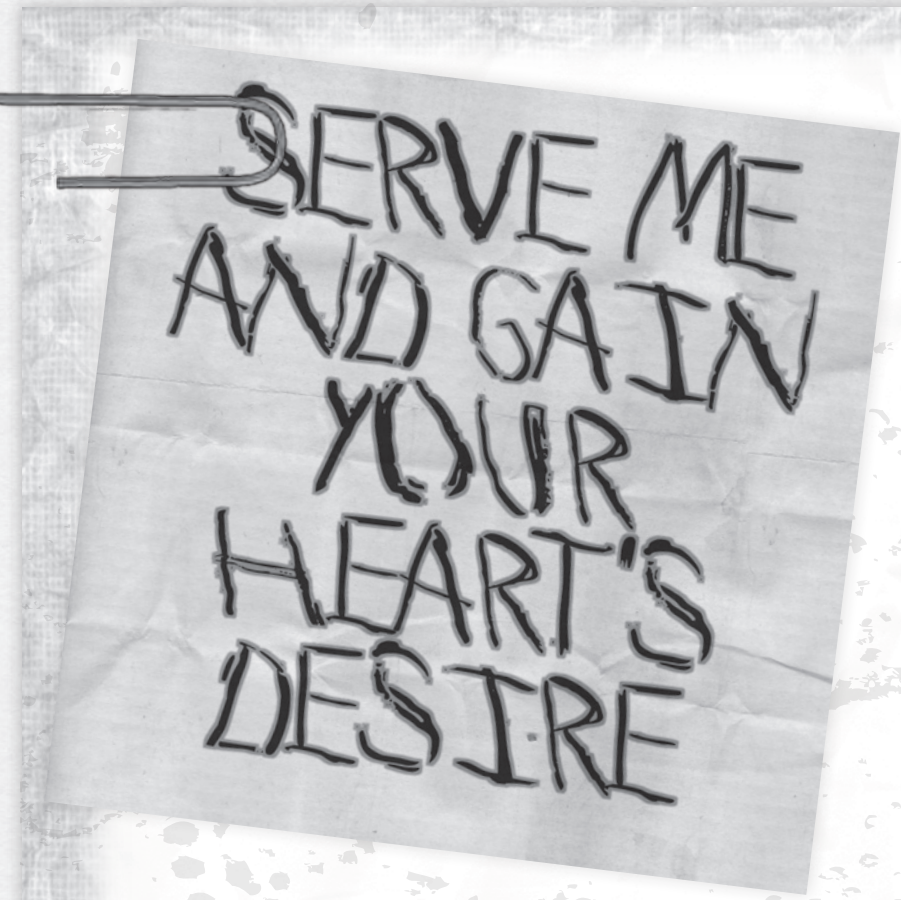
*T: Yeah, I know. Just a feeling I had. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe it already happened. Anyway…I think I should get going. Looks like the rain has stopped. I don't like going out during a storm.*

ADDENDUM 11-1

Okay, I just read this over for the first time since writing it. And I can't for the life of me figure out: who the hell is Robin Garter? I've never heard of him. Theresa Cotton is the piano player I know, always knew, who was in the west-side cell and all that. She's the one I interviewed. So why does the transcript start with this Garter talking to me? Why didn't I notice it when I was typing it? I wish I could go back and listen to the recording, see whose voices are on it. But the recorder was smashed and I never made a backup of the sound file.

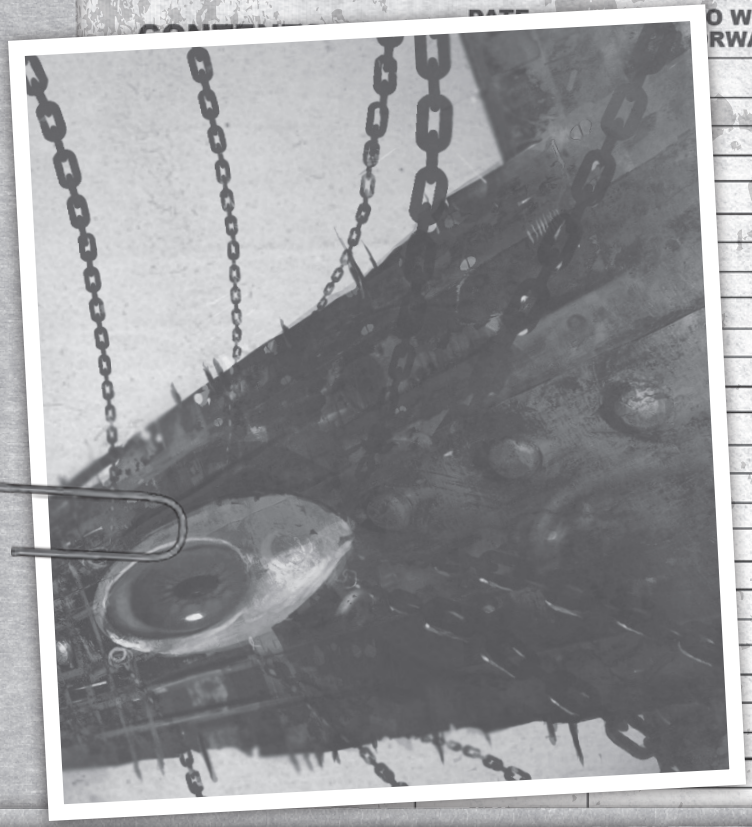
Maybe I really am losing my grip on reality.

I should talk to the doctor about it.


SERVE ME
AND GAIN
YOUR
HEART'S
DESIRE

CASE FILE HRG 00013

# EN PHOTOGRAPHS OF PHILADELPHIA



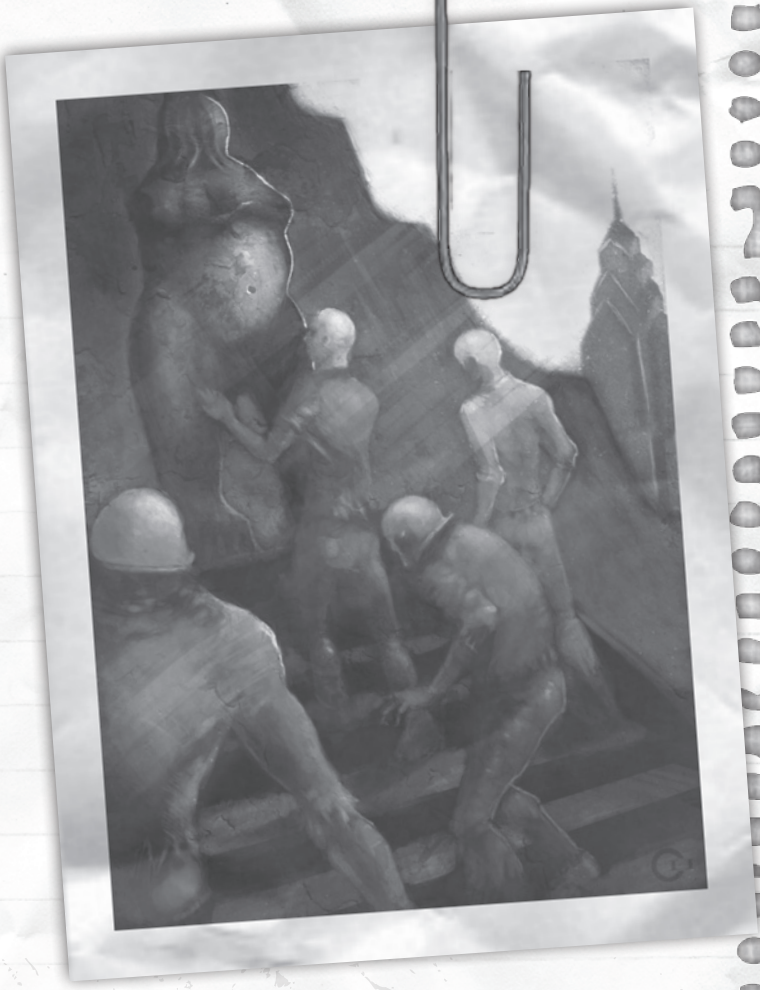
O WHOM
RWARDED

DATE
FORWARDED

REFERENCE
NUMBER

STATUS

One:



The surrounding details of the landscape are familiar enough: it's 6th and Chestnut; the central point of reference is not the Liberty Bell, though, but a narrow, impossibly tall ziggurat of black basalt. Each level, in the scale of the figures standing in front of it, is some 10 feet high and sheer and polished, and each step is a good five feet beneath.

It's bright. Bright like you see in pictures of Arizona, that sharp, burning kind of brightness. The people I mentioned stand at the base of the ziggurat next to a statue in bronze or brass that matches the height of the first two levels, depicting some appallingly graphic hermaphrodite fertility god-goddess, a hideous priapic earth-mother. Its face is hidden by a covering of lank hair. The people themselves: they're unnaturally thin, and wear ragged clothes. You can't see their faces, but from the backs of their hairless heads, something is very wrong with them — as far as you can tell, they're really small, and their heads are covered with scabs, or scales, or maybe even extra eyes.

The stones of the ziggurat, although black, have a highly polished, reflective surface. On one corner of the pyramid's bottom layer, you can see something at the side of the photo, partially reflected in it, something with many wings and many legs, something huge.

**DOUG:** So I killed a vampire.

It's hard to explain how I managed it. He — *it* — had noticed me watching. I'd seen it drink from a girl two nights before and weighed in and drove it off with a baseball bat. And all I got was a slap from the girl.

Anyway, so Thursday last, I was out and it came looking for me. Wanted to salvage its pride, I think. Because it's not good for a leech's pride to get scared off by one schmuck with a baseball bat. I don't know what happened. He jumped me in the street. On my way home from the late shift and suddenly he's got me by the collar and dragging me into a back alley. I thought, *shit, this is it*, but somehow, while I was struggling, I tripped him and went running down the alley blindly, and just lying there was the metal part of a stacking chair and I picked it up and when he came for me, he came so fast that he ended up impaled on a chair leg, and while he was thrashing around, I picked up a brick and beat his brains out with it. Again and again. And suddenly I was beating on this 1980s business suit full of greasy ash.

So I took a breath and sat down in the alley. And then I thought, he's probably not needing anything. So I went through his pockets. A couple thousand bucks — Janice, I put it in the general fund, just so you know — and a switchblade — kept that — and this envelope. Full of photos. Ten of them.

But the weirdest photos I have ever seen.

*Two:*

*This is Fishtown, Greater Kensington. East Berks Street, in fact. I know it really well. But not like this. My dad still lives there. You can see the sign. Under a pale, bright sky and a blazing sun whose rays appear to reach down and scorch the earth and everything in it. The buildings are the same, but they are scorched and bleached; the trees on the avenue are white, skeletal.*

*A small crowd of people walk down the road toward the viewer. They wear ordinary clothes, but the clothes are ragged and faded, hang in a slightly off fashion, and in places have stains from viscous fluids that are so thick, so noxious, you can almost smell them: vomit, or sewage, or some other thing even more revolting. None of them have shoes. Their faces, like their feet, are covered with sores and sunburn that surround milky-white eyes, under hair scorched white and thin. Their hands, balled into fists, barely have any flesh at all, and what there is is red raw. One of them is speaking to the viewer. Or maybe screaming.*



**DOUG:** I haven't brought them. I thought — I don't know. I thought they might be fakes to start with. I mean, they were so weird, and kind of revolting, that they were the type of thing vampires do for fun. They didn't look like they were from a digital. I mean, I know a bit about photography. Not in any professional way. But enough to think they were, at the very least, really amazing fakes. And really sick fakes.

I think I spent hours just looking at them, one after the other. Each one shows part of Philly, but it's wrong, like there's something in the place of a building, or a street, or a landmark each time. Something huge. And there's often the implication that something terrible, something hideous, is hiding just out of sight.

Not that there aren't hideous things in plain view.

**[illegible]UCF**
**TO: HH**
**RE: PACKET / PROGRESS UPDATE**

Surveillance of Potential Asset David Kitchen did bear fruit, as expected. However, the operation has faced a minor setback. Although we had become sure that we successfully unsettled Kitchen to the

extent that he desired to keep the packet on his person, he appears to have been neutralized by another source shortly before our own extraction was intended to come to fruition.

On 04/11/07, Kitchen was thwarted in his desire for sustenance by a civilian wielding a baseball bat. On 04/13/07, having by apparent coincidence noticed the same civilian on the street, unarmed, Kitchen appears to have decided to take revenge. Our last contact with Kitchen was shortly before Kitchen seized said civilian and dragged him into a back alley. Having expected to wait outside for Kitchen to emerge, so that we could continue with the extraction, I was surprised to see the civilian leave the alley. When the alley was surveyed, we found that Kitchen had been destroyed, and also that the packet was now missing.

We failed to apprehend the civilian, but have several clear photographs, and I am confident that we will have an ID shortly.

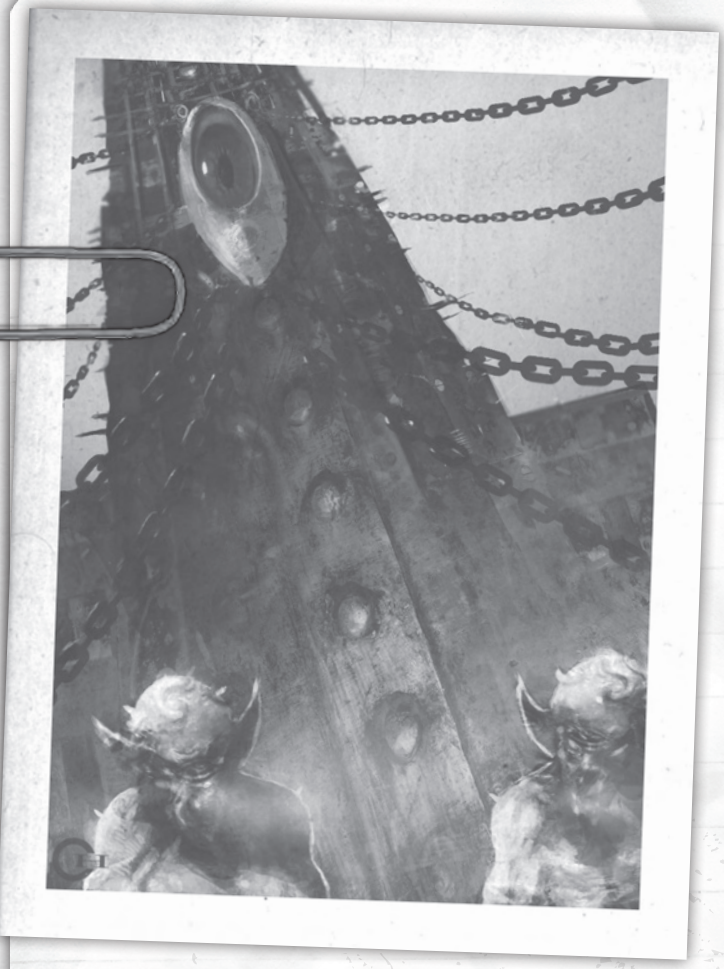
**04/14/07**
**FROM: HH**
**TO: JLF**
**RE: YOUR LATEST SCREW-UP**

Am disappointed at your lack of initiative. Please report back to local FPD HQ; management has something more suited to your level of ability.

**04/14/07**
**FROM: HH**
**TO: GTM**
**RE: PRACTICAL GUIDANCE**

When you have gained an ID on the civilian, ascertain as soon as you can whether he has the packet and whether he has examined them. If the second answer is affirmative, please do not hesitate to eliminate him.

Under no circumstances whatsoever must you look at the contents of the packet yourself.



Three:

I know we're next to City Hall now, except City Hall isn't there. The angle is wrong, which can only mean that most of the things opposite City Hall aren't there, either. The thing in its place, partially visible and presumably much higher, is ornate, this great skeletal contraption of stone and glass and green-patina metal. Gouts of steam or smoke belch from a row of sculpted gargoyle-mouths. And beneath the gargoyle chimneys, you can see maybe half or two thirds of what must be the central point of the whole structure: a vast metal ring suspended by an arrangement of arms and wheels, around the rim of which a thing that resembles nothing more than a single enormous eye, ringed with rough black hair, wraps 50 or more spidery arms or tentacles.

It is looking at the camera.

**DOUG:** The stuff in the pictures weighed me down a bit. I mean, it couldn't be real. Except I couldn't figure out how they had done it. I mean, you can do a lot with CGI these days, but it only looks like something other than computer graphics when you have millions and millions of bucks to put into a studio. And then only about 10% of the time.

I don't know. I'm going to do a bit of reading, and look it up. I'll keep you guys posted.

Thanks for listening.

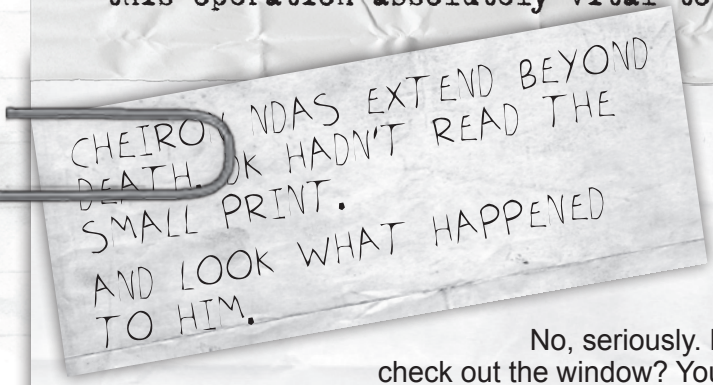
Four:

*This is Fairmount, I think. Or somewhere in the vicinity of Fairmount. It's broad daylight. The windows of the block in the background are covered with ornate shutters made of that same green-patina brass. In a couple of the windows, you can just make out something black and thick and liquid leaking out around the edges of the shutters.*

*The main subject of the picture is this black stone obelisk, where a street sign would be. It rises beyond the top of the photograph, but you can see, just at the top, something poking down, like a black, ragged pennon, or a rope, or the edge of a wing, and most disturbingly, two human feet, disordered in posture, blurred as if moving, just about to vanish out of the top of the shot.*



The importance and delicacy of this operation cannot be exaggerated; the retrieval of the packet without any further leaks of its contents and without the implication of the Company absolutely must be accomplished. The Board of Directors consider this operation absolutely vital to the Company.




DOUG: Here's something interesting.

I'm being watched.

[indistinct voice]

No, seriously. Bryan, could you check out the window? You know, without it looking like it's obvious? Down on the other side of the street. Yeah. That's them.

[pause]

Thanks. Yeah. I know. Black BMW, guys in suits and ties and sunglasses. I mean, couldn't they have, you know, tried?

So these jokers have been following me around since the last time we met. All day, some identikit guy in shades and suit.

[indistinct voice]

No, I don't think it's the FBI. Even they're not that obvious.

[indistinct voice]

See, I think they know they're obvious. They're not actually watching me. I mean, they probably are, but they're doing it subtly. These guys are doing this in order to intimidate me.

I actually went to walk up to them and say hi yesterday.

[indistinct voice]

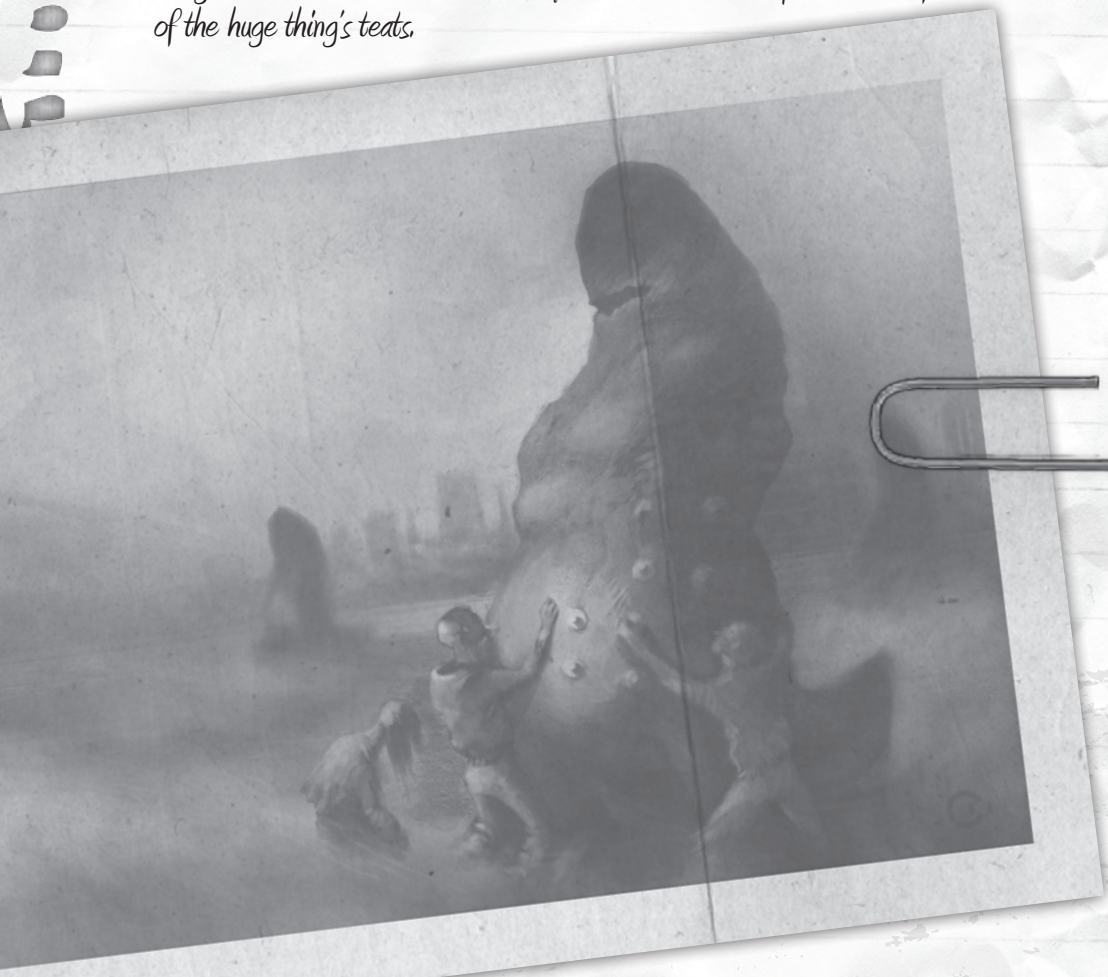
They drove off before I could get close to the car.

[indistinct voice]

That's the big question. No idea why they're doing this, or what it's about. I'm thinking I might need someone to run interference. We'll talk about it afterwards.

Five:

Daylight again. A sign in the foreground reveals this to be 62nd and Wood-something – 62nd and Woodbine, perhaps? If it is, you can't see any of the buildings from the north side. It's this empty, rocky waste. But filling a large part of it are these three things. Two of them are in the background; the third is in the foreground, and you can only see its front parts. It's this mound of wrinkled, naked pink flesh, presumably the shape of a particularly fat sausage; its front end tapers to some kind of more wrinkled, trunklike arrangement, ending in a toothless, sucking mouth. It has these short caterpillar legs and just above them, arranged in a kind of skirt, teats of some kind, which leak a pale liquid. Three people, two men and a woman, in those same ordinary but ragged street clothes, can be seen kneeling on the ground at the creature's side. They stretch their necks up and suckle from some of the huge thing's teats.



Interstitial or alternative terrain is a common but little understood or credited element of the urban experience. But it is a simple fact that there is more to the places we have built than we think.

Interstitial terrain is just that: terrain that exists in the cracks between landmarks. We fool ourselves that distance is concrete, but this is by no means so. It only takes a certain series of circumstances to create the conditions for the reappearance of one of the city's great "gap places." The city where this is most apparent is, of course, London, but even the Americans have cities where streets stretch and change, shuffle around or simply alter themselves, if only to allow shops, churches and other places to come back into place.

A corollary of this is the actual replacement of landmarks by the terrain in question: it takes on the role of the city's conscience. New buildings are replaced by old and inhabitants vanish, to be replaced by people who may not have seen the light of day, even for centuries. In short, a wrong turn in an alley or an avenue can, if the city so wishes, lead one to a place that *is* your destination, but which bears little or no resemblance to the terrain you know.

It has been suggested that these phenomena are the result of a city's dreams, that the city is alive and, in its own way, sentient. It thinks and feels, slumbers and dreams, and because its dreams are the distilled dreams of thousands of people. Or perhaps, it's their nightmares.



*Six:*

*The Nine Penn Center stands alongside its smaller neighbors, quite a long way away. It is separated from us by a wide, rocky chasm, which, despite the bright sunshine, seems filled with darkness. Something reaches out of the chasm, something ragged and many-fingered, and many times larger than the small, blurred figure running away from the edge of the rift.*

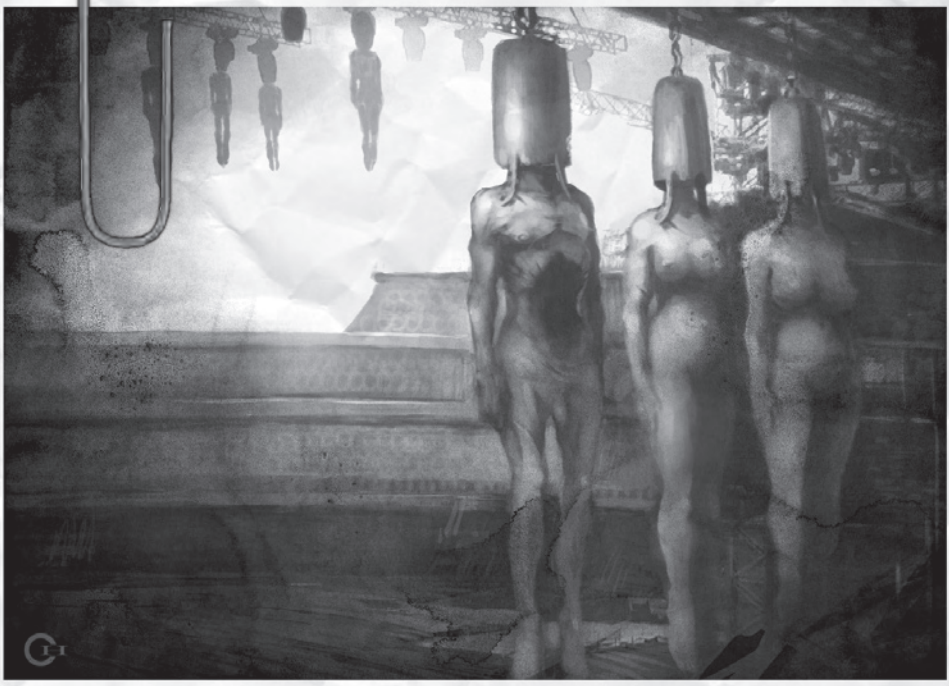
DOUG: Yesterday, I was walking home from work. I stopped about halfway, because there was this alley in a place where no alley had ever been. I stopped and peered down it. And then these men came. Two of them, two men in threadbare, ragged suits, with white marbles for eyes and scabs covering their faces. And the big one tried to grab me, presumably because he was aiming to drag me down this alley I had never been down.

I stamped on his toe and ran. The man didn't go too far beyond the alley, and then I think he retreated. I looked away, and then looked back, and saw that the alley was gone. And both men with it.

*Seven:*

*It's JFK Stadium. Still standing, I mean, it's been gone for, what, 15 years, but I'd know it anywhere. The viewpoint is from inside. In front of us are three naked human bodies, all next to each other, a skinny young man and two young women, a thin one and a slightly shorter and plumper one, all covered in scars and cuts. They hang limp, feet some way above the ground, their only means of support and restraint the riveted brass cylinders that completely encase their heads. Each cylinder has a green light on one side of it, and hangs from something I can't see, on a chain, with an electric wire threaded through it, like you'd see on an old light fitting.*

*And they're not alone. They're the only ones you see clearly, but it's apparent that they hang in front of rows and rows of people just like them, hundreds, maybe thousands, filling the ground of an auditorium that doesn't exist anymore.*



The importance of anonymity for the Board of Directors is paramount, for without true anonymity, we will never be able to bring the Primary Development Plan to fruition. The integrity of the Group's most central operations in the US is suspect if evidence leaks.

DOUG: It wouldn't have been enough on its own for years, but suddenly someone remembered Marcie. Do you remember Marcie? Yeah. Some of you will. No one has seen Marcie for years.

See, I was looking at these pictures, and this is Marcie. Right here. On the left. What did she know? And more importantly, what happened to her that they should do this to her?

*Eight:*

*A vast field. Rows and rows of metal pillars on which are bolted armless, legless naked human torsos, male and female, always perfect in form, their abdomens flush with the base and their arms capped off cleanly at the shoulders, their genitalia clearly visible and, in the case of the men, erect. They stare ahead, open-mouthed,*

*bald-headed, their eyes wide, round, all white like pale polished marbles. Behind a man three rows away, a figure lurks, hairy and indistinct. In the background, in the distance, Franklin Mills Mall stands, the only building visible under the pale, hot sky.*



DOUG: I woke up this morning and looked out of the window, and saw the towers and skyscrapers from my apartment window. And you know what? I closed my eyes. I closed my eyes and saw, for a second, a huge spiderlike creature whose body was almost entirely made of a single eye. I opened them, and it was still there. I turned away and looked again, and it was still there. Looking straight at me.

And I went into my kitchen and ate breakfast, and then went to the window again. The spider-thing had gone.

I think I'm going mad.

Dear Mom,

i don't know where i am anymore. i've written this on the only piece of paper i can find.

This is a terrible place, Mom. They slice out people's minds with knives and put in new ones. They make you worship. . .<u>things</u>. They make you do things. if you don't suckle from the Flesh-Cows or allow the Little Children of the Eye to feed on you for a while, they send you to the Knife-racks, or they make you a Herm and leave you to stand up in a field forever, blind and lost and empty.

i'm scared, Mom. i wish i had never come to Philadelphia. i wish i had never come here. Please, Mom. i don't like it here. i want to come home.

Marcie



Nine:

*This looks for all the world like some kind of holiday snapshot. A pair of retro, stereotype tourists: hats, sunglasses, him in the Hawaiian shirt, her in the fussy blouse and the spangly rims. They're standing and smiling in front of Independence Hall. Except that the hall is made of brass and what looks like strings and webs of flesh.*

**SUSAN:** Has anyone heard from Doug recently?

I got a phone call from him a couple nights ago. Apparently, the men in the BMW were still watching him, but he felt he was being pursued. Another group of men had tried to find him. They worried him more than the others. Anyway, Doug stopped answering his calls.

I think we should try to find him. Just, you know, for our peace of mind.

*Ten:*

*The Turnpike. Broad daylight again. Two automobiles sit abandoned on the side of the road in the foreground, and some of them have something inside them that looks like it might be a plant of some kind, or an animal. The highway is blocked some distance away by a massive wall of polished black stone, which extends to either side of the photograph. Some kind of writing is etched or built into the wall, which has, at one side of the picture, an enormous crack, growing into a wide, inverted triangular gap higher up. Scale is made apparent by a tiny figure — a woman — standing at the foot of the crack, looking up at the gap. Around the edges of the gap, huge fingers made of twisted grey-green tatters curl from outside. They must belong to something indescribably vast.*



04/14/07
FROM: GTM
TO: HH
RE: O'NEILL DOUGLAS

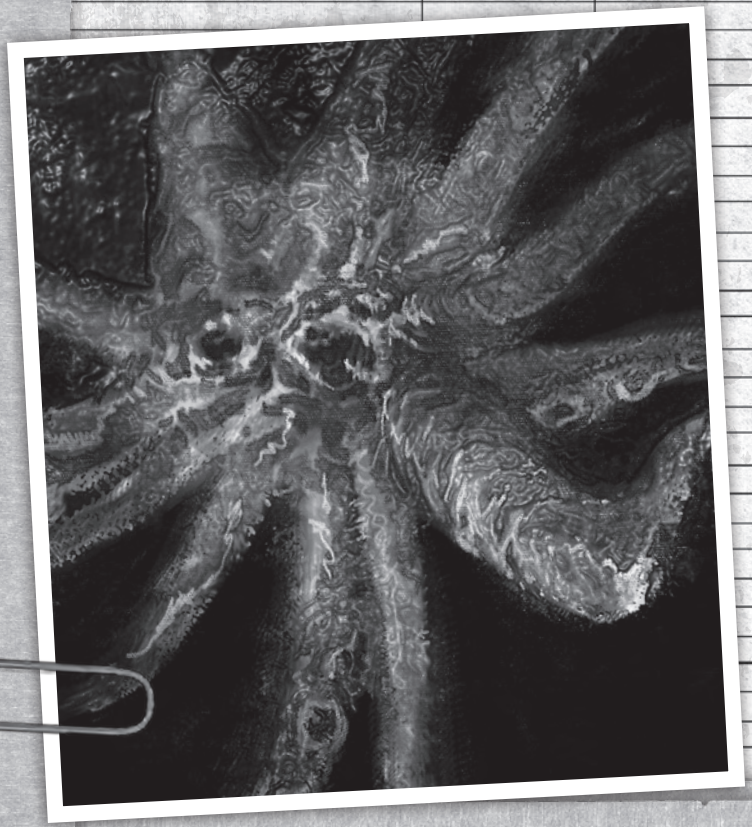
O'Neill evaded our counterparts for two days, but on the third occasion, he took a wrong turn and walked straight down a different street from the usual. Problem solved.

We still, unfortunately, don't have the packet. It appears to have disappeared with O'Neill. I recommend employing expendables to investigate its fate, but no more than that, since I am almost certain the packet will never be seen again.

CASE FILE HRG 00014

# THE THING FROM THE DEEP

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



TESS,

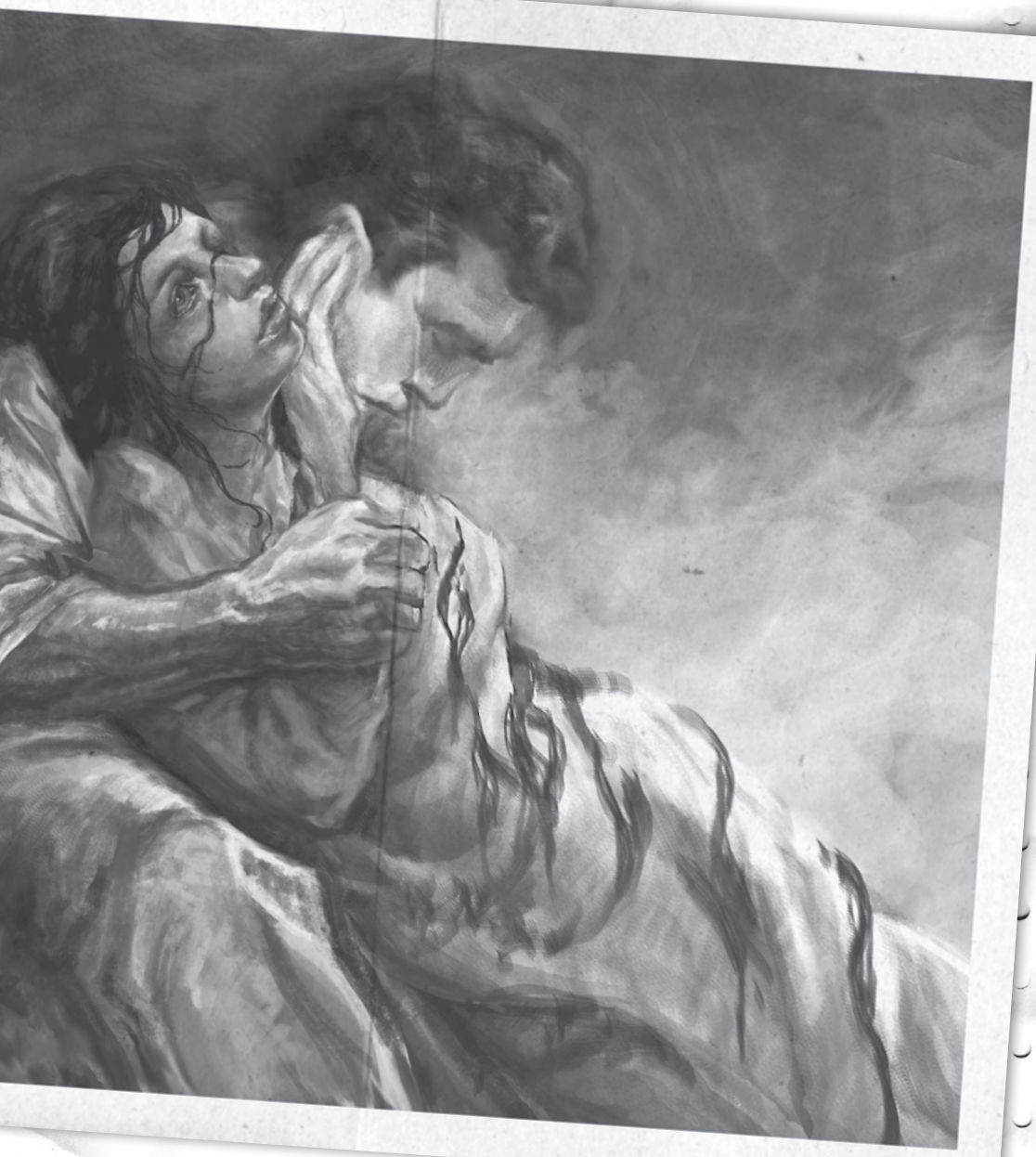
I RECOVERED THIS ONE AS WELL. AFTER LOOKING INTO IT A BIT, SOME OF THIS SHIT CHECKS OUT. RAFFERTY WAS ONTO SOMETHING HERE. I MIGHT HAVE SOME LEADS ON ONE OR TWO OF THE PEOPLE HE MENTIONS TOWARD THE END.

— IAN



The first thing that hits me is the odor — that damp, salty, organic festering that smells like something amphibious got split open and left to float in the surf at low tide. It's the kind of stench that'd nauseate anyone who doesn't work with rotting flesh or bodily waste for a living. It's the smell that's left lingering in the wake of the creature's passing. Or that's what she tells me, anyway, as she's bleeding out. Most of the lacerations aren't deep. No, it's the savage tear in her inner thigh — from what I can only imagine to be fanged suckers, like a squid's, severing her femoral artery — that's killing her.

And I can't do anything other than listen to her as her eyes turn glassy and her voice starts to fade. The slime is all over her: this glistening, phlegmy mass the consistency of raw egg whites, mostly a translucent light green-brown, streaked with veins of fish-belly yellow. It's all over her and it's clinging to nearly every inch of my hands and arms, not to mention patches of my jeans, my shirt and my jacket. It's up in the treads of my boots like a runny pile of Hell's own dog shit. I've scraped it off her face as best I can, out of the shallow cuts on her cheeks, out of her nostrils and off her eyelids. She can't be older than 20. She's thanking me for scaring it off — I'm not sure I did any such thing, but it's important enough to her to warrant wasting one of her last few breaths. She's holding my hand, though not for much longer. She reaches up, her entire arm shivering with the effort, caresses my cheek and says to me, "It'll be all right."



And, like that,
she's gone.

*It'll be all right.*

What a fucked-up thing to say at a time like this.

●●●●●

The crew's been apprised of the situation, but everyone else is on a stakeout that just can't wait; something to

do with an invisible marketplace or something like that. I didn't get all the details. I had to leave the meeting early, since I promised Luke I'd be in for 10, so that he could get up at 5:00 AM and drive out to see his grandma in Chicago. Still, shit happens, and I just can't wait, either. I can't run the risk that this…whatever the fuck it is…will try to rip into someone else along the banks of the Delaware River. I can still smell that stink, lodged up inside my nostrils like a particularly tenacious infection. Every so often, I swallow down the urge to gag, though I'm forced to admit to myself that I might just be remembering that reek, because I couldn't do anything to save her; that the rotting smell will haunt me until I see this thing through to the end.

Truthfully, I have no idea what I'm going to do if I run across this monster. I've got a handgun and a hatchet, a small hunting knife, a few road flares, and a couple of small glass bottles tucked into the pockets of my waistcoat — alcohol and bleach. (Don't ask. They just seemed like good choices from under my kitchen sink.) I'm uncomfortable as fuck-all and anybody who cares to give me more than the most cursory of glances will realize I'm strapped with some manner of murderous implements. I've done my best to hide the tools of the trade, but I'm half figuring I'll spend tonight, and maybe the next 15 to 20 years, in lockup. I can just see it now: "You don't understand, officer: I'm hunting some kind of squid monster. No, I haven't seen it. No, I can't describe it. But it *did* kill that girl who was in Wednesday's paper. Alisha, I think her name was. You know the one — that mysterious death by the river. I was the last person she talked to. She told me it would be all right. So, you see, I *can't* be crazy."

What a fucking mess. I just hope I don't get noticed by… well, pretty much anyone.

**To**: bry@phillyunderground.org

**Fr:** raff1954@papilotlessons.com

**Subject:** [None]

---

Bryan,

What's up, kid? Your mom misses you. So do I. It's been a while. I've heard the journalism thing didn't pan out for you. Don't get discouraged, though. You have to try a bunch of different things before you figure out where you're going in life. I thought I was going to be at that office forever, back before I got my pilot's license.

Anyhow, give me a call. I'm sure you've still got my number. I can hook you up with a desk job at the pilot school, just so you can put some money away. It beats night shift at the gas station.

Uncle Ted

●●●●●

Total bust. Zilch. Probably for the best, though. I spent most of my time ducking in and out of the shadows, trying not to attract any attention and, of course, failing miserably. (Because, really, how inconspicuous is a guy in a lumpy waistcoat, doing his damnedest to track down something he's never laid eyes on and simultaneously attempting not to be seen?) Fortunately, the fog was thick along the river's edge and the few people who noticed me probably just wrote me off as some weirdo to avoid. I suppose it'll all contribute to the eventual insanity plea I'll need to use to get out of serving a life sentence when this lifestyle — such as it is — finally catches up to me and I'm left holding a bloody machete, standing over something that was *definitely* a monster corpse 15 seconds ago, right before the cops arrived.

I didn't even catch wind of the smell tonight. Other "exciting" waterfront odors, to be sure, but not *that* one. I don't know if the creature went back into the river (which, I can only assume, has to be where it came from), or if it's somewhere deeper inland now, but I don't have any leads other than the Delaware, so it's the only shot I've got at finding out anything more. Maybe it's just hiding in one of the dilapidated buildings that I couldn't get into, nesting in a moist patch of shadow and planning its next kill. It could've been staring down at me from behind one of those smog-smeared windows, wondering who the crazy jerk-off in the bulky coat was.

A few of those spots on my hands that got well and truly soaked with that rancid hell-snot are all red and painful. I don't know if it's an allergic reaction or what. Fuck, for all I know, I could be slowly dying from just touching the shit. Wouldn't that be a bitch. Par for the fucking course in this line of work, though. Reminds me of a story from a year or so before my time. I had to get it piece by piece from some of the other wackos who do this for a living. Turns out this guy got exposed to something — a spore, was the general consensus, or something like it, anyway — and, when he finally ate a bullet, he didn't even look human anymore; just a craggy mass of hard, fibrous lumps that sort of moved like a person, with the occasional patch of scabby skin, or a tuft of hair, or a ragged, gangrenous finger. It was that last he used to pull the trigger of the shotgun he'd stuffed into the maw that used to be his face. Used a solid slug, Ernie told me — the sort that normally gets used for blowing the locks off vault doors.

It's not just a job. It's a fucking adventure.

Sleep'll come quick tonight. It's been a long day. I'm already drifting off, and I'm running ideas through my head about how to broaden my search tomorrow. My mind wanders through the trash-strewn blind alleys and among the old piers. It splashes in the muck right at the water's

edge, doing its best not to step on used syringes, the occasional dead wharf rat and other festering garbage. It retraces my steps and then strays into places I didn't get around to checking today.

●●●●●

He says his name's Eddie. Honestly, I don't care if he's the last of the Romanovs; he's got a lead for me. I don't know if it's real or just the product of his obvious schizophrenia, but it's more than I had an hour ago. He promises not to buy booze or drugs with the $20 I slipped him, but I know he's lying. Got to just deal with the lesser evil and make amends later, preferably by killing the shit out of the thing that crawled out of the river. Eddie tells me he was rolling his shopping cart along near the waterfront when he saw something break the surface and slither its way up a drainage ditch. He says it looked like a bunch of big snakes all knotted together, or something like that, but it was right around dawn and he doesn't see so well these days (or so he informs me).

It's not much to go on, but "not much" beats "nothing at all" pretty much any day of the week. At the very least, I don't feel *as* completely useless as I did an hour ago. A bit of digging around the area turns up the faintest whiff of that God-awful stench, though the goo seems to have dried up into a paper-thin layer of a fine, grainy powder. I bag up a bit of it, just in case, and trudge my way along the ditch, which leads — naturally — up into the sewers. Just my fucking luck. How the thing slithered through the grating without bending or breaking any part of it, I have no idea, but it *did* score some of the metal with what looks like claw-marks or some shit like that. Maybe it's like a

not much time now. can't say goodbye to becca and kids. wouldn't even know me. last human pieces falling off. found ear on couch today. tried to eat. threw up. think stomach came up with food. don't know how much longer i have my fingers. need them. got to finish it soon. can barely hold shotgun. have to manage. can't live like this. won't hurt. nothing hurts now. no feeling. one mirror left. need it to aim. no feeling. eye almost swollen over. please break mirror when you find this. burn body. don't breathe smoke. pray for me. goodbye.

rat, squeezing into any space that its head (torso, ass; whatever it is that tentacle-monsters have in the way of anatomy) can fit through. Fascinating though that theory might be, it doesn't get me through the rather solid lock keeping me on the opposite side of the grate from the creature I'm tracking. While I may have come prepared for a bunch of different possibilities, slicing through a half-inch-thick padlock wasn't one of them.

Honestly, thinking about it, I probably *should* start carrying a pair of bolt-cutters or some such. I do enough breaking and entering to justify it, these days. Of course, now that I look, it seems like the welts on my hands are fading, so I guess things aren't all bad.

•••••

Weird.

So, I'm staking out the area where I think the thing has migrated, and I get waylaid by a couple of folks I've never seen before. Well, maybe "waylaid" isn't the best word, but they do kind of show up from out of left field: a woman and a man. She's maybe 30-35, athletic and stern faced, while he's younger — probably a few years older than me, tops — and a bit…soft. He looks like he hasn't been at the job for very long; it hasn't really started slicing the baby fat off him quite yet. She's dressed nicely, but practically, with calluses on her long-fingered hands. Clearly, she's the sort of person who knows the work and has grown comfortable with it. He's got an expensive jacket on and doesn't look



WHO IS THE LUCIFUGE?

like he's gotten accustomed to how gross, ugly or otherwise straight-up wrong this life can be.

"These powers are beyond you," she says to me. First fucking words out of her mouth. No "How're things?" No "My name's So-and-So. Nice to meet you." None of that — just some shit about "meddling with forces beyond your ken." Clearly, this bitch hasn't done any research into ways not to immediately get on my bad side. My reply to her is perhaps the slightest bit impolitic: "Fuck off." The image of that dying girl hasn't faded from my mind's eye and it's making me touchy. I know it, but I'm more pissed off than anything about this…interloper…who just rolls up on me and decides to tell me what's what.

She takes my answer in stride and just keeps coming, with something along the lines of, "What you're dealing with is a thing not of this world. Bullets can't kill it and mortal minds can't reason with it. You're brave to want to stop the creature, but surely you must realize that you don't have a prayer of actually doing so?"

We go back and forth for a little while on this subject, while the guy just looks on. Occasionally, he gives a half-nervous glance around the area, like he's expecting the bogeyman to come jumping out of the shadows or, maybe, for their backup to get the drop on me. Either's a possibility, but I can't abandon the hunt, so I keep the woman talking in the hopes that she'll spill something useful. Naturally, she plays everything pretty close to the vest, except to tell me that anything I can do is "totally inadequate" and "too mundane" to be effective. She hints at having all kinds of amazing powers that can solve this problem, but I just have to let this go and, more or less, leave it to the grown-ups. I raise my voice. The guy gets in my face and starts in with a line about how thankful I should be that the two of them are there as "the thin red line in the darkness," or some shit like that. Clearly, someone's been watching too many movies. The woman puts a hand on my arm when I grab the guy by the collar of his too-nice leather coat and I unclench the fist I was going to plant across the bridge of his nose. She snaps something at the guy — Latin, maybe? — and he steps away, looking appropriately chastised, as I release my grip.

She pleads with me to just walk away, but I can't and I tell her so. I tell her about the girl and she nods at the end of it.

"I understand your desire for revenge; believe me, I do," she says to me. "But I cannot, in good conscience, allow you to continue on. Please, turn back now."

I tell her what she can do with that request.

"As you wish," she sniffs. "You have been warned." Apparently, she's not much for cramming stupid, meddlesome ideas up her tight ass.

Fuck that noise. This isn't their fight, no matter what they think.

●●●●●

The creature's killed again, I think. And if this *is* the work of the monster, then I have an awful fucking feeling that I know what's driving it. The rest of the crew thinks I've gone a little bit overboard on this one, but they're poking into different avenues of investigation. It was M. who turned up something at a local animal rescue, though: stray mutt, torn up something fierce, with a couple of shreds of something unidentified in her teeth. She didn't live long after arriving, but they picked the shit out of her mouth (which was all cut up) and thought that maybe they could see some scaly patches and that the rest of it was squishy white flesh that looked kind of like raw lobster meat. The dog's flanks were ripped to hell and back and she'd been…well…violated. Necropsy said she was in heat.

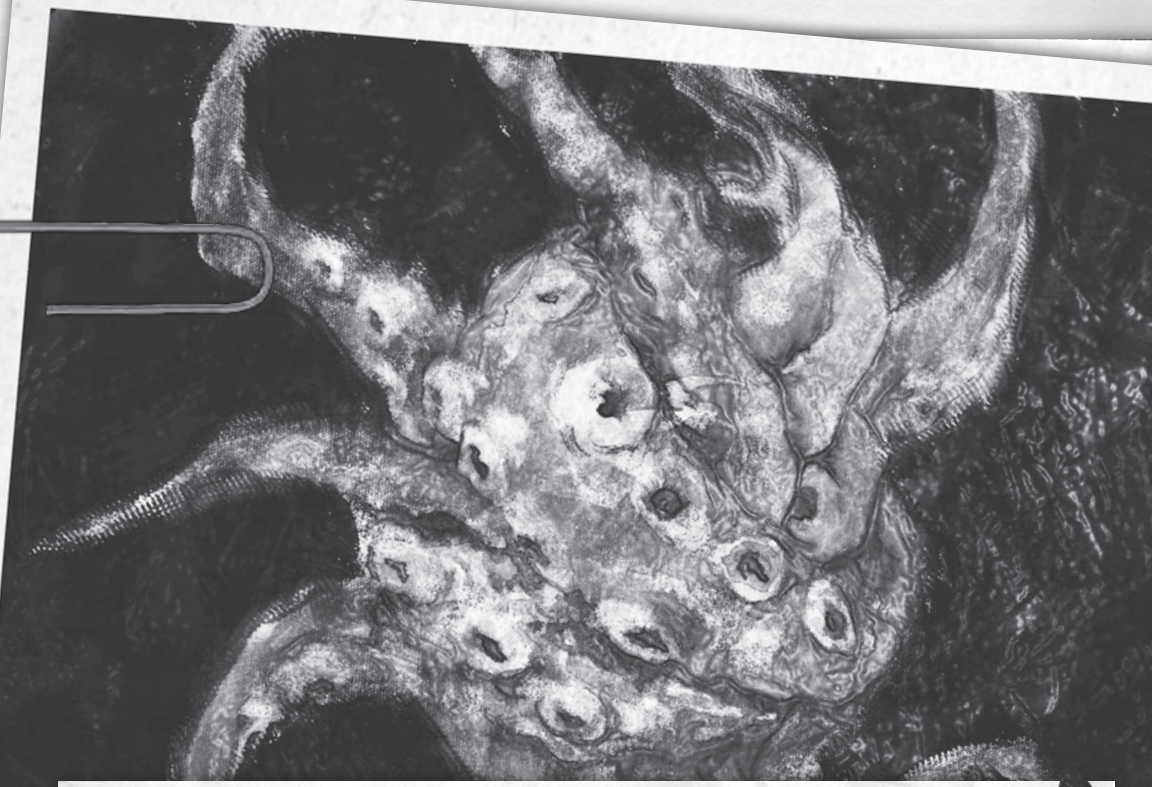
So, as to what the thing wants: do the math.

The woman told me that bullets can't kill it. I don't know where she got that tidbit from, but I'm willing to at least accept that she *might* be both correct and telling the truth. That means I need alternate armaments for this thing. I've been thinking about holy water but, to tell you the truth, I've never seen it work on *anything*. Not once. Still, I suppose there's no harm in carrying a vial of the stuff. Silver. Wolfsbane. Wooden stakes. A mirror. Incense. Rosary beads. Some old copper pennies. Eye of newt. Honestly, I'm going to be packing a grab bag and hoping for the best.

But that doesn't mean I'm going to stop carrying my gun. After all, she might just be bullshitting me, or maybe just plain wrong, and I'd much rather have the gun and find out firsthand that it's useless than be thinking to myself as its beak (or whatever) starts gnawing my face off, "You know what would've been great, right about now? A pistol." Call me old fashioned, but there's something to be said for the soothing presence of a firearm in insane situations. It makes you feel like you're at least participating in your own fate when you can squeeze off a few rounds at whatever's trying to kill you and, if everything goes *completely* to shit, you can always put the barrel up under your chin and pull the trigger before it — whatever *it* is — starts eating you alive.

●●●●●

I figure if this thing is some sort of "elder evil from the deep," like that woman made it out to be, I should dig around and see if there's any precedent for something like it in any old periodicals or anything like that. Turned up something in an old curio shop down by the river. The place has old knickknacks in it, stuff from as far back as the Revolutionary War and maybe even before, in some cases. A lot of it's



LENNI-LENAPE ARTIFACT (?), CIRCA 1800 (?) "WATER DEMON" FROM THE DELAWARE RIVER. OTHER REFERENCES - NEWSPAPERS OR ALMANACS? CHECK WITH JUSTIN S.

pretty ordinary (if expensive as hell). One thing, though, stands out. It's a piece of scrimshaw, roughly spherical, maybe a little bit bigger around than a ping-pong ball, run through with several extremely fine cracks, but still in one piece. It's a knotted ball of tendrils, the undersides of which (which are exposed in a few places) are carved with rough hatch-marks, suggestive of teeth, scales, or some other irregularity.

The guy who owns the shop mentions that it was made by a Lenni-Lenape man about 200 years ago. (I'm not sure if the story is true, mind you; hell, I'm not sure that the natives around here ever even *made* scrimshaw, but it's an interesting story, anyway.) It was supposed to portray some sort of evil spirit from the river, a monster that preyed on women who went down by the banks to wash clothes, draw water; that sort of thing. The owner tells me his grandfather told him all kinds of stories about some of the more…interesting artifacts in the shop before



the old man kicked off and willed the place to him. I'll have to remember that for the future.

But I'm getting off topic. Apparently, the craftsman carved this thing according to descriptions he'd been told by his own father, who'd heard them from *his* father, and so on and so forth, back to pre-Columbian times. How this information got passed down through the generations of this hole-in-the-wall shop, I have no idea, but I figure it can't hurt to listen. Maybe the guy knows something about the creature that it depicts; maybe he knows something about what can *hurt* it. It's a long shot, but I honestly don't have any better way to spend early afternoon on a Sunday. I let the guy ramble on for a while (one of those old-timers who just likes to have someone to listen to him, I guess) before cutting in and asking if he knows anything specific about the old Indian legend. He gets this funny look in his eye when I ask and I start to wonder if I have to make an awkward apology and hurry out, but he takes a long moment to size me up and then nods once, real slow. He shuffles around and out from behind the narrow little counter and locks up, turning the sign hanging on the door to CLOSED.

He doesn't say anything else for a while, but starts thumbing through stacks and stacks of old papers on the low shelves along the windows on one side of the shop. Most of them are yellow with age. A bunch of them are stained with mildew. A few threaten to crack in half, despite the old man's feather-light touch. When I draw a breath to say something, he hushes me preemptively and scrunches up his face to squint a little bit harder through his glasses, like he's close to finding whatever it is he's looking for. Or maybe he just doesn't want to be distracted. I suppose he could also just be a crazy old shit who wants to see how long he can amuse himself at my expense.

Finally, though (about five solid minutes later), he comes back with a heavy, leather-bound book and drops it on the counter. It looks like it's easily over 100 years old — all cracked and faded and battered with age. When he opens it, the book makes that muted snapping noise of pages breaking away from the binding. The old man doesn't seem to care, though, so neither do I. A little cloud of dust floats off the cover and he starts flipping pages, about half of which come loose when he turns them. A bunch of pages are obviously handwritten, while typewritten pages and newspaper clippings are pasted into it in other places. He stops at a torn piece of what looks to be maybe a cheap flyer or pamphlet. It's seriously old and, written at the top in faded print, are the words: RIVER DEVIL RAVISHES LOCAL WOMAN — POLITICIANS, CLERGY AND CONSTABULARY DENY ALL KNOWLEDGE.

What follows (before the tear in the page, anyway) is half a paragraph recounting an attack on one Lucille Archer, by what she claimed was a "servant of Satan," which forced




itself upon her. The writer — whose tone indicates he has some kind of medical knowledge — asserts that he personally studied her wounds, which are strikingly similar in description to those I saw on Alisha. It cuts off at that point, unfortunately. Before I can ask him anything about it, the old man tells me that it's the last fragment of the last copy; the rest were destroyed in a fire in 1923. As I try to get a word in edgewise, he adds that he's not interested in parting with it, at *any* price. Unfortunately, that was actually my next question. Worse, it doesn't provide any answers to what, if anything, can kill the creature.

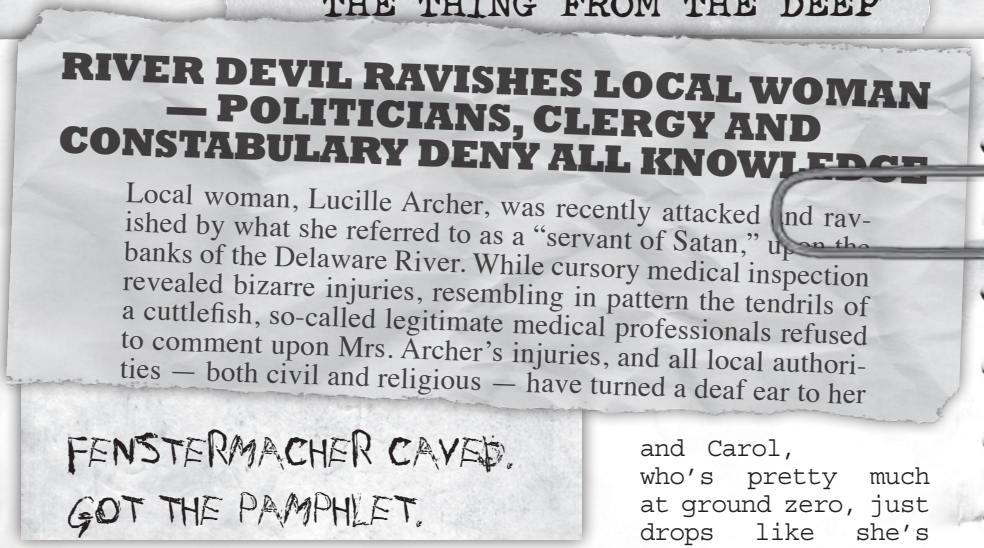
I'm about to thank the guy and leave when he takes my wrist, leans close and says to me, "It's timid around groups of people. Won't come out until it's got a victim alone. Senses others nearby, I think. It'll run if it's interrupted while it's trying to breed. I think it feels vulnerable then."

When he lets go of my arm, he tells me I should leave, and his tone implies sooner rather than later. I take the hint, thank him for his time and walk out the door, wondering how in the hell he knows any of this. I really will have to come back when I get a chance. Of course, I might have to explain myself to the old guy, since there's no way I've got the $850 he's asking for the scrimshaw, but I figure I need it a whole hell of a lot more than he does.

●●●●●

We found the thing. We fucking *had* it! It was creeping up on Carol all slowly, presumably trying to figure out if it had found suitable prey, and we got the jump on it. The creature's powers of perception aren't as amazing as Fenstermacher made them out to be, apparently, but it's a lot more than just tentacles. There's a body of some sort in there, though it seems to shift and flow, like it's just a bunch of fluid-filled sacs packed together inside the same skin. We didn't see eyes or anything else that seemed to pass for a sensory organ; just a horrible, razor-edged gullet that it slid this barbed…ovipositor or whatever…out of.

I don't know what that lady was talking about, though: bullets seem to hurt the motherfucker just fine. It lets out this hideous noise that isn't really a scream, or a shriek, or a cry of pain; no, it's something else entirely. A noise not meant to be heard above the waves, I guess. Panes of glass crack


RIVER DEVIL RAVISHES LOCAL WOMAN — POLITICIANS, CLERGY AND CONSTABULARY DENY ALL KNOWLEDGE

Local woman, Lucille Archer, was recently attacked and ravished by what she referred to as a "servant of Satan," upon the banks of the Delaware River. While cursory medical inspection revealed bizarre injuries, resembling in pattern the tendrils of a cuttlefish, so-called legitimate medical professionals refused to comment upon Mrs. Archer's injuries, and all local authorities — both civil and religious — have turned a deaf ear to her




and Carol, who's pretty much at ground zero, just drops like she's been Tasered. We come out of hiding and try to corner the thing, but it's slippery as fuck-all, and I'm not just talking about that slime. It dodges one way and then goes in a completely different direction. Even on dry land, it moves like it's underwater and we're practically tripping over each other trying to get at it. At one point, it starts to wrap a tendril around Carol's ankle, presumably in an attempt to drag her away, but someone (all I know is it wasn't me) manages to hack off the monster's limb, and it recoils with this horrible, gargling hiss. I can't get a fix on it with my gun and, by and large, it does a fantastic job of steering clear of everyone else's weapons, too. Other than that first gunshot and the missing tentacle, it gets nicked up a bit, but it's more interested in getting away than staying and fighting, so none of our people get whaled with any of those white hooks it's sporting. In the end, it manages to slip between two of us and slither back toward the Delaware, too quickly to follow.

We gather up Carol and hightail it out of there, before someone calls the cops about that gunshot. But not before we bag up the tentacle, which is still twitching and pumping out something that looks nothing like blood and smells like household cleaning products.

•••••

Let this be a lesson: not every hunt ends in a glorious confrontation. Sometimes, it's a panicked scramble that, in retrospect, feels a lot more like a fight that broke out in the monkey house at the zoo than any sort of organized action. And sometimes, the aforementioned monkey fight leads to a resolution that's much more whimper than bang. It seems that the tentacle that got chopped off contained *something* vital to the monster's continuing well-being — a significant artery, an internal organ…something, anyway. It curled up and gave out not far from where we got the drop on it.

About four hours after the fight, we managed to track it to its hidey-hole and it's curled up in a little ball, dead, still defensively clutching the severed limb within a cluster of three other tendrils, maybe in an attempt to stop the bleeding. I'm reminded of my futile attempts to save Alisha and am overcome by a distinct feeling of satisfaction. I can only hope that the creature had a little while (and the mental faculties) to contemplate its impending death and get scared by the notion of the end. It's already begun to dry out and that wet stink has faded somewhat. Its blood — or whatever it's got that passes for blood — is also dry. The sacs that gave its body some sort of rigidity have deflated and it's flattened out on the ground, looking like so much gruesome amphibious roadkill. Its skin has already begun to peel and crack in places; in a little while, I expect its whole body will start to fall apart. Monsters tend to do that sort of thing, for whatever reason. It's like some fucking cosmic constant: odds are, anything overtly unnatural will either disintegrate or turn into something normal-looking shortly after death. I don't know why, except maybe it's someone's cruel idea of a joke.

After grabbing a couple of samples (that we'll look at later in abject puzzlement and then file away for the rest of time, like we do with all of the other materials we harvest from our successful hunts), we call it a day and head home.

●●●●●

Bizarre postscript to all of this: a couple of nights after everything went down, I was in the mood for a drink, so I hit a bar and grabbed a seat in the corner. (Paranoid habits you start developing in this line of work, I guess.) After a while, I got the sense I was being watched, but I couldn't find anyone or anything giving me the hairy eyeball, so I just chalked it up to nerves, got buzzed, and then left to start my homeward sojourn. I ended up at a bus stop on a quiet stretch of street, waiting for public transportation to haul my drunk ass home. As the bus arrived, I thought I caught a whiff of that nasty rotten fish odor from when Alisha died and turned around as the doors were closing behind me. A tall man, with bone-straight black hair and a sickly, mottled complexion, was staring at me. He'd been maybe five paces behind me when I got onto the bus, and he was looking at me with hate in his eyes.

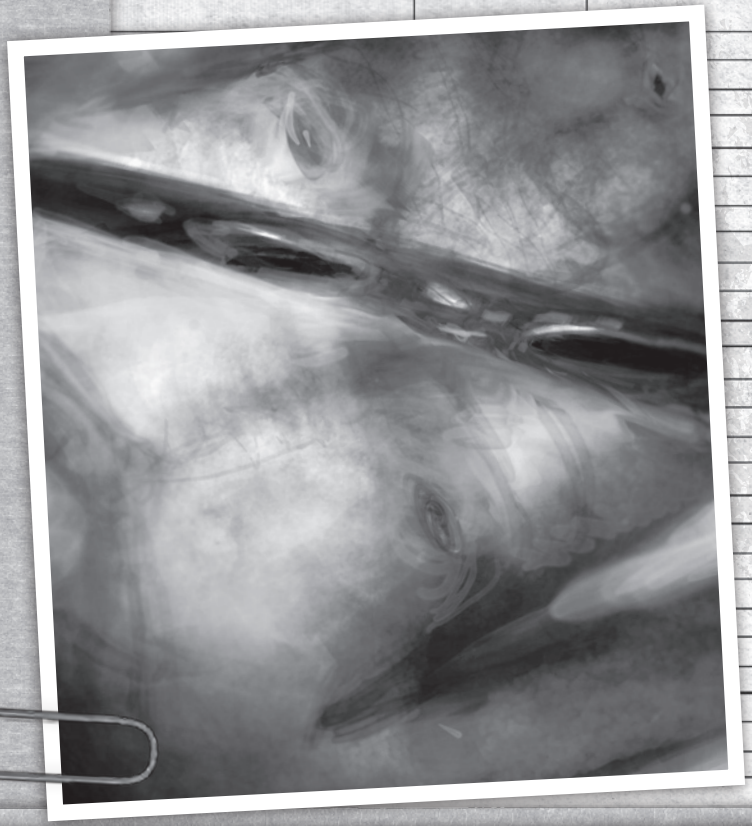
Ever since that night, I sometimes catch the faintest hint of that smell and get a glimpse of someone with that gross, discolored skin, and they're *always* staring at me with that same vengeful expression. Once or twice, I've caught the scent near my apartment, and now I have to wonder about the bum in the next-door vestibule or the woman camped out in her car, under a broken streetlight.

I hate this fucking job.

CASE FILE HRG 00015

# THE VIVISECTION

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



# SHADOW GAMES

| PAGE | DTG RELEASER TIME | | | PRECEDENCE | | CLASS | SPECAT | CNO | CIC | ORIG MSG IDENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DATE TIME | MONTH | YR | ACT | INFO | | | | | |
| 01 OF 03 | | | | RR | RR | UUUU | | | | 04707307 |
| HDGR | MESSAGE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS | | | | | | | | | |

Around 1:30 AM, we were hailed by a pedestrian while driving down South 20th St. The pedestrian, Chuck Latimer, told us he'd found a dead body and had been looking for help. We asked if he'd called 911, and he told us that he "didn't think it was an emergency." I could smell alcohol on the man's breath, but his speech wasn't slurred. We agreed to check it out.

He led us to an abandoned lot just off Fitzwater St, then pointed to a pile of garbage. I went to check it out, while my partner remained with Mr. Latimer. The lot had been abandoned long enough for grass to grow over it, and trash was piled against both buildings. I started disturbing the piles. The third one I checked, just visible from the street, had what was clearly a human arm protruding from under an old mattress. I checked that the arm was human, rather than a shop-window dummy, then moved the mattress.

Under the mattress was exactly half of a human body.

The remains were the right-hand side of an adult male. The body had been sliced front to back, right down the center. It was naked, and I could see the genitals had been sliced neatly along with everything else. Even disturbing the cover didn't cause the body to shift - all the organs remained on the inside. Upon realizing that it was a real body, not some med-student training dummy, I ran a few paces away in order to vomit. Returning to the scene, I couldn't see any blood around, or any immediate signs of how the body had got there.

I've never seen anything like it. I called it in, then returned to the car to tape off the scene. Detectives Slater and Riggs arrived on scene about 10 minutes later. I showed them the body, pointed out what had happened since we arrived, and my partner introduced them to Mr. Latimer.

THEY ASKED ME TO CHANGE MY STATEMENT. GOT A COPY OF THIS BEFORE THEY SHREDDED IT.

Subject A is an adult white male, blue eyes, graying hair. He's approximately 5'10", and about 190 pounds. Measurement of weight and other factors may prove inaccurate or lead to greater problems, as only half of the subject's body is available for study.

The bisection is perfect. There's no bruising or marks where a blade — of any sharpness — passed through the flesh. It's perfectly, mathematically straight, like looking at a cutaway in a biology textbook. Where internal organs straddle the cut, they've been sliced neatly along the same line. The body doesn't show any signs of pulling or tearing. I had a hard time determining time of death. I was hoping the stomach contents would give me some idea, but I had a hard time getting them to analyze them.

Part of what makes the bisection so strange is the lack of movement from the internal organs. The stomach contents remain inside the stomach. Getting any of the organs to move was difficult until I removed a silver stone from the stomach. Once the stone was removed, gravity seemed to take hold — the organs slid out of the body as expected, blood flowed out of the open ends of the circulatory system. It was like the world took notice again.

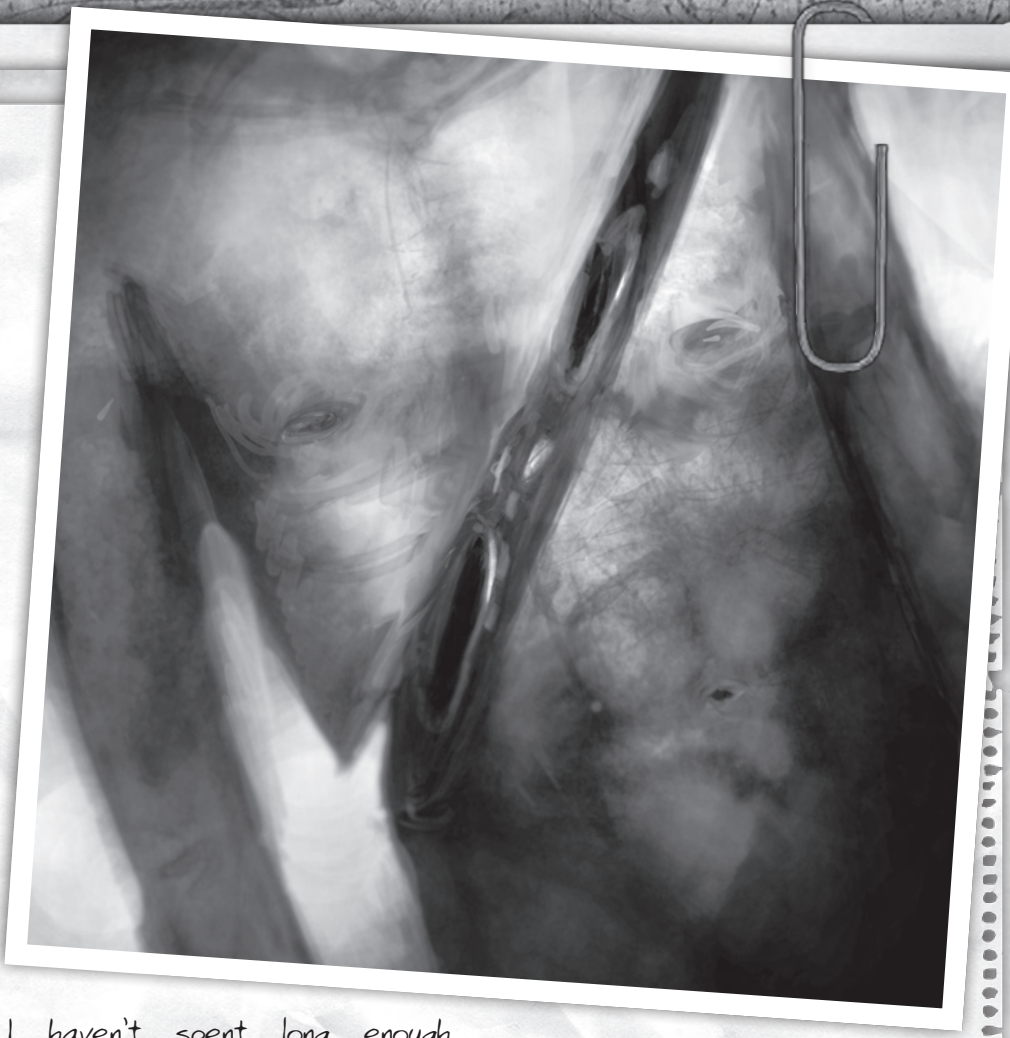
I've had to send the stone away for Federal analysis.

From the look of the resultant mess, the bisection was definitely post-mortem. Looking at the tissue along the edges of the cut, Subject A had been dead for at least 12 hours before someone sliced him in two.

Moving away from the obvious wound, I noted several track marks on the inside of the right elbow, spanning a length of time. It's likely that Subject A was an intravenous drug user, and had been for some time. I managed to run a tox screen on some recovered blood, and it tested positive for heroin. The subject's fingerprints don't match any on file, and his DNA's not on record. On the side of his neck is a tattoo of a stylized spider, which may help with identification.

At this time, cause of death appears to be a massive heroin overdose, followed by incredible post-mortem injuries. Analysis of organs and tissue to confirm this hypothesis is hampered by the extent of the injuries, but I do not believe that the missing parts would shed any more light on the situation.

THE FINAL VERSION'S MISSING PARAGRAPHS 2, 3, AND 4



I haven't spent long enough with Officer Rodriguez to develop a real profile, but I believe I can deliver my preliminary findings.

Over the past week, I've seen her three times. Each time, she started our conversations adamant about the state of the body she reclaimed from the waste ground off Fitzwater St. She maintains this belief in the face of a range of evidence, from photographs of the body in the ME's lab to actually speaking with the CSU technicians who recovered the body.

Despite her evidencing a firm belief that an event happened other than it did, I don't believe Officer Rodriguez is schizophrenic. She found a terrible, disgusting murder scene, and in her own head, the only way she can rationalize it is to create something worth investigating, some "truth" that everyone else overlooks. Perhaps it speaks well of her personality, that she doesn't want to believe one person can do that to another. Some people think she's demonstrating signs of paranoia, but I don't believe that's

the case. She's instead looking to explain away one isolated incident, and her strongly held belief that she found "half a man" is just her means of coping.

I'd advise that Officer Rodriguez be given compassionate leave with counseling offered until she feels ready to accept the truth. If she persists in pursuing her fantasy, she should perhaps look into transferring to a different precinct.

WHERE IS THIS SHIT COMING FROM?

## THE LOOKING GLASS

Nov. 5th, 2008 at 06:20 AM

Status: Protected

If I walked down a rabbit hole, I sure didn't notice it.

Everything's going weird. I found something strange, not the sort of thing I can really describe, and I called it in. Then…shit. I get pressure from above to change my statement because what I'm talking about isn't possible. Nobody said anything outright, but let's face it, they thought I was crazy, and wanted to give me the chance to prove I wasn't. I took it, not because I wanted to, but because I quite like having a job.

I kept a copy of my original statement. The revised one was so much fiction, not worth saving. It'll keep in a file somewhere.

The same day I changed my statement, I found a copy of the ME's report in my locker. I hadn't put it there, but that report confirmed my story, rather than the one everyone else wanted to believe.

I've seen enough *X-Files* to know a conspiracy when I see one. The stupid thing would be to run to the detectives in charge, to the captain, to IAB. After all, I have evidence. Thing is, I've seen what ranting nutjobs call evidence, and what I had was about the same caliber. One copy of the ME's report, the kinda thing I could have faked if I'd wanted to. Instead, I called in a favor and got a copy of the report that's on file. It looked a lot like the one I had, only without the second, third, and fourth paragraphs — the only bits that confirmed my story. That report

mentioned something being sent for the Feds to look over, so I'm trying to keep a lid on things.

The captain asked me to see a counselor, and I've been going every couple of days. At least, I had been. I thought I could be open, that the whole point of getting in to see a mental health professional was so you could be totally honest. That ended this morning. I got a copy of the report that the shrink had cooked up for my superiors. Fucker was in on everything, saying it's a whole bunch of bullshit invented by my brain. But why invent the ME's report? Not like I could cook that one up and not notice. And it's hardly like I could get the shrink's report without my even knowing it.

Whoever got me these documents doesn't want me to prove my story. He just wants me to know that he knows, and maybe to know that I'm not crazy.

Thank fuck that he knows, because I don't.

## TESTING THE WATER

Nov. 8th, 2008 at 22:09 AM

Status: Protected

My partner thinks I'm crazy. I know that. He came by earlier, told me how things were going. I've spent the last few days on leave, taking some "well-earned time off," as my boss puts it. Just me and a bottle and a whole bunch of paperwork I'm not supposed to have. Apparently everyone understands, and they're working flat out on the case, but nobody's got any leads. I can understand that.

The CSU report was in my mailbox this morning, stuffed inside a manila envelope with my name printed on the front. No address, so it had to have been delivered by hand. Nothing handwritten. It confirms my story more than the others — at least, I think it does. I mean, no blood at the site, and yet the body's got plenty enough to screen for toxins and pathogens. How is that possible? It doesn't make sense.

Time off is a bastard. I don't know what to do with myself. I drove past the scene earlier, but it was still taped off, a couple of new guys I didn't recognize keeping people from going on. I had a look around, spotted something that wasn't mentioned in the CSU report. I'm beginning to wonder what the hell is going on, and what's missing from the real report.

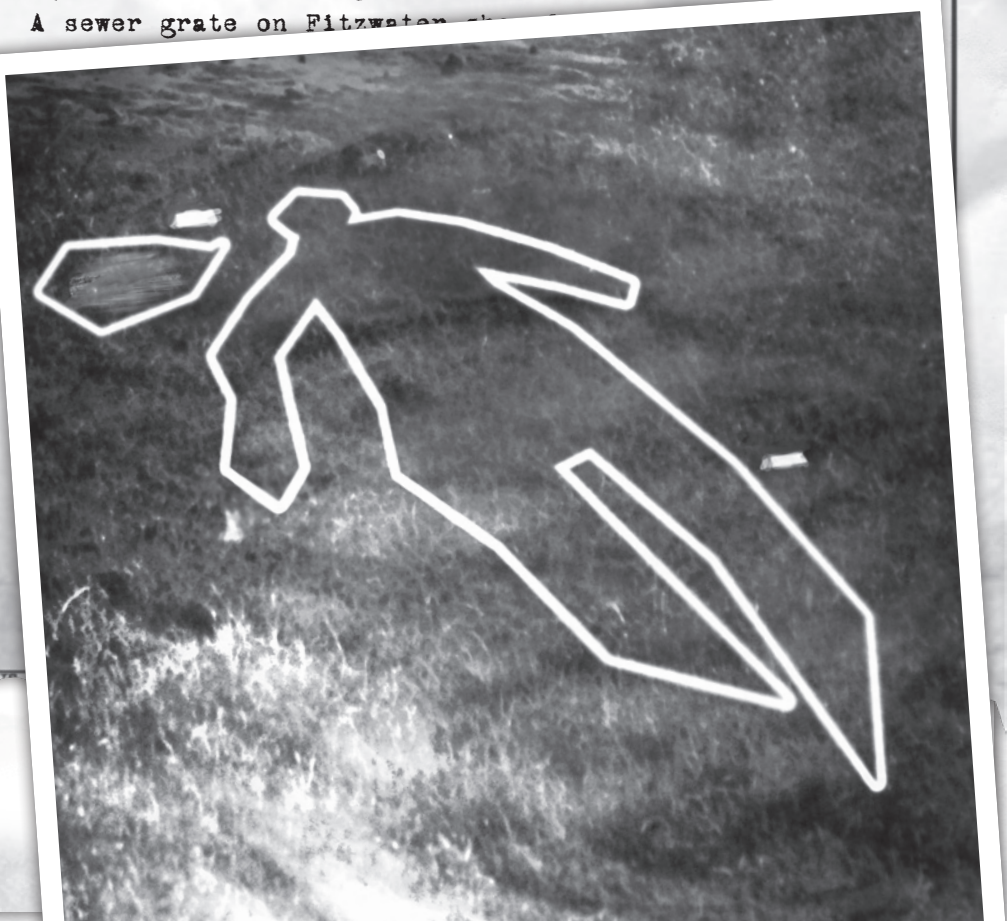
THIS IS THE ONLY REMAINING COPY OF THIS REPORT. USE IT WELL.

held traces of hair and skin on both [illegible]. lack of tissue and fluids doesn't support the theory that the body was found pre-mutilated.

No fibers were recovered at the scene, and apart from the identified patch of vomit, no fluids on the ground. While it's possible that the body was transported among the mattresses and other debris, this is unlikely, as the whole assembly showed signs of water damage consistent with exposure to the elements for at least a couple of weeks. Whoever deposited the body likely only covered it, rather than constructing something meant to hide it.

The grass on the site had been well trampled by the time CSU technicians arrived, so determining a possible drag location is difficult. Whoever left the body could have brought it in a van or a truck and dropped it on the site, or they could have brought the body by other means. The vehicle angle is one we can rule out for certain; we confirmed with local officers that nobody had seen a strange car park for more than a couple of minutes all day, and they'd notice something new.

A sewer grate on Fitzwater [illegible]



turbed recently. Checks with the Department of Sanitation haven't given any reason for anyone to have gone down there. It's possible that whoever brought the body transported it by the sewer network. Forensic tests of the deceased's clothing and hair have shown traces of urine and fecal matter consistent with a sewer environment - but that would indicate the victim was uncovered in the sewers. If that's the case, then either he was mutilated at the site - not likely, given the complete lack of blood and fluids - or he was brought through the sewers pre-mutilated - another impossibility.

Whoever brought him must have been wearing a whole bunch of garbage bags. We checked every surface we could for prints, hairs and fibers, but we ended up drawing a blank. They were prepared for themselves, but didn't cover the victim, which is odd - usually, the dumper hides the victim's body until they can move it to the dumpsite, but they don't take any special precautions. That means that normally, we have trace evidence from the dumper that can help us trace his steps.

## NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE

Nov. 7th, 2008 at 06:20 AM

Status: Protected

I decided that my suspicions and all the coincidences weren't worth a paycheck. I mean, there might be a conspiracy against me, but I'm happy to shut the fuck up about it. If they want me quiet, I'll stay quiet. I'm back at work, which is a damn sight better than waiting around in my apartment.

I'm still finding documents. This one was under the windshield of the squad car, another manila envelope with my name on it. Printed again, with no signs as to who left it. I haven't opened it yet. I might be a puppet on someone's strings, but they can screw off when I've got some asshole exposing himself, two snatched purses and a half-dozen assaults. Just another Friday night. Some drunk tries to play grab-ass? Good. I need this, need the release of knowing what I'm doing. The last few days are all secrets and lies and junk. Fuck that. Find the assholes, arrest the assholes, throw the assholes in the cells, repeat until the paperwork's pissing you off. Sure, it's scary. You never know what's behind a door. But that fear's the real reason you keep going. Maybe it'll all go to shit, maybe you save a life. But you buy the ticket, you take the ride.

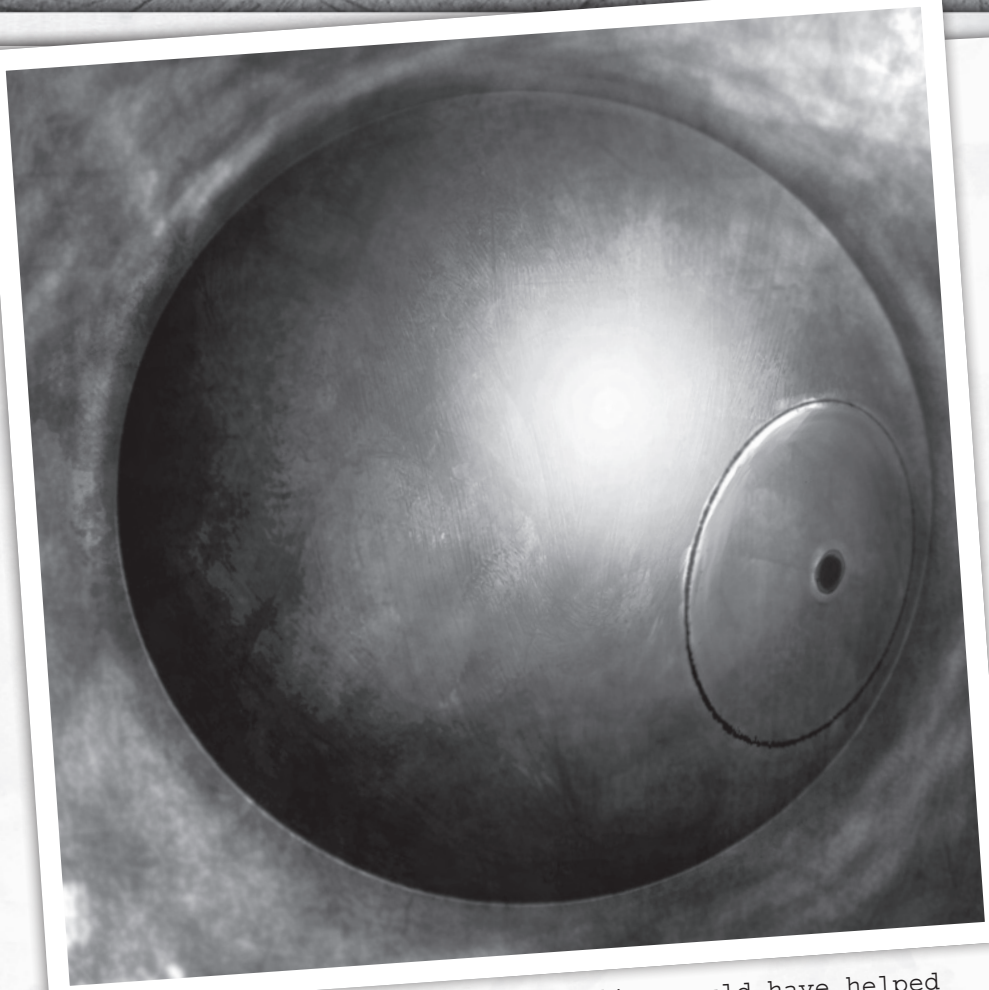
The object removed from [redacted] is a regular sphere. It's 6" in diameter, though only 2" thick. The object is a dull silver, save for two circular ports a quarter-inch across, which don't display any color. Exposure to the inside of a human body hasn't had any appreciable effect. The object is opaque on X-ray scans, and all attempts to determine composition have failed. We either can't run a test because we can't get a sample of the object, or the test comes back with impossible results, results that don't remain constant when the experiment's repeated. We've tested our equipment, and used other equipment — but not other staff, as per [redacted] request.

The effects on [redacted] do provide some clues. The area of the chest cavity where the object was implanted doesn't show any signs of the body's normal attempts to reject foreign objects. Likewise, the body shows no signs of scarring or residual damage from the object's introduction, despite its size. [redacted] appears to have suffered no injuries or illnesses over a period dating back at least six months before his disappearance. This is inconsistent with medical records that claim [redacted] had been diagnosed with emphysema for at least six years prior to his disappearance. Despite these incongruities, distinguishing marks and DNA tests prove his identity.

[redacted]'s lungs were filled with the same fluid as found inside the object, possibly contributing to the regeneration of his lungs in some way, or increasing oxygen uptake in a fashion similar to hyperventilation. Even more importantly, the subject doesn't have a heart. In the space where the organ should be, we've identified at least 10 different combinations of blood vessels, with strange tumors that apparently act like valves to maintain constant blood flow without the normal pulse. The "heart chamber" was sealed and filled with fluid similar to that found in the lungs. Analysis of the fluid is ongoing, but as with the object, we're not optimistic about finding any answers.

Taken together, the implications of [redacted] are astonishing. Somehow, his heart was replaced while he was still alive, and his lungs supported in some unknown fashion, in such a way that he could survive without them while they were altered. We don't know, at this point, why the fluid was present in the lungs — whether this was a deliberate change or a side effect of the alterations — but the object retrieved from inside [redacted] does appear to be some kind of means of regulating the mystery fluid.

Despite all our tests and a full autopsy, it's hard to understand what's happened to [redacted]. Without any information on how or where he was found, it's impossible for us to make any definitive statements. Hell, spending



a day with him when he was still alive would have helped us with so many questions, but apparently that was too much to ask.

## PULLING MY STRINGS

Nov. 7th, 2008 at 20:45 PM

Status: Private

Someone's trying to play me. I know there's pressure from On High to ignore the weirder aspects of the Fitzwater murder. I have some history with Cathy Slater, so I tried broaching the topic, but she drank the Kool-Aid. The scene was oddly clean, meaning that CSU fucked up. The paramedics were lucky to recover the body in such a good condition for the ME. Whatever the normal explanation was, she's on board. She even commented on my "breakdown," like I was obviously crazy.

That doesn't square with what I know I saw, and the files I have. The ME found *something*, CSU are baffled…I know it. But Cathy doesn't know it. She gets this odd look in her eyes whenever we talk about it, like the light in there dulls for just a second.

I know that she saw the scene, that there's more to this murder than anyone's saying, but right now, I don't think Cathy does. She honestly thinks I went crazy. Either I did, and all these files are just figments of my imagination, or something's wrong with her. I don't know what they've done, but it's not like they've just told her to take the party line. She believes what she's saying, and that's the scariest part.

What the fuck am I wrapped up in here? I've got my memories alongside what looks like the paperwork from an alien autopsy, but what am I supposed to do with it? More importantly, who wants me to do anything? Someone's feeding me the files, possibly making sure that I don't end up like Cathy…what else are they doing?

More importantly, who are they? Am I right in thinking that there are two sides here? Or is there just one, and I'm their chosen one? Maybe there's a hundred. Fuck, you should see some of the UFO websites that make just as much sense as me right now.

10 links. 1, 3, 4, & 7 are 404.
5 & 8 are DNS error or expired domain.
2: "TruthNet International." Geocities page full of conspiracy theories. UFOs next to GM foods next to fluoride in water.
6: Abductees Anonymous, YouTube channel for alien abduction survivors.
9: alienresistance.org ties alien visitations and Biblical apocrypha.
10: Another video channel, this one on zeropointinformation.com. Looks like it might be part of a bigger network of conspiracy video sites.

# WIERD EVIDENCE

Nov. 9th, 2008 at 22:19 PM

Status: Private

Someone had left a roll of camera film in my mailbox this morning. Old-fashioned, really — I thought everyone went digital a long time ago. Apparently, that's not the case. I dropped them in at the one-hour photo place when I was getting lunch. I've only just had a chance to look at them.

Whoever left this for me is pissing me off. They're sending me a message, a blatantly obvious one. They know what's going on, and they're dragging me through their own fucking footsteps. I wish I could say I wasn't anyone's toy. I wish I could ignore this, but…I'm fascinated, despite myself. Someone, somewhere, committed a crime. I don't know precisely what: murder's up there, so is Fucking with a Body When I'm Hung-Over, but someone's broken the law and I am going to break them.

I don't have a scanner. Don't know anyone who has a scanner, even. I'm going to describe the photos here so I've got a record.

**Photo 1:** The exterior of a building. I don't recognize it offhand. The shot's from the back, no street signs or reference point. The building's large, fairly modern looking. The shot's from a parking lot out back. Center frame is a basement entry from the building.

**Photo 2:** A large, dark chamber. Could be a big basement or a hall or something. No external light. The back wall's far enough away to be dark, but it looks like red brick. The floor's indistinct. Four tables that look like stainless steel, like autopsy tables or something. Metal lights overhead, not currently lit. Looks like someone's set up an underground medical facility. The photographer has put a can of Coke on the table, to indicate scale.

**Photo 3:** The same chamber as the second photo, from a different angle. Medical equipment is piled up: stands for IV drips, monitors, trays of surgical implements, all discarded. All the equipment is clean, if unused. The shot's at a lower angle than the previous — the floor's tiled blue and white, but people have tracked dirt in. It's not filthy, just well used, and hasn't been cleaned for a couple of weeks.



**Photo 4:** A hole in the wall of the room. The corner of the equipment pile is in shot, establishing that it's the same room. The hole's been smashed through from the room to the outside. On the other side is a dark tunnel that stretches quite a way — further than the camera's flash can illuminate. At a guess, I'd say this is the tunnel linking the basement to the sewer system, but there's no concrete evidence. The photographer's placed an IV drip stand by the hole for scale — that's about six feet tall, so the hole's maybe five feet. The weird thing is how regular the hole looks, like someone cut it with thermite or something.

**Photo 5:** The first "action shot." Taken without the flash, the overhead lights are on but the room's still dark, apart from the tunnel and the area with the tables: 10 in all. There's a human body lying on each table. The bodies are naked, without even a sheet for modesty. Silver objects are visible at this scale, resting in the air around them, but there's no sign of anyone else. Many of the bodies are dirty and unshaven; at a guess, probably vagrants.

**Photo 6:** The strangest photo. After looking at it repeatedly, it looks like the same angle as the one previous, but there's a hell of a lot more light, coming from slightly above. Most of this picture's white, only the shadows can tell me much. Figures are standing over the tables. Human looking, but tall and with thin limbs, though that could just be the light. The figures' heads look bigger, too, though again that's hard to tell. The figures look a bit like some people describe aliens, usually after an abduction, but it's blurry and indistinct enough to be sure.

YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO
THE PHOTOGRAPHER.
YOU FOUND HIM.
TRUTH WILL OUT.

## REVELATION

Nov. 10th, 2008 at 17:20 PM

Status: Protected

I'm looking at everything in front of me, and I've realized something. Whoever's sending me this isn't trusting any of it to electronic storage. No digital camera for the photographs. The documents are either original or photocopied, rather than scanned. Everything, from my name on the envelopes to the note he left on the inside of my locker door, is typed, not printed out.

I know a lot of conspiracy theorists don't trust computers to do their work. A typewriter ribbon burns easier than a hard disk, and you don't have to worry about hackers. But in this day and age, it marks my informant as either very paranoid, or more than a little old fashioned.

I think the building in the first picture might be the view from the back of an old meeting hall or something. It's not like they'd drag a body all the way from Byberry, even if it would be an appropriate location. They have to be more local.

Then again, I could always try to retrace the body's path through the sewers. Unless there's some kind of marking, I'd get lost. But…I get the feeling I know where I'm going. Didn't they do something similar with the old basements of Thomas Jefferson University Hospital? Wall off whole basement wards that'd never see any use, so they'd have damn strong foundations? I could be remembering wrong, but if I know where I'm headed, then I might just check it out.

Whoever's helping me out can obviously read these entries, even the private ones. I'm not quite sure how, but they can. Could you not just give me a damn map?

My continued evaluation of Officer Rodriguez is based more on conversations with her partner and observation from a distance. Understandably, members of the administration don't want me to impose myself, or even make my ongoing evaluation known. Evaluating at a distance, with only secondhand information, is difficult at the best of times, but I believe I've managed to glean some useful information.

Officer Rodriguez has distanced herself from her fellow officers after being involved in a horrific case earlier in the year. Recently she has withdrawn into herself further, partially prompted by evidence that another traumatic discovery didn't match the version she remembered. She took a few days off and returned, but after her return has remained distanced even from her partner. Normally this would indicate that someone is moving on with the healing process and integrating reality with their memories, but in this case, I believe Officer Rodriguez hasn't progressed. She's claiming to be fine while holding on to her own version of events, and limiting her contact with fellows to avoid evidence that her own recollections are false.

In many lines of work, Officer Rodriguez's response to the situation would be a little unusual, but not a cause for concern. In a role like that of police officer, where trust in fellow officers is vital, her situation is divisive. By remaining distant, she's building a wall between herself and other officers, and that's going to hurt her in the long run. Mostly, we see similar symptoms in people who display signs of paranoia or a particular strain of paranoid schizophrenia dominant amongst the conspiracy theorists. People in her position often take reckless actions because those actions will provide "proof" of their beliefs. I wouldn't be surprised if Officer Rodriguez did just that. Even if her actions don't hurt her, if the rest of the precinct hears of them, she may destroy her reputation with her fellow officers. If that is the case, the only way for her to regain the trust of fellow officers may be by transferring to another precinct.

At this point, I think it's best for everyone concerned if Officer Rodriguez is referred for more intensive counseling. I still believe she is at a level where her understanding of the world can be brought back into line with what we consider "normal" through voluntary methods, and I don't believe that medication would help at this point.

# SCRAPS OF A BIGGER PICTURE

Nov. 11th, 2008 at 01:13 AM

Status: Private

Well, that went well.

I was right about one thing: it's a basement entrance to Jefferson University Hospital, tucked away down the side where most people won't ever see it. Only an old padlock on the doors, so it didn't take much to open. The entrance leads to some steps with double doors at the bottom. They're unlocked, and beyond them's a single open room, an old basement ward or something. Those doors are the only way into the room, and the stairwell doesn't go anywhere but the entrance. One way in, one way out, apart from the hole in the wall. Nice.

The room's pretty much like the photographs I described, but it's bigger than I first thought. The whole thing stretches off into the distance, and only the part near the entrance looks used. The rest's shrouded in darkness — I didn't see a light switch when I went looking — but I think with the main lights lit, there wouldn't be much of a place to hide. The mystery photographer must have thought he'd have a better hiding place than he did.

Everything's like the photographs showed. Metal autopsy tables, old medical supply junk. No sign of these weird "silver stones" that have been showing up in some of the paperwork. There's no sign of anything much beyond a disused autopsy room. I had a good look around, but I couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. The floor's got a lot of scuff marks, dirt trodden into the tiles. Not like people have been too bothered about keeping sterile, I don't think.

Each autopsy table had someone lying on it, naked but for a sheet over the torso from chest to knee. It's freaky, walking between people like that. I checked, and everyone there had a heartbeat. Breathing was shallow, and though I tried to rouse three people, all three remained unaware of my presence. When I tried moving one guy, the sheet fell off and I couldn't see any scars, but whoever the strange doctors are, they did a number on him. His stomach was covered in small lumps, like something was there beneath the skin when it really shouldn't be.

I recognized a couple of guys as old drunks we've had to move on a few times, the kind of bums who'll happily crash in a shop

doorway even when their wives and kids have a nice warm house for them. I dunno if they've been brought here or came of their own free will, but I couldn't see any signs of restraint or even any bruises. All these guys, whatever their situation, look perfectly healthy. I saw one guy who I thought I recognized, and then it clicked — he was a panhandler downtown, only had one leg after Vietnam. Except this guy had two legs. Two perfectly normal legs. No scars, nothing. It's fair to say that freaked me the fuck out.

I've no idea where or when the Doctors come here. They didn't tonight; I had a good couple of hours to poke around, and I didn't see any signs of life beyond the people on the tables. I don't know if they use the street-door or the new hole in the wall, or even how that hole got there. It's big, but whoever did it didn't leave any debris around, no bricks or dust. It's a roughly circular hole with perfectly smooth edges. I might have been right about the thermite, but the tunnel beyond is cut in just the same fashion — like someone just upped and removed a part of the wall between here and the sewer. Just like they removed one side of that guy's body. I didn't go too far into the tunnel — I didn't want to fall even ankle deep in shit without being sure of what I was doing first.

That's when I left. I want to go back, but that asshole using an old film camera means I've no idea when the Doctors are in.

Yes, I do.

Saturday night. I found the body Saturday night. Logically, that's either when they killed him or just when they dumped the body. Makes sense that they'd be there at the same time each week, so I might have a better chance of finding these weird bastards.

I've switched shifts so I've got the time off. Time to end this shit.

## A CALL TO ARMS

**Dispatch:** 911, state your emergency.

**Caller:** There's, oh God, it's horrible. They're torturing people.

**Dispatch:** Slow down, ma'am. Tell me what happened. Has anyone hurt you?

**Caller:** Not me. Not yet. But there's people there without limbs, one man with his chest opened up, and some of them, they're alive!

**Dispatch:** Are you calling from a pay phone on South 11th Street?

**Caller:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dispatch:** Where's the incident taking place?

**Caller:** Under — there's a basement under Tom Jefferson Hospital. The

entrance is in a parking lot off Sansom.

**Dispatch:** We're sending a unit out there right now. Are you able to stay on the line, ma'am?

**Caller:** I think they saw me. I can't stay here — they'll know I've called you.

**Dispatch:** What's your name?

**Caller:** Ah…Helena Reyes.

**Dispatch:** Tell me again what you saw, ma'am.

**Caller:** Bodies. Dead bodies, cut to pieces. But some of them weren't dead. Just people with pieces missing. I don't know what to tell you. They had bits missing. I could see into one guy's stomach.

**Dispatch:** Please hold the line, ma'am. You can help make this right.

**Caller:** I can't…I just can't —

<disconnect>

Page 4 of 4

Philadelphia PD. Complaint Number: 97000312

**Narrative**

We responded to a 911 call around 9:30 PM, heading to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. Caller reported some kind of messy disturbance in a basement. We pulled up in a parking lot off Sansom. There was a basement entrance, little more than a door and some stairs, up against one of the walls. The caller said it was urgent, so we drew our weapons and proceeded with caution. Given the lack of other calls, we thought it best to check the place out rather than calling in immediate backup.

The double doors at the bottom of the stairs weren't locked, and we could hear noises behind them. No voices, but some metallic scraping sounds. We waited to assess how we should make our entry. We heard something, a wet sound. Sounded a little like surgery, or a butcher's. We decided we couldn't wait any longer, and burst through the door.

I can't describe what we saw. Figures - people - were holding knives and other surgical tools, and standing over tables. Most of the tables had people on them, most in a state of dismemberment. Pieces of the "patients" were just floating in the air. I saw one man's lungs suspended about a foot above his open chest cavity, without any means of holding them there that I could see. Weird silver blobs hung in the air in a similar fashion.



Our arrival was noticed, and the figures turned to us as we stood, shocked, in the doorway. Right after that, there was a burst of light, so bright it burned my eyes. When I could see again, the figures had gone. They'd left behind a room full of human remains, some dead and some soon to be. We called it in as soon as we could, got some detectives and the ME on scene. It was like a charnel house in there.

Everyone else was dealing with the scene. I heard Detective Slater asking the university administrator about that room, but it's technically no longer university property, so they see no reason to splash their names all over the papers.

THIS ONE DIDN'T GET REDACTED. JUST BURIED. IT'S A START.

# THE LIGHT OF A CANDLE

Nov. 16th, 2008 at 23:05 PM

Status: Protected

I did it. I stopped whatever was going on. I don't know quite what that was, but I stopped it. And damn me if it doesn't feel good.

I didn't know when on Saturday they might have got started, so I snuck down to the room under the hospital on Saturday afternoon. I figured I'd better go tooled up: a pair of old jeans I never got around to throwing out, a flashlight, a camera and my gun. I went down the stairs to start with, then checked that the tunnel did lead to the sewer system. As if the smell wasn't sign enough. It took me almost half an hour, but I made it onto Walnut St. through the tunnels, and I left plenty of markers so I could retrace my path. Getting on to the surface that early helped: I could put the padlock back in place. The last thing I wanted was to leave a big sign saying, "Someone's already downstairs breaking stuff. Come on in!"

I hunkered down nice and low in the tunnel and waited. I should have brought something to stop my mind wandering. I was down there for almost four hours before anything happened. When the Doctors finally made an appearance, I realized I needn't have bothered fixing the padlock. A flash of bright light, and they're there. I couldn't tell whether they just appeared or whether there's a secret door to go along with their flashbombs.

The Doctors didn't waste any time getting to work. The glare of the lights was stronger than I'd thought. So strong I've still got no idea precisely who or what they are, but that doesn't matter too much. I sat through an hour of impromptu surgery, stuck between losing half my body if they found me and swimming in a river of shit if I backed up. I waited until they had a fifth man opened up and ready for surgery. That was a good enough sign that they hadn't seen me.

I could have gone in and started shooting. I could have, but it doesn't work like that. I live in fucking Philly, not the Old West, and who's to say my gun would even have worked? Lots of alien-abduction types swear blind that guns don't fire. If I had gone in there and tried to shoot people, I'd have been condemning everyone in that room to death. One guy got his lungs replaced when they were hovering a foot above his chest cavity. You can't solve that kind of shit with a gun.

You can solve it with backup.

I did my best to sneak into the sewers, rather than running straight away. If I'd run, they might have caught me, and I know what happens to people they catch. I didn't start running until I was out of the sewer and scrambling for a pay phone. For all that I wanted to make the call as soon as I hit daylight, I couldn't have Dispatch knowing that their sudden emergency was coming from a cop who everyone knows is nuts. That meant I had to avoid my cell phone, because nobody would answer. A tip-off from a local pay phone, coupled with a fake name, means there's not much chance of them tracing this back to me. Sure, they probably thought it was a crank call, but I still got a squad car out there.

Nobody's talking about what they found, though I did find a copy of one of the reports in my locker again. It's a big victory as far as I'm concerned.

One of the guys I saw on a table, the Vietnam vet, he's known in all the shelters. Before, when he didn't show up for weeks, the shelters would call it in and we'd ignore them. Now if they've got a concern, we'll listen. Orders from on high. We got given the job of going round the shelters last night, making sure they know we're listening. A lot of them were suspicious, but I think we got the message across: we're paying attention. Some hideous shit has happened, but we're not about to let it happen again. A couple of reporters are already slamming us for closing the stable door after the horse has bolted, but I don't think we are. We've just started paying attention to something we weren't before, and we're doing it for the good of everyone.

Today, the streets became just that little bit safer for people who spend their lives on them. That's a good thing. It's something I can point to and say, "I was a part of that."

## CONCLUSIONS

Nov. 26th, 2008 at 23:05 PM

Status: Protected

I think back to what happened and I still don't know what was going on, not properly. I was too caught up with stopping the strange operations in that basement that I didn't devote enough time to figuring out what was actually happening.

Some people will look at the scraps of evidence I've gathered and conclude that the Doctors were some kind of alien creature. After all, they had such control over human bodies, and they could just remove fully half of a man's body. Couple that with the lack of traces when they dumped the first body, and there you

go. That ties in with the strange technology they're using, and the way nobody got a good look at them. But how would alien creatures know enough about human biology to make such precise alterations? And if they could change us like that, why would they need to perform surgery in the first place?

Of course, it could be that the strange technology — the silver spheres, the weird fluids, all that kind of stuff — is alien in origin, but the Doctors are just regular doctors. If that's the case, where'd they find this stuff? It's not like we're close to Roswell. More than just finding it, how did they work out how to use the strange devices, and what other tools do they have that can part human flesh without leaving scars? Who else knows about them, and was happy to let them just carry on abusing people?

It's obvious that someone knew about the Doctors, someone with enough connections to have my own precinct investigate me — the people I work with, not Internal Affairs, which really hurts. That implies pull at the highest levels, yet someone was able to get me those leaked reports. That means the informant's either part of the same conspiracy, or working against them and able to get their own internal documents…

You know, the hell with this. Yes. There's a conspiracy. I'm not going to wreck my brain trying to make every piece fit. I've got some ideas, and they're good enough for me.

Lost in the world
between worlds
Can you hear me?

CASE FILE HRG 00016

# THELEME AND MAMAN

| CONTENTS | DATE RECEIVED | TO WHOM FORWARDED | DATE FORWARDED | REFERENCE NUMBER | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|



# THE CHEVALIER THÉLÈME:



# CHARLATAN OR MASTER OF MAGIC?

The 18th century was a time of adventurers, heroes, charlatans and mystics. Giuseppe Balsamo, better known as the Count of Cagliostro, was all of these. Entering Parisian Society in the last gasp of the pre-Revolutionary order, Cagliostro ran séances, performed miraculous healings and created magical drugs and aphrodisiacs through the power of alchemy. But most significantly of all, Cagliostro claimed to know both the Comte de Saint-Germain and the even more mysterious Chevalier Thélème.

Whole books have been written about the Comte de Saint-Germain, and much has been made of his alleged immortality, magical powers and magnetic personality. But what of the Chevalier Thélème? Over time, the two fig-

*I am off in search of a great perhaps.*
*–last words of Francois Rabelais*

ures have often been confused and conflated. But the differences are striking. Saint-Germain freely told the people he was immortal, and claimed magical powers. The Chevalier Thélème never claimed anything about himself. The Comte de Saint-Germain frequently offered to reveal the secrets of a dozen Masonic Orders and Rosicrucian Societies. A man claiming to be Saint-Germain even appeared on TV in the 1980s, although little came of it. But the Chevalier Thélème never claimed to be part of any order, nor did he pretend to the glamour of the more famous "secret" societies.

Both men are reputed to be both immortal and ancient, but while the Comte de Saint-Germain always appears as a man of between 30 and 40, the Chevalier Thélème ages: once he appeared as a young man, and in the more recent sightings of him, he has been quite old. Writers have compared both the Comte de Saint-Germain and the Chevalier Thélème to Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew, who, according to myth, spat on Christ on the road to Calvary, and was hence cursed by God to wander for eternity. While the flamboyant and bombastic Saint-Germain seems ill fitted to the role of the eternally guilty Wandering Jew, the Chevalier Thélème seems to be a far better candidate for that figure: always traveling, always seeming to have something to atone for. Saint-Germain claimed to have been alive since at least the time of the Council of Nicaea, but no proof could be found that he lived at all before the 17th century at the very earliest. On the other hand, we can with certainty pin down the movements of the Chevalier Thélème, who has never made any claims of great age, to a very specific date. On August 24th, St. Bartholomew's Eve of 1572, King Charles of France ordered the massacre of the Huguenots (Protestants) of France, under the instigation of his mother, Catherine de' Medici. A history of the time reports that in the midst of the chaos, a number of Protestant families received the protection of one Chevalier Thélème, who is described as "a man older in years than his face presents."



*Cartiphilus, the Wandering Jew by Gustav Dore*

PT: You're recording this.

SD: How do you —

PT: I've been playing this game a lot longer than you. A lot longer.

SD: Uh. Do you —

PT: No. It's not like you're going to be able to broadcast it on the TV, now, are you?

SD: But surely, what with the government after you —

PT: So you're working for the government now?

SD: No.

PT: I think maybe you are. Only you don't know it. Anyway. You're not the only person recording this.



**Specific Targets, #207:**

## MR. THELEME

**Description:** Appears as Caucasian (French nationality), 1.65 m tall, 63.5 kg, graying hair with prominent widow's peak, age approximately 50–60.

**Observed Abilities:** Has been observed to summon at least one EDE on a repeated basis; apparent control over emotions of a limited kind; ability to sense hostile intent; apparent conditional immortality.

**Previous Contact:** (1984) Altercation with Field Projects agents during skirmish with hostile lycanthropic manifestation; according to Field Commander, target attacked FPD group without provocation. (1997) Target gained access to facility and destroyed essential medical research material and notes to a value of $107,000,000 US.

**Other Information:** The target's real name is unknown. Evidence suggests that target has been active since the 18th century. The Board of Directors would value any information on how to retrieve this individual, and any information toward a study of his capabilities, some of which are unfamiliar to us.

**Action:** On identification of this individual, contact your nearest headquarters immediately with your location and numbers, and take immediate steps toward securing him. *Do not,* under any circumstances, engage the target in any kind of conversation.

**SUSAN:** So I was out the other night, and I was checking out this bar. The thing you do where you pretend you're looking for a pickup, and you spot the bloodsucker, and you hit on him, and he thinks, easy feeding, and takes you to one side and you whack him.

Yeah, I know. Not a lot to live for. But it works. They're not expecting it. The only ones who check out bard, anyway, are the ones who aren't too nasty. The really scary ones don't need to hunt. The prey gets brought to them. At least, that's what Mr. Thélème said. So I suppose I was lucky.

Because this is about Mr. Thélème.

PT: Have you ever heard of Project: TWILIGHT?

SD: No. Should I have?

PT: Not if they've been on form, no.

SD: And they are — ?

PT: It's the American government. They're listening right now.

SD: They're what?

PT: They're recording this conversation.

SD: Don't be —

PT: Look.

SD: What are you —

PT: Look.

SD: What's that?

PT: It's a wire. They've been listening to you for some time. Say hello.

SD: They've been listening to me?

PT: It's why I'm not so bothered about you recording me. Everybody wants to record me. It's a fact of life.

SD: But aren't you worried about them catching us?

PT: Not particularly. You are useful to them.

SD: Sorry?

PT: They are interested in the same things that you are. Have you ever wondered why you've been finding it so easy lately to find information about… those things in which you are interested?

SD: How do you know that?

PT: Because this is how they always do things. And this is why I know that it is they who listen to you now. They are an organization controlled by the government. And do you know what that means?

SD: No.

PT: They have budget constraints.

SD: Wait. What?

PT: They cannot afford to go chasing after monsters themselves, so they say to themselves, we know this woman is interested in finding monsters, so we will give her the means to find her monsters, and we will let her do the hard work, and maybe we will swoop in if she finds anything in which we are interested.

SD: They helped me find you.

PT: They want to catch me again.

SD: They caught you?

PT: Once.

SD: What happened.

PT: Better not to say here. They are not happy that they do not still have me.

SD: Aren't you worried they — whoever they are — might catch you again?

PT: You're doing a remarkably good job of talking me out of this interview. Are you sure you want to talk?

SD. Um. Do you?

PT: I don't mind. I reached the point where I just want someone with whom I can speak.

SD: You're lonely.

PT: I'm a little fed up with solitude. It is a matter of degree.

SD: Right. Okay. So I suppose we should —

PT: Why not?

SD: Yeah. So. I want to ask you something.

PT: Ask away. I am here.

SD: I want to know about your Maman.

SUSAN: People have been hunting monsters for a very long time, you know. And for, like, hundreds of years, this one guy pops up. Same name, over and over again. Mr. Thélème. I first came across it in a memoir of the French Revolutionary Terror by a man named Louis Giraud-Cajean. I was reading it for a paper. So. Anyway. The author is in prison; a mysterious man who calls himself le Chevalier Thélème shares a cell with him for a few days, and in that time, the Chevalier claims the Terror is partially the doing of witches. Then he escapes, without the author ever really knowing how.

ORCON · NOFORN · EYES ONLY

| PAGE | DTG RELEASER TIME | | | PRECEDENCE | | CLASS | SPECAT | KMD | CIC | ORIG MSG IDENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 OF 03 | DATE TIME | MONTH | YR | ACT | INFO | | | | | |
| | | | | RR | RR | UUUU | | | | 04707307 |

WORK 40401P /insB **Potential Asset** **Category:** Civilian

**Status:** US National / DOB 02/07/80 Boston, MA / Single / Residence [redacted] / Telephone [redacted] / Parents Francis John Doyle (DOB 01/10/49 Anaheim, NY, deceased 07/04/05); Jean Vanessa Doyle née Hughes (DOB 01/29/50 Boston, MA, still resident [REDACTED])

**Physical Statistics:** Caucasian female / height 5'6" / weight 138 lb / hair short; brown or black / eyes brown / other features: spectacles, piercing left nostril, two piercings left ear, one piercing right ear, tattoo butterfly left shoulder

**Education:** High School Central Bucks East 1991-1998; BA, MA French Drexel Univ; post-graduate student, thesis subject: narratology of religious conversion in early Medieval French literature.

**First Contact:** 02/07/07

**Details:** Subject first noticed after series of keyword Internet and library searches, followed by visits to ER 02/10/07 and 02/22/07; political views precluded recruitment but deemed possible target for instrumentalization 02/26/07; information feed level B began 02/28/07; made contact with individual using alias "Mr. Thélème" (see file 00192PS/ACT)

**Action:** Possible means of ensuring re-arrest of target "Thélème"; observe; use equipment.

**Oversight:** TWILIGHT

**Status:** Expendable



And I thought he was interesting, so I started looking in some of the more out-of-the-way stuff. The usual. Sheridan's New Daemonolatrie. Francis' Cornucopia of the Damned. I even had a flip through a collection of Vincent Moon's stories (Moon's pretty interesting: it's basically shitty pulp fiction, like

Lovecraft or the Conan guy, only he gets a lot of details about the things we look for about right, as if he's really familiar with them).

So the Chevalier Thélème? He's in all of them.

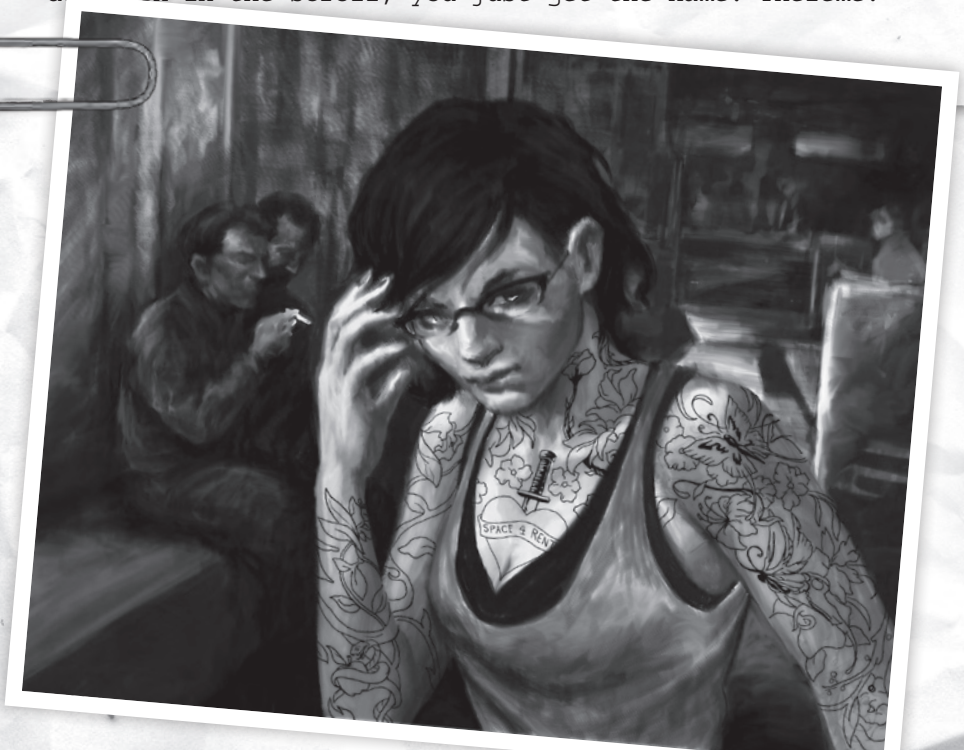
"Thélème" isn't really his name. That's established practically every time. It's more of a nom de guerre. But there's always been this Mr. Thélème — or sometimes he's the Chevalier Thélème — ever since the 16th century, which figures, since that's about the time the name was invented.

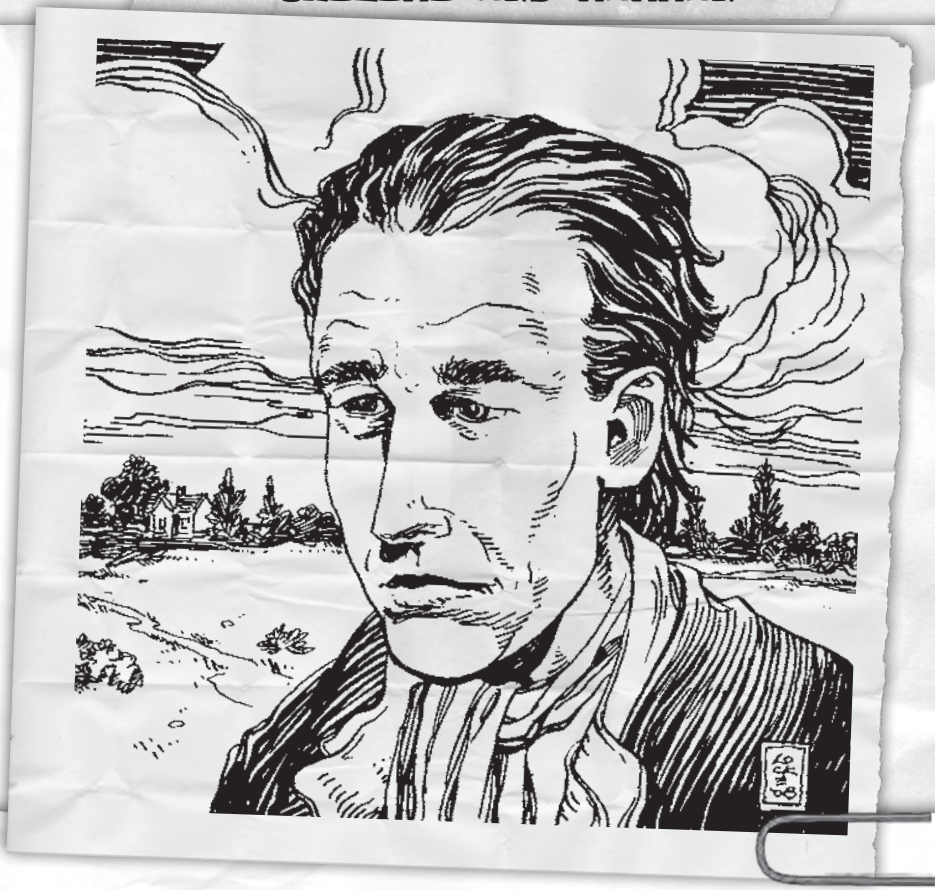
It's from Rabelais. Guy wrote Pantagruel and Gargantua, which is this weird kind of fantasy-satire of French life back in the 16th, only with a bit of philosophy shoehorned in. Pantagruel sets up this kind of community called the Abbey of Thélème, or Thelema, and it works because it's a benevolent anarchy, where everyone gets by because they're all getting on. And the only rule they have is Do what thou wilt, and that shall be the whole of the law.

Which is where Aleister Crowley got it from.

But I digress. The point is that straight out of the pages of Rabelais, this Chevalier Thélème appears, fully formed and grown up, and in whatever document he appears in, he is somehow involved in fighting witches and vampires and werewolves and monsters of every kind you can think of.

I found this engraving from about the time of Louis XIV. It shows this handsome but kind of slight-looking guy with slicked-back black hair — no wig — and these intense dark eyes. And he's smirking at something. He just seems amused. And underneath in the scroll, you just get the name: Thélème.





The question is, are the stories about a real figure? I thought for a while that he was mythical, but after a while, consistent details appeared, details of appearance, or quirks of speech, or things he is reputed to be able to do, points of agreement between documents that cannot possibly have any relation. He appears in a 17th-century Japanese document about the evils of foreigners and a witch-finder's account from the days of the Spanish Inquisition, for example, and in both he supposedly spits fire.

Which suggests a commonality that can only adequately, simply, be explained by the writers having actually met him.

So what? Is he immortal? A couple of "Great Mysteries" books from the 1970s and 1980s say so, but they're the kinds of books that aren't really referenced, and you can't trace the provenance of any of the stories beyond another very similar book of the same kind.

For a while, the most obvious answer seemed to me to be that it's some kind of hereditary title. Every generation has a crazy French magician carrying the name, who hunts monsters. And maybe he passes it on. To family, or friends. Or maybe to some sort of organization. Maybe they take turns.

But — and this is crazy, but you have to bear with me — I don't think it is.

Because if you put all the references to his appearances in some sort of chronological order, there's this one fact that no one makes much of. He gets older. Sixteenth-century references have him as a really young man. Early 20s. By the beginning of the 18th century — time of the engraving — he's in his mid- to late 30s.

He's in his late 40s by the time he supposedly meets Karl Marx in London and defeats some kind of patrician vampire with him.

And the most recent references to him I found, which come from the 1980s, describe him as a man of about 60. It doesn't make sense that a hereditary title would pass each time to an older guy.

I think it's the one guy. Just him. And he's not immortal. But he is really old. But still, very, very slowly, getting older.

I know. It's crazy.

And I mean, when it came to me, I went, nah, but something happened. I was looking for more stuff, and you know how sometimes you click on something and think you're going to get one thing, and you get something else? So I clicked on something, and suddenly I'm downloading this PDF and I'm about to close it, and then I just glance at it. And I realize that actually, it's about the Chevalier Thélème. As far as I can tell, it's by the Chevalier Thélème. It's this scan of some Victorian book — huge file — and it's the autobiography of the Chevalier Thélème, from about the 14th century right through to the 18th. It's his autobiography. Somehow I clicked on the wrong link, and here he is. Right in front of my eyes.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


I

My nativity — The absence of my mother — The solicitude of my father — An idyllic childhood — Adolescent nightmares — Misunderstandings with the clergy — The discovery of my true heritage — My first meeting with Maman — My meeting with the Lady Lucifuge — I abandon my name 1

II

The expulsion of the Jews — A family in need — The beauty and grace of Cecile — Cecile and I fall in love — Cecile is taken — The failed rescue — A decision — I go to war — Jeanne D'Arc and her visions — Gilles de Rais — The campaign ends in disaster — I condemn an innocent, unawares — My regrets 33

**III** 71

The sojourn in Spain — Times change — My people, persecuted once more — The evils of the Inquisition — The fanaticism of Isabella and Ferdinand — Torquemada — Badajoz — How Alphonso Romero was called the Butcher — I am captured — I am tortured — I escape — Justice is served — I remain and defend my people

**IV** 111

My return to France — A chance meeting with Rabelais — *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* and I — Conversation with François — I adopt a new name — "Do as thou wilt" — The Huguenots — The Massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day — My escape — I encounter Maman — I quit France once more

**V** 157

The Journey to the East — Cossack Trust — The Hetman's friend — Dead men on the shores of the Dnieper — The Starving God — Khorasan — Battles with the Uzbek Covey — Pursuit — I am left for dead — Franz — Reckoning — The crossing to India

**VI** 189

The wonders of the Mughals — The wedding of Shah Jehan — An assassination attempt — Were-monkeys — Death of a Queen — The madness of the Shah — The journey to the Himalayas — Lhasa — the hidden cities — Shambhalla — Agharti — The Dark Masters — My escape

**VI** 213

The Rulers of the Qing — An audience with Kangxi — The Emperor's witch-hunter — The Dutchmen and their vessel — Closed Japan — Trespass on the grounds of the Shogun — The Oni — The mob — The passage across the Pacific — A visit from Maman

**VIII** 253

The return to France — Society — The Sun-King and his court — Great Lords and Ladies — Poverty — Ignorance — The Demoiselle DeFay and the Duc D'Assame — A betrayal and a duel — The Community of the Dead — Their mores — Their crimes — How I obtain my reputation

**IX** 299

A diplomat — London — The guide to whores — The killer on the Isle of Dogs — The Beast of Shoreditch — The Foibles of Royalty — On Andrew the Tanner and Elizabeth Sheridan — An unholy bargain — The Tanner escapes — the return to France — A conversation with Maman — Goodbye to Versailles — Life as a peasant — The stirrings of revolution — The Angel of Hysteria — Citizen Robespierre — Witchcraft over the masses — The Terror — Imprisonment engineered — The fall of the Angel — The end of the Terror — To Russia

**X.** 341

The Ikon of Betrayal — The dead and the dying — Man-eaters and blood-drinkers — The killer borne out of poverty — The killer as a prince — The Cainite Heresy — Pursued across the Rhine — Wars and princes — The Madman — London once more — Marx and Engels — The Coming Race — The Dictator of the Proletariat and his knife — Franco-Prussian Wars — Bismarck and the Friends of Hell — Realpolitik — A warning from Maman — I endure

PT: They let you read the book, I take it.
SD: I have a copy.
PT: They always do that.
SD: They've done it before?
PT: Yes. You're not the first.
SD: What happened to them?
[pause]
SD: It didn't go so well. They didn't —
PT: I am not safe to know.
SD: Did you — ?
PT: No.
[pause]
PT: I wouldn't do such a thing.
[pause]
PT: I'm not a monster.
SD: I see.

ORCON · NOFORN · EYES ONLY

Gregory Newman - PSENE, London, 1756.
Elizabeth Talbot - Serial Murderer, London, 1756.
John Graham - Serial Murderer, London 1756.
Huillame Roux - PSENE, Paris 1766.
Georgette Lis - PSENE, Alsace 1777.
Victor Brein - PSENE, Paris 1786.
David Brein - PSENE, Paris 1789.
Jean Vieille - Revolutionary Committee, 1791.
Louis Cajean-Giraud - N/A
Dominique Belleville - PSENE, Paris, 1794.
Roman Delisle - EDE, Ukraine, 1833
Karl Marx - N/A
Frederic Engels - N/A
Gregor Hecht - Serial Murderer, Paris, 1870.
Hans Niekerk - PSENE, Sumatra, 1909.
Karl van Moerik Broekman - PSENE, Sumatra, 1909.
William Semeijns de Vries van Doesburgh - PSENE, Sumatra, 1909.
Luc Piaget - EDE, Ardennes, 1914.
Aleister Crowley - N/A
Leah Hirsig - N/A

ORCON · NOFORN · EYES ONLY

| PAGE | DTG RELEASER TIME | | | PRECEDENCE | | CLASS | | | | ORIG-MSG IDENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DATE TIME | MONTH | YR | ACT | INFO | | | | | |
| 01 OF 03 | | | | RR | RR | UUUU | | | | 0470730Z |
| DCGN | | | | | | | | | | |

Eva Spiegelmann - Serial Murderer, Berlin, 1933.
Rudolf Hess - N/A
Henry Newman, Jr. - Conspiracy, Berlin, 1945.
Sergei Krasny - Conspiracy, Berlin, 1945.
James Grant - Conspiracy, Berlin, 1945.
Martin Thompson - Rats, London, 1952.
Terence Biddington - Rats, London, 1952.
Christopher Stacey - Rats, London, 1952.
Jennifer Cavill - Rats, London, 1952.
Rachel Campbell - Rats, London, 1952.
John Lennon - N/A
Janice Jones - EDE, London, 1970.
Gerald Horsley - N/A.
Andrew Scott - EDE, Chicago, 1974.
Robert Beattie - PSENE, Los Angeles, 1976.
José Herrera - Conspiracy, Madison WI, 1984.
Carissa Byers - EDE/Hybrid, Boston, 1997.
Amir Khan - PSENE, New York, 2001.
Matthew Gardner - TFV/PT, Washington, 2003.
Susan Doyle - Undetermined.

SUSAN: It happened again. I got this ZIP file somehow through the web. Same way as before. Clicked on one thing, ended up with a prompt asking me if I want to download THELEMEdotzip. Bit file.

So it had some text documents. Some official government thing. The agency crest all blanked out. And it was a file about Mr. Thélème.

It had a folder of images. One has him surrounded by a group of soldiers in First World War dress. And there's one of him with some men in Nazi dress. A group of ordinary-looking men and women from what must be the 1960s or 1970s with him in the middle of it. One of them had him standing next to John Lennon.




He
was in Berlin when
they liberated it from the Nazis. He was
trying to keep people from getting hold of something —
the file doesn't say what it was.

As far as I can make out, there was something a lot of people wanted, and he didn't let any of them get it. He destroyed it. Made sure it was blown up. And a lot of people died.

And there was this expedition to this jungle in Sumatra in 1909. He went looking for some lost tribe with this group of Dutch guys, and none of them got out except him.

He was in London in the 1950s. He led six people into a cellar. He was the only one who came out.



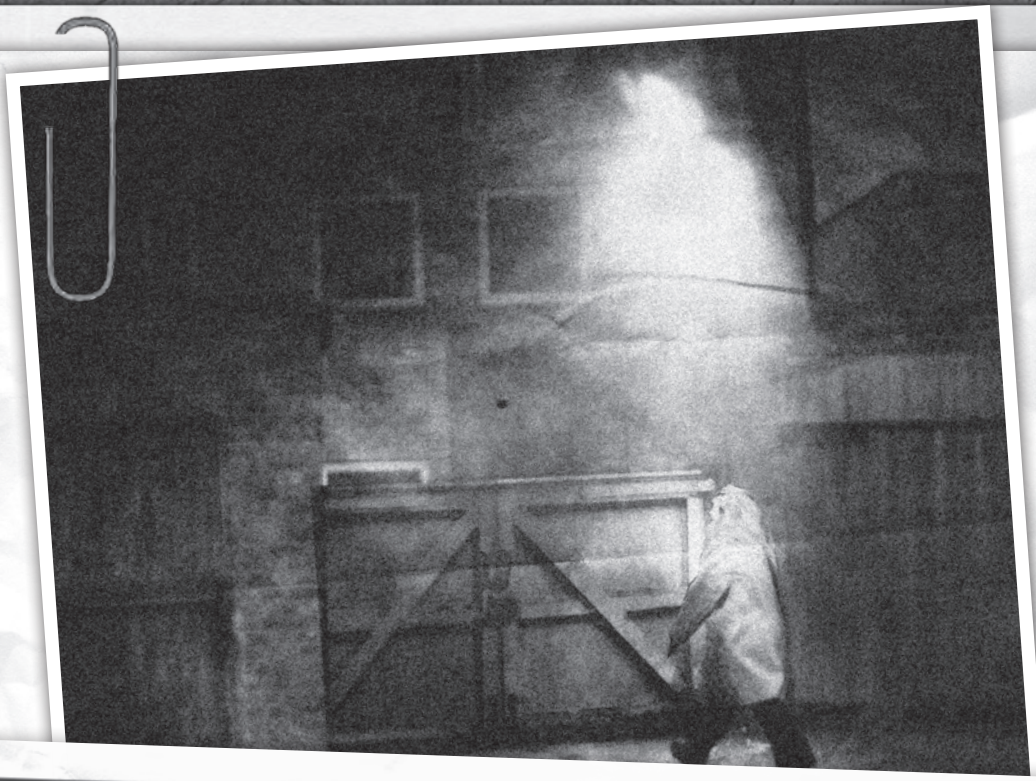
They think he talked or intimidated Rudolf Hess into jumping ship during the Second World War and flying to Britain to try and make peace. He was in Aleister Crowley's Abbey of Thelema in the 1920s.

And whoever made this folder caught him. Back in 2003. They sent him somewhere like Guantanamo or somewhere like that. Orange jumpsuits. Waterboarding. And they tortured him. And then, when he felt like it, he made the guy in charge go mad, and then just walked out. Just like that. And the file doesn't say it, but I think they didn't catch him. *He* caught *them.*

But the file is incomplete. It's full of questions and gaps. And it's not always stuff they've hidden or redacted, although there's some of that. It's things they genuinely don't know. And there's this one thing they just don't mention at all. His book brings it up over and over again, this one enemy he meets again and again over hundreds of years. It's as if they didn't even think of it.

But right at the very bottom of the list of files, there was this tiny Quicktime video. Like, I opened it, and it was maybe a couple inches wide on my screen. It had a date and time stamp in the corner — like it was taken on a digital camera. I could just about make it out: it had happened two days before I was watching it. It was, like, about 10 seconds long. It showed this little, thin old guy with a big nose and hair in a widow's peak. And he was just walking down the street and walking into a house. Just unlocking the door and walking in. The guy in the video looked like an older version of the man in the engraving. And then it dawned on me that I knew the street. It's here in Philly. And it was, like, three blocks away.

So I hopped in my car and waited outside his house, and staked the place out.



ORCON · NOFORN · EYES ONLY

| PAGE | DTG RELEASER TIME | | | PRECEDENCE | | CLASS | SPECAT | KMD | CHC | ORIG MSG IDENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DATE TIME | MONTH | YR | ACT | INFO | | | | | |
| 01 OF 03 | | | | RR | RR | UUUU | | | | 04707302 |
| HDQTR | | | | | | | | | | |

CDW 02/06/07 01.26.13: Sir? She bit. She's checking out the place now.

HDI 02/06/07 01.26.14: Well. Okay, then. You have the equipment set up?

CDW 02/06/07 01.26.17: Got it in yesterday.

HDI 02/06/07 01.26.20: Keep the op running to plan. Don't waste too much time before you move, though.

CDW 02/06/07 01.26.25: Yes, sir. I'm confident we're finally going to nail the bastard this time.

HDI 02/06/07 01.26.33: Don't pre-empt yourself. He's more dangerous than you think.

CDW 02/06/07 01.26.42: I've read the file, sir.

HDI 02/06/07 01.26.55: Then you know getting him isn't the problem. Don't make the mistake Hemingway made.

CDW 02/06/07 01.27.02: I understand, sir.

HDI 02/06/07 01.27.04: If you want to get to the end of this, you should.

SUSAN: I think I was there all night. I fell asleep. And then something started thumping the side of my automobile. I didn't know what it was. I woke up. And it was huge, and hairy and panting like a motorcycle engine. Like an enormous dog. Biggest dog I have ever seen. And it was ramming the other side of the car. And I didn't understand what it was doing for a minute, and then it hit the car so hard I could see the automobile door cave in from the inside. Like someone hit it with a jackhammer. And the automobile slid across the road and ended up across the road. I think I lost it about then.

I was screaming and trying to get out of the other side of the car and I don't know what I was doing. I haven't a clue. There was this thing outside trying to open the automobile up like a tin can and I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I completely fell apart. I didn't even notice when it stopped. I mean, it must have been over pretty quickly, but I was screaming for God knows how long.

There was a light tapping on my window. The thumping, the heavy breathing, all gone, just a finger tapping at the window. So I stopped screaming and straightened myself up. Patted my hair, pulled down the hem of my sweater and took a few breaths. And the tapping started again.

And I took another breath, and rolled down the window, and here he is, leaning in, saying, "Are you all right, mademoiselle?" And I nodded and then I looked at him, and I think I said his name, and then he asked me why I had been watching his house. And I told him. And he walked me home.

SD: You keep talking about her in the book.

PT: It is true. I have met her perhaps half a dozen times, and each time has been significant. She has been with me for my entire life.

SD: How did you find out?

PT: Pardon?

SD: You never say how you knew who she was. In the book. You just say she was there, and she met you, and she tried to kill you.

PT: Yes. I remember. Sometimes I wish it had never been written. And yet. Do you know, no one has ever asked me about her before.

SD: So?

PT: It was my father.

SD: He told you?

PT: No. Not at all. I was about to reach my 23rd birthday, and although I had had sweethearts in the village, I was unmarried. My father, he was concerned a little about this, but not overly so, for I was not past my prime. My father must have been about 40 then, and had not remarried since my mother had died.

SD: Wait. Your mother was dead?

PT: That's what my father told me. He told me, quite seriously, that my mother had died in childbirth. I think he actually believed it. My father used to leave flowers on her grave. Every year, the day after my birthday. The day she died. I don't think he ever really got over her.

SD: I see.

PT: On the night of my birthday, I went out drinking with some friends. And do you know, I have quite forgotten their names. It is funny how one's memory works, isn't it?

SD: I suppose.

PT: I returned home that night after midnight, in my cups, as the expression goes. Although I have never really been affected particularly badly by alcohol. Which I find somewhat frustrating. I found my father not in his bed. This did not worry me. Often on this night, he would find it hard to sleep. He would go out walking.

[pause]

PT: It was the night the nightmares started.

SD: This is significant…?

PT: I dream of Hell. I am only a man, whatever else I am, and I cannot understand what it truly means, and so I dream of fires and torment and skulls and *memento mori*. I dream of grinning devils. I have had dreams of Hell every night since that night. Every time I sleep.

SD: How long ago was that?

PT: I think you know.

SD: Yeah.

PT: This night, however, I dreamed of my mother, a woman whom I had never known, but who I knew, in that way that you know things in dreams, was my mother. And she was in Hell with the demons.

[pause]

SD: In torment?

PT: No.

[pause]

PT: She seemed to be quite at home. She sat in a wanton gown on a throne built from blood and bones and souls and presided over a thousand slaves, men and women in chains, and in torment because they loved her, they loved her and this was what had brought them to this pass. She did not love them or want them. She humiliated them and punished them. I watched as she singled out a woman and took the form of a man and teased her, and tore the woman limb from limb and rent her soul into a thousand pieces, and gave the pieces to a demon seamstress who sewed the victim back together, and the victim loved her still, and groveled for more. And the others begged my mother to do the same.

[pause]

PT: This is the worst of it: she saw me, and came to me. And she took the form of a woman, and then she took the form of a man, and she or he came to me and tried to seduce me. And promised me power over all of her victims.

SD: And you said no.

PT: No. I willingly acquiesced.

[pause]

PT: It happened so long ago, that dream, and I remember it all. I remember what I did. I remembered how I exulted in it. Because I was like her. And when I had done all those things, she touched my face and we embraced —

[pause]

SD: You did it.

PT: A question for you: if all this happened long before Freud was even conceived, could one call it Freudian? The name presupposes a following, does it not?

[pause]

SD: Well, whatever you call it, it's messed up.

PT: Yes. I think that is true.

[pause]

PT: So I awoke, and I shook. I felt like I had really done those things. And my bedsheets were soiled. But I looked around my little house, and my father had not returned. So I fed and milked the goat and put the sheep out to pasture and had my breakfast, such as it was. All the time, I had a cold, heavy sensation in my stomach, and I loathed myself. I had scrubbed my body hard, and I felt filthy.

SD: It's pretty normal to feel that way after dreaming of things like that.

PT: Perhaps. But the feeling did not, would not go away.

[pause]

PT: I remember that it was getting toward sunset and my father came to find me. As I was bringing the sheep back in. He was agitated. He practically ran to me.

SD: Had something happened?

PT: In a manner of speaking. He told me that he had fallen in love, and was to be married again.

SD: And this was news to you?

PT: It was. I had had no inkling that my father had even looked at a woman since my mother had died. There was me, and there was our little farm. He had neither the time nor the inclination.

SD: Don't you think that's a somewhat shallow understanding?

PT: Yes, but my father was not a man of any great depth.

SD: And yet he clearly grieved deeply for your mother.

PT: Yes. Yes, he did. But it was the only depth he allowed himself.

SD: But now he was going to be married to someone you had presumably never met.

PT: Indeed. I asked him to whom he was betrothed, and he told me her name was Marie, and she was the young widow of a farmer from the next village.

[pause]

PT: Of course, I asked him how he had met her, and what had led to him making a proposal of marriage so swiftly, and he said that he had visited my mother's grave early this year. And this was normal. If the market day or the weather made his visit to the grave inconvenient, he would perhaps be a day early or a day late. As it happened, nothing was unusual. He simply went there a day early on a whim, and there he met the widow, Marie, who had come to lay flowers on the grave of her husband. My father had been struck, he said, with the woman's beauty and piety, and he had spoken to her. Although she was shy and polite, she had returned my father's greetings and they had spoken, and they spent the rest of

the day together, and he walked with her through the night, and they watched the dawn and yet continued to speak. She was a good woman who lived a hard life and had a few meager acres on which she subsisted. It was a perfect match. My father was too old, he said, to be concerned with the business of courtship.

SD: But you were surprised that he was so lovestruck?

PT: It was not like him.

SD: And you had never met her. Didn't that strike you as odd?

PT: These were days in which people would likely live their entire lives in the same village. You would travel 10 miles for market day, and that would be the furthest you would ever go. It was no surprise if my father had never met her.

SD: But you did meet her.

PT: I did. The very next day, he took our horse and cart and went to sell her land for a dowry and brought her back to our home with every possession she had. And I saw her, and I cannot describe the horror that seized me as I saw her.

SD: She was the woman from your dream. Your mother.

PT: She was. Younger than I, yes. She was dressed in a peasant's gown, and her hair had no golden ornaments and oils, and no paint was on her face, and no rings were on her fingers. You could see the dirt under her fingers and the marks of the sun on her face. But she was young, and she was beautiful, and she was, in every respect, the one with whom I had performed an abomination in dreams. Maman. My Maman. Come back to me, and marrying my father once more, and him all unawares.

SD: But you didn't tell him that. You couldn't have.

PT: I did not. What was I to think? I was a peasant and a good Catholic, and I believed then in God and the Devil and the power of dreams. But she could not be the woman from the dream. She could not be. I was deceived by Satan. That had to be it. And what could I say to him? That this was my mother, and that she had returned from Hell after I had tupped her in a dream? I did not even know if I had dreamed that, or if I had fooled myself into thinking her to be my Maman. I bowed to her and smiled, and told her that I was now her son, and my father's fiancée curtsied to me and smiled, and looked at me with eyes of green that I remembered so very clearly from my dream. And she told me that I must call her Maman.

SD: And they were married?

PT: They were. We built a cottage nearby, where I could live now that my father shared a bed with Maman. And my father was filled with joy and love, and his new wife was devoted and kind. But I was not happy, for every night I dreamed of the Hell of which the priests had always taught me. And at times, I dreamed of Maman, as the demon, sometimes man, sometimes woman, wanton and gleeful. I did not tell my priest-confessor these things. I went to confession, and told him when I had been lazy, or when I had been angry. But I told the story of my dreams to no one. And slowly, I began to think that God was absent from our home.

[pause]

SD: She was, wasn't she? Your mother, I mean. I mean, it's all so unbelievable, but here you are, 700 years old and talking to me. It's bizarre. Nothing seems logical anymore.

PT: [laughs] Logic is overrated, mademoiselle. But yes, Maman was now my mother twice over, and each dream brought it back to me. And more. When my

father was not present, she was cruel. I saw her torturing a sparrow once, for no other reason than its slow death pleased her. She would kick our old sheepdog, which cowered when she entered the room. And sometimes, she would go out and slice ears or slit noses or cut squares of skin and wool from the sheep. My father would see our mutilated sheep and curse the evil ruffians who had done this, and Maman would nod and curse the culprit with him, and he would never know that it was she who had done this.

[pause]

PT: It soon became apparent to me that she wanted me to see these things. And more. She was trying to seduce me. She would walk past, even while my father was in the room, and brush her hand across mine, or touch my hair, or my rump. She knew the effect these things had on me. And sometimes, she would say a word or refer to some event, and I would know that she knew what I had dreamed on the night before.

SD: You wanted her.

PT: I did. But at the same time, I was consumed with horror. She was my Maman, and she was my father's new wife. I would cuckold my own father with my mother. And the thought revolted me. And excited me.

[pause]

PT: And as things got worse, I realized that she had absolute power over our family.

SD: And of course, you couldn't tell him what she was doing. Which is, presumably, why she never hid these things from you.



PT: That is correct. And more. He seemed unable to see the things in front of his eyes, how the house grew dirty and filled with cobwebs, and the meager, foul nature of the food she gave us, and how she would laugh behind her hand when she went with us to Mass. She had put some sort of enchantment on him.

SD: It couldn't have lasted.

PT: No.

SD: You acted.

PT: I did.

SD: What did you do?

PT: I decided that my life did not matter. I was wretched and worthless. I would murder Maman and throw myself on the mercy of the Church, and they would, of course, not show mercy, but I would repent and go to my death with joy.

[pause]

PT: I took the largest of my father's knives and crept at night to the family cottage, that I would kill her while my father slept.

SD: Did you go through with it?

PT: No. Lights shone inside the cottage. But it was not candlelight. It changed color. Like some green or blue flame blazed inside. But I could feel no heat. And the sounds were not the sounds of burning. I could hear voices. Screaming.

[pause]

PT: I remember standing with my back to the wall of my father's cottage, the home of my childhood and youth, with the door on one side of me, listening to the cries and groans of men and women in torture, and worse, asking to be tortured and abused, and the honey-sweet voice of Maman sneering at their weakness. I reached for the door — it was not barred — and flung it open, and stepped inside. The cottage was vast inside now, and made of rough-hewn stone. Winged devils flew around the high ceiling. On a throne carved from bone and blood and souls, Maman reclined naked but for gold and paint, one leg draped over one armrest of the throne, the other stretched out and covered in filth and excrement, and there was my father, naked and collared like a slave, being directed to lick the foulness from her toes, one by one. Other slaves, men and women, looked on in envy at the humiliation of my father. Maman looked up and smiled at me, and invited me in.

[pause]

SD: Like your dream.

PT: Like my dream.

SD: And was it —

PT: No. It was not the same. She kicked my father to one side, casually, viciously, and he crumpled, and mewed, obscenely, like a cat. And she came to me, and caressed me, and placed her hand on my manhood. She told me that the chained wretches around her were her prey. She had returned for my father, as she had always intended to. She had pretended to die, and she had flown from an empty grave. She had allowed him to endure without her because of me. Because I was her only son, and I could be her daughter, and her lover as well, because this was why she had come to my father as a woman and had allowed him to father a child in her. And then, she invited me to use my knife on my father.

SD: And you didn't.



PT: No. I raised the knife and stabbed it into the soft flesh under her chin, up into her skull. And her eyes grew wide and flashed with rage. And she wrested my hand from the knife handle and pulled it out of her chin. There was no blood. I never saw her bleed. And then she brandished it at me, and the next I knew, I was wrestling her for the knife, and she was a woman, and she was a man, and she was something else I must not name. And I fought and fought, and then the sun rose, and the last I knew was the sight of her eyes as she bore me to the ground.

[pause]

PT: I awoke on the bare stone floor of my father's cottage later that morning. A small face was looking down at me, with malevolent little eyes of yellow. Like an imp from an engraving. Scaly skin and horns and a hooked nose and chin and tiny wings like a bat, too small to carry him in flight. Ready to strangle the thing, I sat up, but he cowered. I spoke to him, and he replied. After the initial revulsion had passed, I held a conversation with him, of sorts. Devils have rules, you see. I could not harm Maman, because I was her son. And likewise, he had been left behind when her realm abandoned this place forever. He was bound to the blood of his mistress.

SD: And he was bound to you?

PT: Yes. Whether I wanted him to be or not. I never got rid of him, and sometimes he proved useful to me. I called him Franz.

SD: You still have your own private demon?

PT: He never leaves me.

SD: He's here now?

PT: He is.

SD: Can I — ?

PT: Yes. Franz?

[pause]

SD: Holy shit.

[pause]

PT: That's enough, thank you, Franz. You can go now.

[pause]

SD: Holy shit.

PT: As you said.

[pause]

PT: Devils have rules, Susan. And here is the grandest irony of my existence: the rules tie my hands. I held her off until dawn, and that is why she left me then, not for any other reason. She has returned to me on several occasions. I have a talent for the detection of sin, but Maman I never expect, never notice until she is upon me. I have killed so many monstrous things. But the one thing that I can never bring to harm, the one thing that will plague me until some other hand ends her life or mine, is dear Maman.

SD: You have never doubted that she is your mother?

PT: Never once. You know, I take it, what a succubus or an incubus is.

SD: Yeah.

PT: My mother is part of the breed that gave birth to legends. I think of her as female because when she gave birth to me, she took the part of my mother, but creatures like her are beyond such things as sex. They appear as people expect them to. With brimstone and fire or different kinds, and winged imps and chains, if necessary. But the torment they create goes beyond simple myths. There are many different hells. And my mother and her ilk embody all of them. Maman is not, I think, really what one might even think of as a "person." She is an elemental force, beyond such things as gender. She is desire personified and twisted into the unhealthiest of shapes. She appears, when she wishes, as the thing of which you are most ashamed, although human bodies are mere vehicles for her. She is the only thing of which I am truly afraid.

SD: Because she'll kill you.

PT: No. Because she'll make me join her.

had warned me that I would [illegible] that the Ikon would offer some manner of protection against the eternal terror afforded by dear Maman. What value should I apply to the word of a dead man? What can a vampyre tell to a man who has experienced, if not true immortality, a truer immortality than the un-dead, a man who has truly lived, rather than simply continued to exist, for an epoch akin to the earliest Patriarchs of Genesis?

Alas! It was not to be.

Without even taking time to rest or sleep, I repaired with all the goods I could carry to the docks, and there I was fortunate to engage a swift ship for Calais, which was due to leave that very morning, thanks to a Captain who attached no shame to the receipt of financial incentives.

The weather, I recall, was fine and bright, and the sea was calm, and as I stood on the deck, taking in the embracing sea air, I found myself engaged in conversation — so I thought — with a charming young lady of good family.

She was, she said, due for Paris, where she had been sent to take up a post as a lady's maid in one of the larger salons. Of course, I was not unfamiliar with Versailles, and instructed her — to her amusement, I might add — on some of the more arcane customs and etiquettes of Louis' court.

One would have thought it a moment of gentle bonhomie, but alas! It was not to be. The young lady, while regaling me with some charming detail of the spring festival in her home, Weston Super-Mare, halted in mid-sentence and convulsed, as if epileptic.

I caught her and held her until she opened her eyes; and those eyes, which had been brown, were

317

green, the gre[illegible]
poor girl's body and stepped back, and she [illegible]
example of chivalry!"

"One might consider chivalry to apply solely to women," was my rejoinder.

"Now, now! This is no way to speak to your Maman," she said.

I paused and collected myself. "How, then, shall we play the game this time? For you are not armed, and this poor innocent you have hollowed is vulnerable to my blade in a way that you are not when free. I could dismiss you in a moment."

"Perhaps," she said, "I only wish to talk this time."

"What have we to talk about, Maman?" I replied. The brightness of the morning, the beauty of the sea and the prettiness of the girl served only to emphasize the horror of the creature with whom I conversed.

"We have known each other for an exceptionally long time, my dear boy," said the devil in the girl's body, "and it is perhaps time to let bygones be bygones. We need not run from each other forever, and you must appreciate still the gifts I have given you."

"Were you the one who gave me these gifts? I am hardly alone in this."

"In one respect: you are immortal. Which was always my intention."

I affected boredom, to a degree. "Is it really?" I said, looking out to sea, and resting my chin on my fist, my elbow on the rail of the ship.

"Have you not ever wondered why you endure? You have my blood, dear boy, and it is potent enough that, barring accident or violence, you shall live as long as I do."

"I am sick of life, Maman," I replied. "If destroying you is the key to ending this span, I am all too enthusiastic to take the risk."

318

SUSAN: This goes so much farther than anything I ever expected. The government spooks are following me. They might even be listening to us right now.

God, that sounds so paranoid. But these massive, potent agencies are at play here, the kind that burn so brightly that people like us, like moths, burn to a crisp in seconds of exposure. Earthly agencies and unearthly ones.

You know, the funniest thing is that when I first started coming here, I thought you were all paranoid. Crazy.

I think I'm going mad. I think I've lost every compass I had.

I'm not sure I like it.

SD: It's in PDF format. I managed to print most of it. It's all yours.
[pause]
SD: I'm surprised you don't have a copy yourself. Or even the original manuscript.
PT: Well, there is a quite simple reason for that. I didn't write it.
SD: You didn't —
PT: No. It's a forgery.
SD: But you told me it's all true.
PT: It is. But it is not my autobiography.
SD: How can it not be? I mean, some of the things there are pretty private. A lot of times, you're the only survivor.
PT: I don't know. Perhaps I wrote it in my sleep, *hein?* Or perhaps Maman is in fact always with me, and always knows where I am and what I am thinking, and what I am experiencing. I believe that Maman had it written in some way or another. The mechanics are unimportant. The simple fact is that no other agency knows me so in and out.
[pause]
PT: I think at the time it served as an object lesson.
SD: I'm not sure I want to think about that.
PT: But in situations such as these, it is thinking about these things that save you.
SD: So if she is always with you, if she is always present — you can't have always thought that.
PT: No. It took a long time. Whenever I have any form of respite from the things I hunt, she is present once more. She is there. Leering, and keeping me going. I have considered suicide on many occasions. Do you know that? No. On this, the book is silent.
SD: So why…You know.
PT: Because she has no other children while I am alive. But more importantly and directly, because my life is dependent on hers, while hers is not dependent on mine. If I die, she continues to damn and torment souls. But if I do contrive an end to her existence, I not only end this too-long life of mine, but end hers. I will have won in every way.
SD: Do you think it may happen?
PT: I don't know. I am getting older. I may die anyway. I may live on, growing ever more decrepit. I don't know. I want a solution.
SD: This is why you're talking to me.
PT: I came to this conclusion not long ago: Maman must die. And I cannot do it alone. I need — are you all right?
SD: [coughs, repeatedly]
[sound of breaking glass]
PT: Susan!
[sound of movement]
[thuds]
[scuffles]
SD: I —
PT: Susan?
SD: I don't — I don't — I don't — aah —
PT: Susan!
[long pause]
SD: Dear boy.

SUSAN: Just to say, I'm taking a break for a while. I have things to do.

KEYSTONE PHARMA LLP
A SUBSIDIARY OF THE CHEIRON GROUP

You sonofabitch. Where are the files? We had them for *one week*, Michael, *one week*. They were sitting on my desk. My office is locked with a keypad behind two other doors that are locked with differently coded keypads. Someone wrote a nice little message on my desk calendar, too — that goddamn Sator Square business again. Is this you? Is this your idea of a joke? We hook up *two nights ago* and this is how you repay me? Did you steal my codes — that what this is? If I find out you did this, or that the tip of your little pinky touched this situation somehow, the deal's over. No more funding, no more nothing. We'll bury you.

You're not answering your phone, so call me. ASAFP.

Alicia Mangum,

Alicia Mangum

Senior Associate Director of Biotech
Keystone Pharma, LLP
Division of TCG

Alicia:

You should invest in tighter security, especially with all your secret projects going on around there. Didn't I mention that someone tried to steal the files from us? A couple of different instances, actually. Thankfully, if there's one thing the United States Government does right, it's keeping its information safe.

Regardless, we didn't steal the files back. I don't want them. I have what I need from you now. Sorry they were stolen. If we can help in any way, I'm sure we can spare an agent or two. Maybe Gabreski. You two will like each other.

Not me, though. I'm going to be busy. Don't bother calling. We've changed the numbers.

Michael

# CREDITS

Authors: Rick Chillot, Stephen DiPesa, Howard Wood Ingham, Matt McFarland, Malcolm Sheppard, Stew Wilson

Developer: Chuck Wendig

Creative Director: Richard Thomas

Production Manager: matt milberger

Editor: Scribendi.com

Art Direction and Layout: Mike Chaney

Interior Art: Carlos Samuel Araya, Costas Harritas, Joel Biske, Avery Butterworth, dugnation, Phil Hilliker, Ken Meyer Jr., Kari Christensen, Aaron Acevedo, Juan Antonio Serrano Garcia, & Mike Chaney

Cover Art: Carlos Samuel Araya and Mike Chaney




WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD
SUITE G
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

©2009 CCP hf. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Promethean and Werewolf The Forsaken are registered trademarks of CCP hf. All rights reserved. Mage The Awakening, Vampire The Requiem, Hunter The Vigil, Promethean The Created and Horror Recognition Guide are trademarks of CCP hf.

All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by CCP hf

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

Check out White Wolf online at http://www.white-wolf.com

PRINTED IN THE USA

# GEIST™

## AUGUST 2009




Copyright CCP North America, Inc. All rights reserved.



I don't know what happened to them.

Dead?

Gone?

Can't say.

But this is their record.

These are the things they encountered.

Use it well.

-Michael Moryken,
Task Force: VALKYRIE

This book includes:

- Fifteen encounters from the vantage point of one of Philadelphia's first-tier hunter cells, all revealed as in-game "artifacts" that can be uses as story hooks for Storytellers or as a full-blown prop in your Hunter: The Vigil game.
- Glimpses into the inner workings of some of the compacts and conspiracies such as Null Mysteriis, Network Zero, The Cheiron Group, and Task Force: VALKYRIE.
- A return to Philadelphia, the monstrous City of Brotherly Love.

HUNTER
THE VIGIL

51999
9 781588 463555
978-1-58846-355-5
WW55560 $19.99 U.S.