

The Bloodstained Rabbit

by Sean Kennedy

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For my Father.
A great man
who knew he knew nothing,
except that he lost his youth
in the potholes of a road
that led to nowhere.

Grave breaches to which the preceding articles shall be those involving any of the following acts, if committed against persons or property protected by the convention: Willful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.

-Geneva Convention, Chapter VIII; Article 51

Chapter 1

June 1, 1944

Personal Journal

...It is despairing for me to think of how much money has been wasted in the training of inferior men, while right now we have the capability to breed the ultimate weapon. We must learn to control the Malcuthrad.

- Dr. Hans Verruckt

Doctor Verruckt inspected the final details of the experiment. His lab notes formed a chaotic collage that must have been displeasing to the painted mural of the Fuehrer looking down into the room. The guard dogs barked outside, their echoes crawled through the cracks in the walls, bringing the stench of the camp with them.

Nothing could stop the lingering taint of the camp. One could grow accustomed to the screams of human filth, but never to that odor. The perfume of blood, burnt flesh, and shit clung to everyone and everything. No scrubbing could remove it, no perfume could mask it. It was always there, lurking like a playground rapist.

There was a sharp knock at the door. Bundling his papers, Doctor Verruckt opened the porthole and walked though to the laboratory beyond. The room was often washed by screams. Several pain stained tables stood full of glass equipment and cages that held various vermin. Still more tables were stacked high with bizarre texts and charts taken from the shelves that lined the walls.

One table was bolted down in the center of the room, isolated from the others like a diseased orphan. A young woman laid there, belly swollen with child, naked and crucified with leather straps. A nurse with a scorched spirit had prepared the young mother for the procedure. Her cold eyes had taken the usual vital signs already, deaf to the subject's cries for mercy. She turned as the doctor approached.

"All is ready, Doctor," the nurse said as he began inspecting the piece of meat that he saw before him. The young mother had given up the struggle against her binds. The pleas for her unborn child had been traded for the whispered prayers that now escaped her lips.

Verruckt checked that the numbers inked on the page matched those tattooed on the woman's arm. The experiment had failed in the last five attempts, but a subject in the sixth month of pregnancy could be the answer. He knew the others would fail, but these tests had to be completed to ensure accuracy.

Still silent, Verruckt moved to another table and examined the dull gray apparatus that lay there. It resembled an inverted punch bowl made of dull metal. Rubber coated wires churned like mad serpents about its surface, completing circuits and connecting each piece to the other with telltale crimson patches amongst them. A small reel-to-reel tape recorder was fastened like eyes to the exterior of the device. Two speakers were positioned at opposite sides, pointing to within the bowls hollow.

Verruckt motioned to the nurse, and together they moved the channeling device onto the mother's abdomen and strapped it down over her unborn child. The young mother paused her prayers anticipating pain as she felt the weird thing on her. She looked down only to see the lifeless eyes of the tape reels, and then resumed her prayers with a heightened fervor. The nurse stood watching like an eager student over the doctor's shoulder as he triple checked his apparatus. Then, with a sterile nod, it began.

The young mother stopped praying, fear widening her eyes to the ceiling. Only now would she know which gods had been listening to her prayers. She dared not breathe. She waited for the pain to wash over her, but none came.

Through the electrical hum, the click of the reel-to-reel tape could be heard. A muffled chanting came from the speakers, recorded only for the ears of her unborn child. The young mother waited for what was to come.

The pain began. The room exploded in a shrill wail. Every rat, rabbit, and guinea pig in the lab joined in a screaming choir. It was an unnatural howl, the sound of raw terror. The mother began screaming with the beasts. Her eyes thrashed, searching the ceiling to find any god to help, but none had listened to her prayers.

The air was rotting with forbidden power; the essence of fear now flowed through the room. One of the frenzied lab creatures threw itself against its bars, knocking the wire cage to the floor with a crash. Yet through all of this, Doctor Verruckt stood firm. He observed the experiment, as oblivious to the noise

around him as he was to the wails of the young mother. She was mad with agony, smashing her head against the table. On the fourth blow her head split open, spilling blood across the table and onto the floor. On the fifth blow she vomited blood and flesh across her breasts. It splashed onto her swollen and now pulsing abdomen, carrying a small chunk of meat that had once been her tongue.

Doctor Verruckt moved to her side to observe more closely, it would not be long now. A spitting scream splattered blood across the front of his lab coat; a few drops struck his face unnoticed. The young mother's eyes rolled back as she thrashed in the madness of agony.

A putrid geyser exploded from her crotch, splattering the wall and all things between with a runny slime of blood and flesh. The tissue between her navel and anus now hung in seething ribbons, clinging like spider silk to the wall, tables, and chanting device.

From under the device, within the twisted flesh of her womb, a small underdeveloped face emerged. Its fetal black eyes were wide and tiny lips curled back as it savagely tried to free itself from the mother's tangling intestines. Turning its face, it caught sight of the doctor standing over it. A vicious smile of stolen flesh gawked in pleasure.

The mother moved her jaw as both the fetus and mother spoke in one voice; the voice of Thesmulcar. The doctor had heard it before, it was the true voice of all things within this world and without. Lost to man at the tower of Babel, it now erupted from the two speaking as one while the animals' choir of terror continued around them.

"Malcuthrad come! The masters have returned!"

Doctor Verruckt drew his pistol and fired three shots into the tiny face before him. Not before all movement had stopped, did he calmly turn back to his clipboard and report the experiment's failure. Tucking his clipboard under his arm, he spoke for the first time since entering the room.

"Prepare for the next attempt. Confirm the subject is in the seventh month," he said, and without another word, returned to his office.

Chapter 2

“You don’t know,
what you don’t know,
and it never bothers you.”
-*The Truth*

Deep in space, a mammoth fiery eye explodes around itself in nuclear chaos. The heat and light birthed from this sail through the void and eight minutes later falls upon earth. Weaving its way down through the atmosphere, its rays become the morning sunbeams for the small municipality of Port Kells, British Columbia.

Steve Naylor felt the heat of those same sunbeams on his face, bringing with them the knowledge of a new day. He toyed with the idea of getting out of bed, but the blankets were heavy.

It is best not to rush into these things, he thought, but a sudden weight upon his chest meant the decision was no longer his.

A large white Persian cat delivered a loud resounding purr and a warm wet nose into his master's ear. Steve turned to avoid the foreign feline probe.

“Good morning Sebastian,” he said.

The persistent Persian ignored his thick sarcasm. Another nudge, then another, and finally Steve gave up the fight. Grabbing the cat as he sat up, he looked out on a fuzzy world. He found his glasses on the night table and slid them on to face the morning.

His was a basement suite. A matching couch and loveseat with worn plaid upholstery were cluttered by clothing and books. Bookshelves had sprouted everywhere around the room while existing wall spaces between them were artistically plastered with a collage of posters and magazine articles hiding tan wallpaper.

A woman’s voice came from upstairs. “Steve! Breakfast.”

“I’ll be right there!” he yelled back, startling the cat.

Dropping Sebastian from his lap, Steve worked his way to the edge of his futon to find yesterday’s black jeans and T-shirt. The stiffness of his black socks was a sign that it was time for a new pair, so he got up for cleaner socks as well as a fresh set of boxers from the dresser. With arms full of his fabric booty, he piled into the small downstairs bathroom.

The water felt sharp and clean on his face. With no time to shower, Steve pulled on his clothes, wet his hair, and attempted styling with a fistful of gel. His short brown hair crowned him with natural curls that were always a challenge to deal with. Steve had just turned eighteen on August seventh. A tall wiry frame, and rather sharp features topped with his glasses gave him a look of intelligence. It was that same look that had prevented him from getting dates and made him a target in high school. Steve didn’t mind that his social reputation was less than pleasant. Being a ‘nerd’ had cast him out of the ‘in’ crowd but had given him more time for chemistry, his one true love.

Ever since old Mister Sweatnam accidentally blew up untold dollars worth of lab equipment back in eighth grade, chemistry had become Steve Naylor's religion. He’d amassed no small amount of laboratory supplies and equipment. Some of it he had bought, but most of it he had acquired from the high school storeroom. It was this obsession that had earned him his full scholarship to Lord Thornton University, one of Canada's top universities, where in less than two weeks he would start on his career path.

He dragged an electric razor across his face, then dropped it back into the drawer and hurried himself upstairs. In the dining room, he found the Saturday morning ritual in full swing.

Jack Naylor had donned a hideously blue tracksuit and sat at the kitchen table. The tracksuit was his rebellion against the banker wear he was forced to don each workday. He had been involved with banks all his life and had no idea how chemistry or any science worked, but he was fiercely proud of his son. Now, with his head sunk deep into the newspaper, it could be argued that he might miss a nuclear blast, and certainly his son's entrance.

“Good morning, Steven,” his mother said as she prepared three plates of bacon and eggs. Lorraine Naylor had been a homemaker all her life. She was proud of her profession, and her cooking was a testament to that fact. She had met Steve’s father when she got a job as a teller in the bank he now managed. When they fell in love, she dropped out of the workforce and never looked back

“Morning mom. Morning dad.”

“Mmmmm...” Steve’s father said.

“Worlds on fire dad, I drank some bleach.”

“Mmmmm...”

Steve sat down as his mother placed a steaming breakfast before him and took her seat. She always started the conversation; it was in the Saturday morning psalms somewhere.

"Did you find any boxes for your move?"

"Some..." Steve blurted between mouthfuls of eggs. "But Jerr' said he knew where a bunch were, so I'm not too worried."

"So you're all set then, good."

She hated it. Jack knew how hard this had been for his wife and was listening to the conversation while pretending to read. He folded his newspaper. "So do you have a good idea what the housing situation is going to be like? Do you have a place in mind?"

"Well I've been checking the local papers a bit but there's not much listed for Twillingate. I think we're going to go with what we find once we're there. Besides, I think it's always better to do this kinda' thing in person."

"That doesn't sound like very good planning Steve. This is one of those things you can't wait until the last minute on..." Jack caught himself. His concern was taking a form that he wasn't sure he wanted. He had to learn to let go too. "I'm sure you'll be fine," he said and laid his hand on his son's shoulder. "Besides you're one of the smartest men I know." Steve looked up at such an odd thing for his father to say. Lorain stopped eating knowing how hard it was for Jack to open up. Jack winked at Steve and resumed eating.

"Hey! Guys! C'mon now, it's not like you're never going to see me again. I'm only a few hours away! I'm sure if there's a problem Jerry and I can handle it."

Jack tried again to move the conversation along. "I was just reading a report on how much damage the fire did. The closest it came to any houses was an Indian reserve outside of town, but Twillingate was getting pretty nervous for a while there. Apparently the whole mountain face has been burnt to a cinder. You'll have to send some pictures back."

"Yeah, I'll do that..." Steve was cut off by a car horn outside.

"That'll be Jerr' now," Steve said as he jumped up from the table quickly putting his dishes in the sink.

A badly rusted white Pinto was parked on the street. A black-haired teen with a dirty brown bomber jacket and ripped blue jeans was frantically throwing boxes onto the Naylor's front lawn. Steve thought Jerry's sneakers might fly off, the way he was bounding about.

Jerry noticed his friend watching in disbelief and stopped long enough to strike a pose, showing his Daffy Duck T-shirt and insane smile. Then he leapt back into the car to retrieve the last boxes.

Steve turned to meet his friend outside.

"Is it Jerry?" his mother called through the kitchen.

"Oh yeah. It's classic Jerry."

She wanted to say something else, but Steve vanished down the stairs.

Grabbing his black flight jacket and runners, he threw open the front door only to catch a large cardboard box in the face. The surprise knocked him back more than the box, which he batted down to face a grinning maniac.

"You wanted boxes, you got boxes Stevie-my-boy!"

"Jerry, you're a freak! What the hell are trying to do? Wreck the lawn or what?"

Jerry swiped his tiny round sunglasses away from his face. "Wreck the lawn...with empty cardboard boxes? Now that would be a trick."

Steve shook his head. He tossed the injured box down from the front landing and into his suite. "Well c'mon then, we'd better get those other ones off the lawn before my mom sees."

When the two dropped the last of the boxes down to the cluttered basement floor. Jerry flopped down on the clothing covered couch, looking like a perfect corpse for a matter of moments. He sat back up and gave an exasperated sigh.

"These will do the trick eh?"

"Should," Steve said, sitting down next to a horribly disorganized bookshelf. "I just don't know where to start with all this shit."

Jerry dropped his head in disbelief. "You haven't started packing yet? Are you on glue? Registration starts on Wednesday! One would think a scholarship god like yourself would be able to figure out time management."

"Oh, I got the lab all packed away, it's just all the rest, and we'll get that done today."

Jerry rolled his eyes. "Oh, WE will, will WE?"

"Yes WE will. How about you? I guess you're the model of organization right?"

Jerry let out a snorting laugh. "Yeah! Right! The library got packed, that's about it."

This in itself was no small affair. Although Steve had a more than fair sized collection of books, it was nothing to Jerry's. Jeremiah Slate was without a doubt the biggest bookworm Steve had ever known.

The two had met in their first year of high school and despite their personality differences became fast friends.

At that time Steven was outcast by his school peers because of his intelligence. Jerry had such an outlandish and bizarre sense of humor that he was labeled a weirdo. The only thing Jerry took seriously was history; it fascinated him and he had an extraordinary memory for names and dates.

As Steve was acquiring chemicals and glass beakers, every spare cent that Jerry made went directly into books. Every week his shopping rounds would include six favorite used bookstores where he would hunt his precious printed treasures. All of them, each and every book he bought, were on the history of man. There was something about knowing the origins of culture, deep secrets that waited like dirty diaries of the past; it thrilled him. More than once Jerry's parents had thought that he was an obsessive-compulsive reader, but at least it was something productive.

Neither Steve nor Jerry knew exactly how many books were in The Library. Every time they tried to tally them they always lost count at around two thousand. The Library was their shortened version of their original name for it: *The Complete Unabridged Historical Library Of The Universe And Everything In It*.

Jerry's parents were thrilled that their son wanted to go to university, and were willing to pay the rent for both boys, as long as their grades stayed up. If it wasn't for Steve's constant prodding and tutorials in all of his other classes, Jerry never would have made it out of high school. But he did make it, and since the Slate family was far more financially endowed than Steve's, it was no trouble sending Jerry to the school of his choice. Not to anyone's surprise, that school was Lord Thornton University. They knew that without Steve, Jerry would lose interest in school, so it was a wise investment.

The day passed quickly as the two of them packed Steve's world into cardboard. By four o'clock the majority of clothes and trinkets had been packaged, labeled, and stacked against the entrance wall. Steve had packed his lab into five large trunks and kept them separated from the rest of the pile. The amount of fragile stickers betrayed their value.

Jerry lifted the latest box onto the pile. "OK, that's it! If I don't get out of this basement I'm going to kill everyone in the house. It's ...just...that...simple!"

"Yeah, I think you're right," Steve nodded. "We got the majority of it, you wanna grab some chicken?"

"Sounds good to me." Jerry moved with a newfound energy to grab his coat and headed for the front door. Steve followed close behind, yelling up the stairs, "We're heading out for a bit!" then quickly shut the door behind him so that he wouldn't hear the response.

Jerry turned. "Mine or yours?"

"Let's take the bus," Steve said.

"Sure, I'm easy."

"Yeah, and I want to live." Steve chuckled and disappeared around the side of the house into the two-car garage. The garage door opened, letting Steve drive out the 1970 Volkswagen Van. Like everything else Steven owned, this too was black. That is, except for the very rear of the bus, where the two had painted a large biohazard contaminated waste symbol in the brightest orange they could find. He had bought the bus for two hundred dollars, and after an additional eight hundred it turned out to be not a bad investment.

Jerry swung himself into the van, slamming the door behind him, greeted by the familiar musty smell. "And just exactly what is wrong with my Pinto?" he said.

"Jerry, I want you to think very carefully about that, and then you get back to me on that one, okay?" Steve said as the van lurched into motion.

In Port Kells, Auntie M's had cornered the chicken market. The 1950's style diner with its tan booths and brightly colored tables had the ice cream and burger market cornered as well. It was central to everything in town, including the lives of Steve and Jerry. The two swung the glass door open and strolled in.

"Hey, I thought you guys were gone," a pudgy, balding man called from his post by the till.

Jerry flashed his wild smile. "Not yet Leon, you still got us for another couple days. Give us two specials and some Dr. Pepper please."

Leon raised his hand and relayed the order through the small window behind him. Steve took their usual booth and sat back in the worn vinyl seat. He looked at the various Norman Rockwell prints littered along the wall over the chessboard wallpaper feeling an uncertain twinge within him.

"Y'know something, Steve, I'm really gonna miss this joint," Jerry said, interrupting his thoughts.

"Yeah, I was just thinking that. But I'm sure they got something like this in Twillingate."

"Probably. What do you know about Twillingate anyway?"

Steve cocked his head. "Well, I know they had a forest fire outside of town, I know they got a University there, and that we're going to set new records for grades in their science and history departments. Other than that, what's to know?"

"Yeah, I guess, it's just that this is really going to be different." Jerry sounded too thoughtful.

Steve raised an eyebrow. "Worry? From you? The king of carefree?"

Jerry flashed his smile again. "Yeah, talk about role reversal eh? Just jitters I guess."

"Hey, I'm totally nervous too. Nothing ventured, nothing gained though, right?" Steve said.

Jerry didn't have time to answer before a young waitress placed two plates of chicken and two glasses of fizzing soda down on the table. She stood up, throwing her long braid of red hair back over her shoulder. "Here you go guys." She turned her head towards Jerry with a mischievous smile "I guess I won't have to put up with you anymore either, hmmm?"

Steve looked down at the table as Jerry flexed his shoulders.

"Well, y'know; there's still time left on this exclusive offer!"

Her smile grew wider as she spoke, "In your dreams, Jerry."

"Every single night Suzanne, every single night."

She turned away in mock disgust and Jerry found himself watching her shapely departure. Sighing, he sat back in his seat. "Ah well, looks like I'll never get the chance now."

"Yeah. Whatever Jerry."

Jerry grabbed a chicken leg from his plate. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh c'mon Jerry, like you won't find any women up there, you're a slut!"

"It's true." Jerry sipped his soda, "Maybe the chemical monk will pick up some babes, hmmm?"

Steven focused on his plate. "I don't date."

"There is absolutely no good reason why you can't date."

Steve stared down. "We've been over this Jerr'. I don't want to get into this right now, okay?"

The tone of his voice made Jerry shrug his shoulders. Steve had been worse than shy ever since forever. Even when Jerry had managed to sneak him into a bar, Steve just sat in the back and got terribly drunk. He didn't drink a whole lot after that night, but he wasn't any less shy either.

Jerry shook off the mood. "So what's the actual plan here? How are we doing this?"

Steve dropped the chicken bone on his plate. "Like I said, we leave day after tomorrow, we'll probably hit Twillingate around noon. I'll phone around to the few places on my list the day before and let them know we're coming. That way we can spend the rest of the day finding a place."

"Are you sure that's enough time? I mean one day Steve, that's cutting it a little short don't you think?"

"Not really. I mean, we're not too picky, here; we just need a place with a couple of rooms and maybe a basement. Worse comes to worst, we can crash in the van for a couple of nights 'till we find the perfect little abode."

"Good plan, Stevie-my-boy, good plan indeed."

"However..." Steve frowned, "we have to stick to the plan Jerr'. There is no way your parents will pay the rent if you're failing. Studies first, always."

"Studies first," Jerry nodded. "But I don't think it'll be a problem though, I wouldn't call us the hub of the social scene, and we don't even know anyone up there!" Jerry broke into his evil smile at the thought. "Still, two single bachelors renting a whole place for themselves, I mean you have just got to know the possibilities are endless!"

"I don't give a shit about that, all I want is a nice big basement to set up the lab," Steve said.

"Yeah? Well, you're not getting your basement unless I get my attic study."

"Oh right. That way you won't have so far to climb with a high powered rifle during midterms."

"No, it's because I got a nut in my basement, and I want to be as far from the explosion as possible!"

The rest of that night and the following day were spent in chaos. The two scrambled after the millions of tiny details to sort before the trip. Jerry had more to do, but in Steve's mind this was to be expected. The moving company had informed him that they could hold their amassed furniture until contacted for up to two days. Then all their worldly possessions could be delivered within six hours to any address in Twillingate. This meant that if everything went perfectly, they would be able to start unpacking the same day they arrived. But if not, they still had the freedom of a few day's grace.

The Monday morning of departure found Jeremiah Slate leaning up against his trusty Pinto staring expectantly at Steve's front door. He'd already gone through the good-bye speech with his parents, but he knew Steve's would be a little harder than his own.

Since Jerry wasn't that close with his own parents, the farewell had consisted of a lot of handshakes and the 'What-to-look-for-in-a-house' speech, and his father stuffing some cure-all money into

Jerry's pocket. He glanced at his watch, ten to eight, and then Steve's door slamming brought his attention back up. Steve shuffled out of the house with his head low; Jerry knew the tears must've been flowing inside. His pace was slower than normal as he approached the car.

Jerry was the first to speak. "You're dressed like you're going to a funeral."

Steve chuckled. "As per normal," he answered

"How'd they do?"

Steve shrugged, "'Bout as well as could be expected I guess. Dad wasn't so bad, but Mom..."

Jerry waited for a moment then reached behind him and grabbed the two bottles of Dr. Pepper he'd bought on the way over. He held one out to Steve, "Well partner, let's get the fuck outa' here."

Steve nodded as he took the drink and gave a quick smile to show he was okay.

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Postcards had been made of the scenery they drove through during the three-hour journey. The highway arched and curved like a great serpent through a seemingly endless wilderness. Crystal blue lakes, emerald trees and great rock cliffs cut into even greater mountains that lay in the serpent's path. Some small communities existed just off the highway, but stopping was simply not part of the agenda; they had to reach Twillingate.

The turnoff to the little town fell just after Hell's Gate. Hell's Gate was an air tram tourist trap that toured over the Fraser River rapids, which were as savage as their name implied. It was one o'clock by the time they made the turnoff. Neither of them had accounted for the hard climbing the cars had to do, but from the look of the road ahead, it seemed the worst was over.

The 451 exit led them through forest unlike anything they had seen before. Massive virgin growth trees hundreds of feet tall and covered with green furry moss lined the sides of the road. The dark density loomed around them, as though the trees were unwilling to yield to the asphalt serpent that divided their ranks. Sight was impossible beyond the first trees, not even light could punch through the woven canopy of ancient bows. Occasionally Steve thought he could see the dark peak of Mount Skihist, but the giants around him forbade a closer look. Gradually the serpent wove its way up, cresting on a ridge, and all at once it came into view.

A small rest area had been paved along the top of the ridge to allow weary travelers a chance to stretch their legs and feast their eyes on what was once a beautiful landscape. Steve pulled the van into the lot and parked. Stepping slowly out of the vehicle, he knew there were no postcards of this to send home. This was not a scene that would promote tourism. Jerry slid his car alongside Steve's and stepped out to join him in the spectacle.

The entire mountain face was a charred black surface against the gray sky. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of virgin growth forest had become fields of twisted charred corpses from the rage of flame. Even the most ancient and mighty of the green ranks left only pathetic burnt torsos as evidence of their resistance. The rich color of the surviving forest formed a jagged line where the rage had ceased, only a few miles up from the mountain's base.

In the valley, the city of Twillingate could be seen. Its outskirts were a mixture of houses and petite condominium blocks. Gradual roadways led inwards to the marketplace malls and small office buildings of the downtown region. Throughout the city, trees had been allowed to grow in grove like patches along the streets, giving the whole community a rustic tone. From the center of town, large gray Gothic spires stretched far above the rooftops. The largest of them was a giant clock tower that chimed, sending lonely tones through the valley

Steve imagined it could only be Lord Thornton University. Scattered about the city other Gothic style buildings jutted above the trees, but none came near the university's size or grace. It whispered knowledge. The entire city had somehow slipped backwards in time, isolated by the forest and mountains and resting in the shadow of Mount Skihist's cremated dead.

"Bet that fire would have been something to see at night," Jerry whispered.

"Yeah, no doubt."

Chapter 3

Thomas Bedlam was beginning to feel the effects of his beer. Normally a six-pack wouldn't have affected him like this, but he imagined the concoction his wife had prepared for dinner might be having some influence as well. Twenty-five years of marriage and she was still trying to feed him these crazy magazine meals. Not that he was one to complain. She was an excellent cook.

Ever since his retirement six years previous, his nights were spent watching the late night movies and talk shows he could never watch before. Margaret had gone to bed at nine, and that left him his few extra hours, and beers, to enjoy in privacy.

A burst of barking echoed out from behind his rancher. Without the business of work to occupy him, Tom had taken to raising German Shepherds. He was good at it, and within the breeding circles he was known to brag incessantly about the quality of his bloodlines. The kennels out back were converted from his old garage. They were small, but large enough to house fifteen dogs and a fenced running yard.

Another sudden outburst and Tom raised a brow. Normally he wouldn't have noticed, but since the fire, bears and cougars had come down in search of food. On his last check at seven he'd noticed the dogs were more restless than usual, so Tom had made extra certain both the kennel gates and the main doors were locked tight. When he returned to the house, out came his Winchester rifle just as an added precaution. Now it seemed justified.

Shutting off the television, only the nighttime noises of the house could be heard beyond. The silence stretched on like an awkward kiss and he was about to relax when the barking started again. This time he knew it was not the usual rivalry between dogs, this was far louder, more savage, more defensive, more... afraid.

Tom pulled himself out of the chair and was slipping on his old work-boots when the scream of splintering wood came from the kennels. With only one boot on, Tom grabbed his rifle and threw open the rear screen door to survey the night.

As the yellow spot of the porch floodlights lit the yard, he could see the remains of the kennels. The main doors were ripped open and hung shattered. Shards of the door chain glittered in the yellow light amongst the splintered lumber. Tom chambered a round over the frenzied roar of the dogs.

Stumbling down the steps, he made it halfway across the yard before the sound came. The twisted snapping of wire mixed with a howl of agony, and at the same time an explosion of glass and wood from the rancher behind him. Something was inside his house.

Another crash from the kennel. A broken ball of flesh, fur, and blood came hurtling through the kennel wall landing with a sickening crunch somewhere in the darkness beyond the lights reaches. The dogs' desperate cries grew deafening mixed with the sound of rending metal.

Smash!

He spun on his heel facing back towards the house. He was sure he'd heard a sound from within the rancher and he searched for its source. Then the sounds were everywhere. He was surrounded by sounds beyond the yellow gaze of the floodlight, craving fingers gripping soil in anticipation, and the sounds of hands dragging old flesh across the darkness.

Tom hadn't moved three steps before a bloodied pink mass hurtled out of the screen door and crouched, catching itself with knurled hands at the base of the steps. Then the light was gone; the bright circle of protection flickered, and vanished into the sound of tearing cable and shattering glass.

Tom fired a shot, fanning the action he fired again, and again. He was firing wild into the darkness. Another shot, and another, until the firing pin struck an empty chamber like a funeral bell. He froze, he could hear them rushing to him in the darkness now. In the time it took to die, he recognized a wail, the guttural wail of a newborn child as it slashed through the darkness. Then Tom heard the sound of his own flesh tearing as he fell.

Chapter 4

The Twillingate community was divided into three different districts. As the road led into town the first district was Essendale, which had housing for the lower and middle class. Even with gas-lamp styled streetlights and the shading canopy of trees, it was actually below the standard of the other districts.

The second district was the upper class of Riverview, located very close to the jutting spires of Lord Thornton University. The houses had enough class for even the most pretentious, with intricately designed iron fences, lush hedging and short stonewalls encasing thick, rich emerald lawns. Larger houses with their wide sweeping steps and all-embracing Victorian architecture had been converted into boarding homes for single students.

The last district was Gander, the shopping area of the city. The cobblestone streets throughout the city were more polished and pronounced the closer one was to Twillingate City Hall. Here, the shops took care of the oak and elm trees in front of their businesses and the ground was always spotless.

A few blocks beyond city hall, a six-foot stonewall artistically severed wide-open grounds and well-maintained gardens from the rest of Twillingate. It would be easy to mistake the large Gothic structure as a museum, or perhaps a further extension of the University, if not for the small weathered plaque on the wrought iron gates.

LORD TWEEDSMUIR SANITARIUM Est. 1935

Inside those gates, a plethora of robed zombies wandered with the complacency only regular medication could bring. Besides the university, the hospital was the other known institution of Twillingate, although people seldom went there willingly.

Steven and Jerry wasted no time trying to get settled. By two-thirty, they were well into viewing the houses from Steve's ready-made list. The first two locations were boarding houses in Riverview. Nice though they were, they only offered adjoining rooms with a bathroom to share. The third house had a quaint basement suite, but was far too confining for their needs.

The three landlords had a peculiar way about them. They all made discrete, but nonetheless thorough visual inspections of the two young men. One went so far as to casually look out the front window to see what kind of vehicle they drove. Steve didn't like it, and Jerry liked it even less, so by the time they had been assessed for the third time they had a bitter taste in their mouths. That was when they met Mr. Perrilican.

When the two vehicles pulled up the driveway in south Essendale, an elderly man was sitting on the front porch of a small single story rancher, gently stroking the head of an Irish Setter. After brief but polite introductions, Perrilican began the usual line of questioning. Their main subjects, how they would pay for their schooling, but when Steven said what his parents did for a living, it provoked quite the response.

"Oh! So you're Jack Naylor's boy!" he said.

From the moment the phrase left the old man's lips, the entire mood changed. The man brought them inside the rancher while the dog didn't budge from his warm spot in the sunlight.

The house had the resident charm of an elderly madman. Magazines and newspapers were stacked in huge piles all over the floor and drawn curtains gave a dark but cozy appearance to the home. The whole house smelled of tea, which Perrilican offered to the boys as soon as they sat down.

"So. So, yes indeed, myself and Jack used to talk quite frequently actually, yes, quite frequently. But it was all business you understand, strictly business," Perrilican said as Steve shot a look to Jerry, who had a hard time repressing a smile.

"Yes, I'm sorry but I don't remember my father mentioning you," Steve said, trying to sound as inoffensive as possible. Perrilican didn't notice.

"Yes, I remember Jack may have mentioned you once or twice to me before. Yes, yes, you're quite a bright boy aren't you? A bright boy altogether! And it seems you have a bright friend here as well!" Jerry couldn't hold his smile back any longer.

"Well, I tell you what," Perrilican continued, "I'll let you have the house for three hundred a month, but you'll have to do a little cleaning."

They were shocked, that was half the price of the location with the adjoining rooms, and a third of the basement's cost. Jerry spoke up. "Whoa there sir, we better take a look at this place first don't you think? We just might be getting ahead of ourselves here a bit." Steve nodded in agreement.

“Oh, yes, yes of course,” the old man’s smile grew wider. “I bought the house some years ago at an estate sale, it was a European fellow’s place. Somehow I just never had the time to move in. No, no time.”

Steve’s curiosity was climbing. “Where is this place, sir?”

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After drinking three cups of tea each, and a stream of consciousness conversation with the ex-banker, Steve focused on the winding roadway ahead of him. The address Perrilican wrote down read 2975 *Avendale Road*, and with Steve leading, locating the house would be no great task.

Avendale Road was not too hard to find. Perrilican said the road had been used as a major transit route to the old Skihist mine before it ran dry back in 1937. The old man would have told them the history of the entire mining operation if Jerry hadn’t expressed the urge to take a look at the house before dark. Sundown was still at least six hours away, but it was a good enough reason to get them going.

Once on Avendale Road, it took them straight through Gander and farther outside of town. Houses became less and less frequent until Steve could only see a driveway every once in a long while. He was about to reconsider his path when the rusty mailbox came into view.

It was just how Perrilican had described it, an old mailbox with illegible numbers and a large thick chain going across the driveway between two trees. Steve pulled over and parked with Jerry’s Pinto pulling in close behind him. He got out in time to hear Jerry’s car door slam.

“Well, at least we’re not going to have to worry about the neighbors,” Jerry said.

Steve nodded, it was at least a mile to the last house, and looking down the roadway ahead, it was probably farther to the next. Jerry walked into the shade to get a better look at the chain. It was thick enough to be a real barrier, with the center of it fastened together by a rusted mass that at one time must have been a lock.

Jerry turned it over slowly in his hand. “Nice. Seems the old guy was in and out of here like clockwork, every few thousand years or so.” Steve stepped over the chain gingerly as to not let the rust rub off on his black jeans. Jerry followed, but not before running back to the Pinto to grab a flashlight.

The driveway was nothing more than an extra wide path cut into the forest. As far as either of them could see on each side were legions of trees, their canopy locked so tightly together that only the smallest shafts of light rained down from above. The coolness of the shade was a welcome change from driving in the summer sun, and the air had the pleasant fresh scent of wilderness.

“Getting the mail is gonna be a bitch, buddy didn’t say anything about a two mile hike to the front...” Before Jerry could finish his sentence the house came into view. The driveway led into a large clearing. Steve guessed it had to be two square acres in which all of the stumps had been removed but the overgrown lawn had taken over. In the middle of the clearing stood the house.

Wide front steps led up to the verandah that encircled the full front and sides of the structure. A roof built out from the house protected the deck from the elements, except for the loose twigs that had been blown in over the railing. Above the porch, a wide angled face stood out against the cedar roofing. Two windows could be seen on the second story, but like the rest of the glass they had been boarded up for protection.

The most striking feature was the half octagon tower that stretched up the left side of the building. The first and second story of the turret had multiple windows covered by sloppy boards. It was the third story of the turret that made Jerry widen his eyes; it seemed obvious the house had a considerable attic. The turret’s tall spire roof was topped with an old iron weather vane towering over the rest of the building. The Victorian presence of the town could be felt even in this secluded place.

Apart from the gray peeling paint and small patches of moss scattered amongst the cedar shingles, the house looked to be in fairly good shape.

“What have we here,” Jerry whispered with an approving eyebrow.

“Yeah, it doesn’t look too bad, let’s get a look inside.” Steve reached into his pocket for the key as the two climbed the wooden steps. As they crossed the porch, there was hardly a creak from the deck.

“This thing was built pretty solid, I guess that jargon about old ways and being built to last was pretty true,” Jerry said approvingly.

“Yeah. Yeah Jerry, I saw the size of the attic but we gotta check the whole house out.”

Jerry threw up his hands. “It’s not that! I was just saying the place looks pretty solid, that’s all.”

“Sure Jerry, sure,” Steve smiled as he slid the key into the lock.

The door swung open. Surprisingly, neither of them could feel nor smell any dampness from inside the house. The hardwood floor ahead of them was a wood stain finish, now gray from the abundant dust.

With a flick of his thumb, Jerry fired a beam into the darkness. The flashlight's spot fell onto a staircase, which led out of the comfortably sized foyer they now stood in. Panning the flashlight around they could see an open doorway to the left, another to the right, both leading to large bare rooms.

"Left or right?" Jerry asked.

Steve had already begun to move to his right. "Let's see what's in here, shall we?"

Entering the room, their running shoes stirred up dust, letting the floor moan from years of sleep. It was obvious Mr. Perrilican hadn't been through here in quite some time. The lack of furniture made the room seem larger than it was in reality, giving them the feeling they had trespassed onto a long forgotten tomb. Dust solidified the shards of light penetrating from the window's mismatched plywood covering. The beams formed bars meant to deny anyone from invading the vacant darkness. Only a large brick fireplace in the center of the far wall gave any sign that this room was meant for humans.

"It does seem pretty spacious if nothing else." Jerry's words thundered in the stillness, echoed by the hollow ring of ancient wood. Steven only nodded in agreement. This house had managed to spark his curiosity and now it would not let him rest, or form an opinion, until he had explored this place throughout.

A hallway started from where they had entered, running parallel with this room, down and into the kitchen. He imagined the hall had been designed to allow people to come and go through the house without disturbing the guests in the other rooms.

Pressing back through the open doorway at the rear of the room confirmed Steven's suspicions. The flashlight revealed a spacious kitchen, complete with antique cabinets and a closed door leading to the left side of the house. Jerry twitched the flashlight about over Steve's shoulder.

"Well, I see one problem, no fridge or stove, that could be annoying," Steve said.

Jerry let out an exasperated sigh. "You have got to be the biggest pessimist ever! How can a guy as bright as you lack so much vision?"

"My vision has nothing to do with it. However, your vision will force you to agree that this place does not contain a fridge or stove, true?"

Jerry pushed past him, sweeping back and forth with the light. "True, but you gotta admit all this hard wood flooring does add to the joint."

Steve shook his head. It was more than obvious how badly Jerry wanted this place, drifting from appliances to flooring in a heartbeat. Not answering, Steve turned out the back exit from the kitchen.

The next room had been used as a kind of dressing room for the occupants to peel off dirty clothing and boots before venturing into the house. Through the dust could be seen the telltale water stains from unknown storms beaten back by thick coats.

Steve noticed for the first time the pleasantly simple checkered wallpaper around him. It was faded, but seemed to fit the house perfectly. Three doors stood facing back to the front of the house, the middle situated directly under the stairs he'd seen upon entering.

The first door opened with a gentle tug to let the spotlight reveal a small pantry. The third was a similar closet or maybe a coatroom that now only served as a kind of spider's paradise. The second door when opened led to a steep narrow staircase leading down into a black void below.

"It seems we have a basement," Steve said as anticipation got the better of him. He snatched the flashlight from Jerry's hands. This stairway screamed in protest, it wasn't as solid as the rest of the house. The tiny shafts of light that had penetrated the house above were nowhere to be seen down here; only the lurking void greeted them as they descended.

Steve's foot connected with the basement's concrete floor that stretched away from the stairs. If the lack of furniture upstairs made the rooms seem larger, the wide empty void that existed before them now seemed infinite. A single wall that ran in line with the stairway had divided the basement. The left side, completely unbroken and uncluttered by even a support beam formed a black windowless chamber of cement where their breathing echoed.

As the flashlight's beam spanned across the floor, Steve stopped suddenly to examine it closer. The groundwork cement had been carefully finished and smoothed to a polished surface. Not a single crack or gouge could be seen, only strange dark mottled stains splattered about in odd patches. To their right, a single open doorway led to a similar chamber. A workbench along all four walls and a single table running down the middle framed the room. Steve guessed that each chamber was at least thirty feet square, with a ceiling that was close to ten-feet high.

"I guess this was a kind of workshop, or something," Jerry said knowing exactly what had to have been running through his friend's mind. "Yes, Stevie-my-boy, I do believe this place would probably make a fine research establishment for furthering man's knowledge of the unknown."

"Yes," Steve spoke more to himself than to Jerry. "Yes, I believe it would."

Once back on the main floor, the downstairs yielded a quaint bathroom and large living room. Steve imagined that when the window boards were removed; the room would be glowing with light, especially where the turret circled out creating a cone of glass.

The main staircase was made of a darker wood than the rest of the house. Jerry thought it might have been maple, or perhaps old oak, but he couldn't say for certain. The groaning protest here was not as great as it had been on the basement stairwell, but the creaks were still present. Jerry stayed close, since relinquishing control of the flashlight made him realize just how dark the entire place was.

At the top of the staircase the angled rooftop made the second story's smaller size more apparent. The floor circled around back along the top of the stairwell, with only the railing that lined the edges to stop anyone from falling. Through the sliding shadows cast by the banister rods, the two made out four doors, two on each side, mirroring each other along the half hallways. A well built wood ladder had been permanently fixed to the wall immediately at the top of the stairs. Above it, a large square trap door of the same wood had been fixed into the ceiling.

Steve hurried through the four rooms, knowing full well Jerry wouldn't be able to control himself for too long before he'd steal back the flashlight to inspect their attic. On the left were two adjoining bedrooms, each the same, with matching windows boarded up tight. The other side revealed a bathroom with a freestanding antique bathtub. The fourth and final room was the master bedroom. The turret continued throughout the master suit, its window's were boarded, but the effect made the room seem almost as large as the living room below it.

Jerry could control himself no longer. No sooner was the door to the master bedroom closed than he had seized the flashlight and was making his way up the ladder. The trapdoor stuck slightly, but a quick jar from his shoulder broke it free. It bounced slightly as it caught on the door chain, rattling for a moment while Jerry brought his flashlight up to see.

For the middle of a summer's day, the attic was far cooler than he had imagined. He remembered his father saying that this was a sign of insulation during his 'What-to-look-for-in-a-house' speech, so it was a good thing.

Standing up, Jerry found the roof's gradual decline made it possible for him to walk freely about without crouching, except for the edges, where the angle was much steeper.

The attic had to be over thirty feet long, and at least twenty feet wide. The red bricks of the chimney caught the light at the far end and at the opposite length, the now familiar turret glass winked the light's reflection back at him, making Jerry wonder how spectacular the view was once the boards were removed. The room was perfect.

Turning to go back down, the spot fell on three large chests, skulking in the darkness of one corner. They were covered in dust, and the fabric that once upholstered the wood was worn and ripped from the grinding wheels of time.

"What's it like?" Steve's voice called out from below.

"Come up and see for yourself, Stevie-my-boy!"

A moment later and Steve was half way through the trapdoor surveying the find. Jerry walked over wearing a grin. "Well, what do ya think Steve?"

Steve cocked his eyebrow as though there was some question about renting the house. "I think we got ourselves a house here Jerry."

"I thought you might say that."

Chapter 5

“Sometimes the few must suffer so that the many can benefit.”

-Justification for the cruel, so that they may sleep.

June 12, 1944

Personal Journal

It is as I have feared. It seems that just as the research shows promise, the talk of stopping it becomes fluent. The war does not go well, there is talk that the Fuhrer has gone mad, that he is prone to fits of anger and tantrums. These fools don't realize that with the knowledge we now have, within the year we would master veraxology. I cannot allow this research to fall into the hands of the enemy.

I regret now my decision to destroy the first experiments. Though the Malcuthrad seem unreasonable on first contact, they do show signs of the advanced intelligence that the text speaks of. It also states the Malcuthrad can be bargained with, and that exchanges of knowledge were common with past masters. I begin to wonder if the first alchemists did not glean the design of the pyramids or the secrets of science from these creatures. They definitely do possess a knowledge of the flesh that even now I'm at a loss to explain. However, I have recently developed a theory as to their magic.

From the original text, ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER, despite the religious shroud of ceremonial ritual, there are consistent factors that lend to the true nature of this science. The book speaks of the Regnum as their kingdom, existing beyond all eyes and ears. With the recent research done in the metaphysical community, I'm certain these beings exist in a different level of reality. A different dimension if you will.

All of what I possess now is theory. From metaphysical sources, it has been said that there are an infinite number of realities and dimensions. If this is true, then perhaps the greatest knowledge to be learned from these beings, calling themselves Malcuthrad, is not their inner knowledge of shaping and reworking existing flesh. Instead, perhaps it is how to bridge their world to ours.

The Latin text we possess may rank amongst the oldest books ever found. Inside, the author writes that the manuscript is a reproduction of an even older work, illuminated in a forgotten script known as Tahn'Jey. It is unknown to us how old this book really is, but this I feel is to our advantage.

From my libraries I have made a thorough examination of all occult symbolism and ceremonial ritual, and intertwined with the religious clutter are descriptions of complex geometric shapes. I feel the use of these shapes to be more than mere religion. There is significant effort made to convey their accuracy, and I therefore believe they are, in essence, the key to these operations of magic, or more properly named, the science of virtometry.

This science is not totally unlike electronics. Lines drawn in different material are like wires of different alloys and metals that join together in specific series to complete a kind of circuit. An electrical circuit uses electricity taken from a generator or a battery source. These magical symbols also use an energy either gathered by the “sorcerer” through the ritual or perhaps through the sacrifices made to release life force itself. But like an electrical circuit, there must be an initiator, some spark that begins the process. I believe this secret lies in the chanting of magical words and sounds.

All rituals use exact methods of speech and songs of certain harmonic frequencies in all of their forms. Special bells, gongs and chimes are said to have “magical” properties and when used in these rituals may actually increase or allow the flow of this energy into these circuits, completing them for lack of a better term. Throughout history this theory has been supported. Every recorded organized ritual falls into the paradigm that these circuits use. These must in fact be remnants of this technology that we've forgotten, like a young child who uses a radio but cannot tell how it works, just that it does.

I do have some evidence for my theory. In recent experiments, I've had the chants recorded to keep a consistency unattainable by any other means. The experiments have continued and progressed as expected with the recordings, but it makes me wonder about the origin of their power. Does it come from the individual in the ritual, thus his need to rest after casting a spell? This would explain why it would be required to have a gathering or Sabbath in order to complete certain rituals. Perhaps it is the drawing of power from its natural state in our environment. The individual or gathering may act as a kind of catalyst allowing the power to flow through them, a transformer if you will. There must be another factor that eludes me as to why certain people can use this power better than others; indeed some are totally unable to use it. The magnitude of questions this poses is staggering. It seems the only riddle we've gotten a firm grip on is Thesmulcar.

Although the text is vague on a great many points, it does manage to explain the language of Thesmulcar surprisingly well. Having heard one of them speak I must admit it was unnerving how this creature spoke a language I understood but could not repeat.

The ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER makes reference to the great falling of Babel where this language was lost. It seems odd, the Babel reference, except that it's not in reference to the Bible story, instead it's to the actual Tower of Babel itself.

In the text it states that at one time all creatures in all the realms had knowledge of this language. The closest way to explain it would be to call it verbal telepathy. Mankind was fluent in Thesmulcar up until the time of Babel's fall. Apparently the Tower of Babel actually existed, and was in fact a library.

It was to be the largest compilation of the written word, compiled for the benefit of all. Supposedly the knowledge of all subjects arcane, including Thesmulcar, was kept within its walls.

It seems strange to me, how the only other library that would contain similar knowledge would be the great library of Rome, and both were destroyed for unknown reasons. However, it is my belief that the Malcuthrad and other outworld predators destroyed them to prevent man from growing wise. It is universally true; to keep a race suppressed, it must be kept ignorant.

Recently I have taken to recording experiments in their entirety in the hopes of establishing the fundamentals of the language. Despite some difficulties, I have managed a few words. But until I understand it, I can only listen and learn, but not inquire. Once I grasp their language, the real advances will begin, and the questions of the Malcuthrad will finally be answered.

-Dr. H. Verruckt

Chapter 6

At 4:30 in the morning, a light spattering of rain had just begun to fall as Detective Dave Madden pulled up to the Bedlam house. The frayed ends of police line tape flailed in the breeze. A few officers milled around in front of the rancher, while bright strobe explosions from the photographer's camera came from inside. Dave could only see shadows over the crowd of vehicles surrounding the house.

Sparking the familiar flame of his Zippo, he lit a cigarette and took a long drag to combat the early morning cold. He'd tried quitting a number of times, but he figured a man is allowed his poisons. Stepping out of the car, the reality of the rain cut the dampness through his coat. His tidy red hair provided little protection. His time living on the coast had given him a weathered but still friendly look. Despite twenty-five years on the force, at forty-five his hazel eyes still had sparkle. Before he had a chance to move closer, a uniformed policeman approached, grim grin in place.

"Those things will kill ya."

"Want one?"

"Pass. Anything on the Jacobson case?"

Dave hated saying it. "No. We're still waiting on a full files search, if those prints got picked up on this planet, we'll know about it."

The Jacobson case. That was one of those little terrors that made cops what they were. Four children leave on an afternoon bike ride, aged nine, eleven, thirteen, and seventeen, with the seventeen-year-old left in charge of the trip. The bikes were found strewn across the road, metal frames twisted into warped forms, as though the bikes were gift-wrap, ripped away and left on the road. The team only managed to lift one set of prints, nothing so far.

"What's the story here?" Dave asked with cigarette smoke words.

The Sergeant winced. "You'd better take a look at this one Dave." The rain intensified as the two approached the house

Though slightly shorter than the average, Madden rarely had problems keeping up with physical demands, and thanks to his temper, he more often than not had to keep a tighter rein on himself. Some called it 'the little man syndrome'; he called it 'taking no shit'.

The house came into view as they rounded the cars. The front door had been smashed in with such force that it had taken three feet of the wall with it. Though the rain had hidden most of it, he could see the larger shards of the shattered bay window strewn across the lawn.

Inside, the picture didn't improve. The hallway leading down to the bedroom looked like someone big had gone mad with a sledgehammer. In the bedroom, the mattress had been ripped in two pieces with the wreckage of the furniture tossed casually about the room and out the window. A sheet of poly-plastic had been put over the window to protect the crime scene; the rain beat a strange rhythm as the droplets hit it.

Madden took a long drag from his cigarette before he spoke. "Where were the bodies found?"

His question met with the solid stare of Sergeant Elson's eyes.

"No bodies," Dave whispered in disbelief.

"No sign of the occupants anywhere, we found his Winchester laying on the ground outback. It looks like it was fired to empty and then dropped."

"Anyone got any bright ideas?" Madden felt a familiar frustration.

"The only going theory is bear attack."

"You gotta be fuckin' kidding! What else?"

"It seems Thomas Bedlam and his wife raised German Shepherds. It was a fellow breeder who dropped by with a sick dog to find this mess at one in the morning."

"So where are the dogs now?"

The stare again.

The detective shook his head. "The dogs are gone too? How many of them?"

"The kennels have spaces for fifteen dogs and according to the breeder they were all full. There's not much left of the kennels. The building's barely standing."

"Excuse me Sergeant..." A younger man approached wearing white canvas coveralls. Raymond Murry from forensics. Dave had seen him around but he kept quiet, this was Elson's show.

"What've you got for me Ray?"

"Well, I don't think there was a struggle here."

Elson looked around at the floor and thrashed walls around him. "Obviously not."

Dave ignored the sarcasm "Why not?"

“No blood.”

Dave looked at the littered carpet, there were similarities with the Jacobson case. None of the bikes had even a smear of blood anywhere on or near them when they were found.

“No blood?” Dave asked.

“No blood, no tissue, no saliva, nothing. The only things we’ve got are a fistful of occupant’s hairs in the residence, and dog hair in the remnants of the Kennel. We did get some prints though.”

“Run ‘em,” Dave said and turned to head back to the car, Elson would wrap this place up. He could still hear the Sergeant’s flurry of questions to Ray as he walked through what once was the front door. Outside the rain fell cold and hard, making damp whispers in the trees.

Chapter 7

Before the movers arrived, the main concern was to clean the house. It seemed a monumental undertaking that had started far too early and would finish far too late. After informing Mr. Perrilican that the house would be more than adequate, the rest of that afternoon was spent searching for the best fast food, or at least the best waitress who served fast food. With no chicken house that could compare with the glory in Port Kells, they were resigned to looking for a new hangout.

They found a retreat known as Dak's Daycare. Not six blocks from campus, it catered to the university crowd. Despite their certain bias, both Steve and Jerry admitted that the burgers were exceptional. Compounding this were the huge glasses of ice tea, and so they had discovered their new haunt.

The next day, the movers arrived with their entire shipment of worldly possessions. It was disheartening. What had seemed like immense amounts to pack didn't even make a small pile in the immensity of the house.

After a quick trip to the local secondhand store, they managed to amass enough mismatched furniture, along with a fridge and stove to make it a home. After spending the entire morning setting the kitchen straight, a light rap at the door drew their attention away.

Steve moved for it first; Jerry just stopped scrubbing the floor, content to sit for a moment before curiosity called him to follow. Mr. Perrilican greeted the two with a cardboard box and a smile. It was the gloating smile of an old man who knew better, but was still sympathetic.

"Well boys, how goes it?"

Jerry only smirked as Steven replied, "Not so bad."

"Good! Good!" the old man bellowed as he brushed past them into the house. Setting the box down he exclaimed, "I can't stay long, no, can't stay. But I did figure I'd bring by some cleaning supplies for you lads."

"Gee, Mr. Perrilican, that's swell, thanks." Jerry's sarcasm was lost to the old man but Steve picked it up quick enough.

"Actually, we do really need more cleaning supplies. Thanks, thanks a lot."

"Don't mention it boys, it was nothing at all." He glanced down at his watch expectantly. "Well, I really must be off, I still have some errands I'd like to run before noon. Take care boys."

Jerry caught his arm as he turned to go. "Actually, Mr. Perrilican, you left some trunks upstairs in the attic, what did you want done with them?"

"Trunks?" The old man rubbed his brow for a moment in the strain to remember. "Ah yes, the old trunks. Oh they're not mine. No, they belonged to previous owner. Not much in them, some dishes, and old books I think, you're welcome to them. Just throw away what you don't want, I can't use it. No, I can't. You can have them, I've got to go though. You boys take care now, clean, clean, you're doing a great job." Perrilican slipped out the door laughing to himself as he wandered back to his car.

Jerry shook his head slowly. "He's crazier than a shit house rat, you know that, eh?"

Steve nodded. "Yeah, but he's harmless." Steve closed the door after watching Perrilican's car leave the driveway. His thoughts flew back to the trunks. "Did you check if the attic lights were working yet?"

"Haven't had a chance, I just put my books at the base of the ladder to get them outta the way."

Both got the idea at the same time and raced upstairs for the ladder. Jerry won and had scrambled halfway through the open trapdoor when Steve flipped the switch sending a flood of light down into the darkened attic. Jerry stood off to the side, letting his eyes adjust as Steven climbed up.

The attic's thick layer of dust showed where Jerry had stepped before and the three trunks sat in plain view. A string of bare bulbs hung evenly spaced along the ceiling, giving their unfiltered light in stark form.

"This place is so huge! You could live up here," Steve said.

A smile crossed Jerry's face. "That is the idea, Stevie-my-boy, that is the idea. Mind you, it will fill up fairly fast once I get the bookshelves up here, and I still got no idea how were going to get the boards off the windows."

Steve wasn't about to give it much thought at the moment; his eyes became locked on the three unknown vestiges. Each of them had a large iron lock that looked seized shut.

"I'll get a hammer." Jerry vanished back down the hole. Steve tried to imagine how Jerry would set up his new kingdom. There was no doubt that when the boards were removed from the window there would be a spectacular view. He felt a twinge of jealousy.

Moments later, a crash came as an old wood handled hammer landed on the attic floor. Jerry climbed up after it, breathing heavily from his frantic search. "This one should do, those locks don't look like they could take much."

Steven pulled the trunks over for better lighting. The first one wasn't too bad, it was heavy but maneuverable. The next two may as well have been filled with water. Kneeling in the dust Steve swung the hammer down upon the lock, the crash ripping through the air. Once, twice, but on the third blow the lock fell away, rattling across the floor.

Years of disuse made the hinges scream as the lid was thrown back. The musty smell of dead knowledge filled the room. Light fell upon three solid rows of books laid flush with the top of the trunk. They were old leather bindings withered with age, with faded spines where the words had worn away. Topographical maps lay in pressed rolls on top, and the few newer looking texts scattered amongst the tomes looked as out of place as babies in a furnace. Even if he were to try, Jerry wouldn't even get a comic book between the rows; they had been puzzle-pieced together so that no space was wasted. There must have been two levels of books beneath this one, no doubt networked the same way. A solid cube of information; buried, lost, then rediscovered!

Jerry had already pulled out two texts as Steve started on the next trunk. The first was a book on anatomy that he guessed dated back to the 1920's; the other was too difficult to say. The second trunk's lock came off as Jerry spoke.

"These are all in German."

"What?" Steven paused.

"I'm not joking." He grabbed three more books to verify his claim. "It looks like almost all of these are German."

"Can you read them?"

Jerry strained into one of the texts. "Jesus, I wish I'd paid more attention in that stupid class now."

Steve battled against the second trunk's lid. This lid was heavier and the scream louder, but Jerry had already found his treasure, Steve was on his own. A final burst of strength and he threw the lid all the way back and gazed into this second sarcophagus.

Small objects, wrapped within torn rags for padding and protection, filled the trunk. The same musty odor was intensified now as the ancient case opened. Steve withdrew one of the objects. At first he thought it might be a vase or ornate glass but the moment he unwrapped it enough to catch a glimpse he knew instantly what it was.

Jerry's curiosity was mounting again, the books were too frustrating for now. "What's in it?"

"It's a beaker."

"A what?"

"A chemistry beaker, like the ones I got from school." Steve turned its now unwrapped form over in his hand. "Only older, much older. It looks like blown glass."

"So the house belonged to a psycho before we moved in. Cool!"

Steve would've rolled his eyes, but this idea sat strangely with him. These kinds of chemistry tools were expensive, especially when they were this old. No one would voluntarily leave behind possessions like these. Jerry carried on. "Well, the guy was a German chemist or scientist or something like that. These books are all mathematics and scientific theory. Looks like it backs the going theory."

"He must be dead."

"What?"

"If this guy was a scientist there would be no way he'd leave his lab equipment behind, or his books. Seriously Jerr', what would make you leave your books?"

Jerry rubbed his head for a second. "Good point. Perrilican did say he got the joint from an estate sale, we just lucked out. Is it all lab stuff?"

Gently Steve sifted through the pile. "Looks that way."

"Damn! We could have used a couple more dishes."

"Hey!" Steve said. "I didn't complain when you got your trunk of books! You can never have too much glass."

"Okay, okay, sorry for being practical." Jerry got to his feet and approached the last trunk. Steve passed over the hammer, now he had his own treasure to sort through. Jerry eyed the last chest.

"So, a trunk of books, and one full of lab stuff. If the third one's full of cash we're set!"

On the second blow the lock fell away and with the thrill of discovery flowing through them the last lid presented little resistance. A new odor came now; it wasn't the mustiness from the last two, but an old, rancid stench that cut through the air. Steven compared it to the scent he caught when visiting a taxidermist's shop. It reminded Jerry of when he found an old dried up outhouse. Shaking off the unusual stink the two peered into the chest.

Compared to the regimented order of the others this box was a seething disarray of random trinkets and junk. A large gray box was surrounded by what looked like a cluster of old film cans. Jerry guessed there had to be at least twenty or thirty of them, crammed in with a disarray of other random objects.

The first object they latched onto was the most obvious. It was a large gray box with slightly mildewed corners that folded out. It looked like an old style film projector, the front folded away and detached into two speakers, but closer inspection showed it to be a large reel-to-reel tape-recorder. Steve found the date 1971 stamped on the manufacturing label.

Stacking the cans on the floor by the recorder the dates could be seen amongst other numbers stenciled on the side. By the time they had finished they had removed twenty-seven canisters of tape, with dates ranging from January 1939 to September 1943.

Steve looked at one of them quizzically. "I wonder what's on them."

"Probably German news reports from the war," Jerry replied inspecting a bundle of oddly stained straps tied with twine. "A lot of people during those years recorded speeches and whatnot from the radio. Wouldn't be surprised if good ol' Hitler himself wasn't on there somewhere."

"Do you think they're worth anything? Like to a museum or something?"

"Maybe," Jerry said as he unzipped a satchel case. It held a wide variety of surgical tools. "I guarantee this is worth some bucks though." He handed it over to Steve who grabbed it with the zeal of a child at Christmas.

"These are great!" Steve said as he examined a particular hooked scalpel. "Oh, man! I'm gonna have the basement stocked!"

"You're weird, Steve." Jerry's hands found a large, loosely bound sketchbook. Steve already had his interest rekindled in the tape recorder; Jerry was distracted by his movement.

"Now what the hell are you doing?"

Steve unraveled the power cord and headed for the nearby wall socket. "Give me a hand man I want to fire one of these things up. Y'know get kind of a mood while we look at this stuff."

"Steve, this thing probably doesn't even work anymore..." But before he could finish the electrical lights on the recorder flicked to life. Jerry grabbed a tape can at random from the pile and began running it through. The machine was simple enough to set up. Moments later the switch was thrown and the tape began to turn.

Silence for a few seconds, then, with scratchy static whispering in the speakers, a deep thick German voice came over, a man speaking quickly but clearly in short machine gun bursts. In the background could be heard a strange whining, like the bleating of a young goat but longer and more sustained. Steve sat transfixed staring at the wall. His mind straining to understand what was being said. Jerry shrugged showing that he had no idea what was said. It was too much German, too fast.

The machine gun fire of the German voice stopped, and the steady bleating grew louder. They recorded a goat, for whatever reason. Opening the sketchbook they began to understand why. The two had been ready to find anything within the sketchbook, anything at all.

Anything but what they found.

Perfectly drawn arcane symbols, inked over to make them permanent, with paragraphs of German written and tiny arrows leading to the symbols, as if to explain locations on a map. With each new page the symbols became more complex, more advanced, but throughout, there was the taint of madness found in forbidden science.

Despite the ritualistic appearance of the sketches, it was plain to see that painstaking effort had been taken to assure accuracy. Long outstretched physics equations were a part of every sketch. Some sketches had two or three pages of equations and theory to back them. These were not the vague scribbles of some mystic; it was intended as hard data.

The animals bleating on the tape became more frantic now, more desperate. The voice came in and out in short blasts, giving some commentary as to what was happening. A sound like wet fabric being torn came from the tiny gray speakers, and the bleating became a high-pitched wail of agony. The German voice was yelling over the noise to be heard on the tape, and then silence. The voice hushed and the wail stopped dead. The only sound heard was the occasional splattering gurgle faded by the static. Steve reached over and flipped the switch and the silence of the attic returned.

For a few passing heartbeats the two sat in silence, looking down at the images before them. Jerry spoke first. "Well... I guess it's not radio reports after all."

Steve tried to shake the vibe. "What is this, Jerry?"

A ponderous look on his face, Jerry flipped through the pages, then moved back by the trunk to continue the exploration. "Maybe there's something else."

He reached in amongst some old torn newspapers and found another notebook. This one was smaller than the sketchbook, but still with sketches and equations. Steve felt a familiar twinge in the back of his mind as Jerry flipped through it. He took it in turn as Jerry continued his search.

Everything else in the chest was packing material, mostly bits and pieces of newsprint and some old clothes. The only objects worth notice were a large rectangular shape wrapped in red material, and a long, polished oak cigar box. Leaving the red-wrapped package for last, Jerry picked up the cigar box and flipped up the small ornate latch.

Upon opening it, he could tell that this was not a cigar box at all but a case. A red velvet cloth covered the contents, but the large Swastika, black on white relief, done on the inside top liner left no question about it's origin. Removing the cloth, Jerry stared down at a highly polished Luger; the pistol of a Nazi officer.

"It's a lab book!"

"What?" Steve's outburst shook him from his find.

"It's a lab book, the sketches are the same as the other ones, but all scientists run along basically same format when they write down their labs. This guy did it really well too! Lab books are designed so that everyone and anyone can repeat any experiment that you do. It's like a permanent record, proof of your work."

"Well, we know who this guy was working for." Jerry turned the box so Steve could view the pistol. "Nazis, baby."

Steve's look turned to shock. "Holy shit!"

Jerry went on. "I can't say that I'm too surprised. It was proven that the Nazis were into all kinds of weird occult shit. The SS were even supposed to go to rituals at this castle in Austria. Some of it was pretty wild stuff, even Hitler was big into it."

"Apparently, so was this guy." Steve took the case and examined it more closely. As it changed hands he heard a rattle from beneath the pistol. Lifting the corner revealed a false bottom. Underneath were two boxes of ammunition, still sealed with the Nazi emblem.

"It's even got bullets! Man you know we can get some seriously large coin for this."

Jerry's face dropped, "Uh...Steve?"

"What?"

"If it's all the same to you, man, I'd like to keep the pistol. I mean, from a historical point of view that thing is quite the treasure find."

Steve eyed him for a second, just long enough to make him sweat before cracking a grin. "Sure! I was just bugging ya anyway. I guess this would make a hell of a conversation piece in your library, eh?"

"Oh, I think so. Just a little bit."

"But of course you realize the lab gear, tape recorder, tapes, surgical stuff, two trunks, and your immortal soul then go to me!"

"Done! I get the Luger, books, and one trunk. I was gonna give my body to science anyway."

"I think we're missing one though buddy." Jerry looked down at the red-wrapped parcel.

As they unwrapped the parcel, it was apparent the wrapping wasn't just fabric. Again the large black on white swastika came into view, revealing itself to be the flag of the Third Reich. Its content was a thick mammoth of a book, bound in some kind of leather, but the type was hard to tell.

Telltale signs jumped out at Jerry. This was by far the oldest book here, and perhaps the oldest he'd ever seen. Only at the UBC Library did he see tomes that came close to this book's age, and they weren't in the shape this one was. Holding his breath from the excitement, Jerry laid the book gently on the floor and opened it. The pages within were in fantastic shape, still supple after untold centuries. Jerry was beside himself.

Steve could feel the energy in the air. His tone was hushed. "What is it?"

Jerry looked up from the pages of the book, "It's Latin."

Chapter 8

A child asks, "Where did the cows in the field go?"
The adult cooks a steak and replies, "They went away."
Adults ask, "Where do all the missing people go?"
And they tell themselves, "They went away."

-The Truth

Under the police station's neon lights, the desk was a collage of reports and photographs, which weren't helping. Void of leads, Dave sat with one hand cradling his head and a lit cigarette in the other.

The Jacobson Case: A group of four children on bikes get taken down without spilling even a drop of blood. The bikes were left twisted and torn like tissue paper strewn across the road, with no other trace or tire track other than one partial set of prints.

He had taken physics and some fundamentals of engineering in high school. Everyone got a regular, everyday item to find out how strong it was and how well it would handle stress. His buddy got a hammer, another kid got a chair, but young Dave Madden had a bike. He would never look at a child's bike again without silent admiration. They were almost indestructible, especially with the new alloys that were being used. But whoever took those children had the raw power to tear those bikes into ribbons, and not leave one scratch mark from a chain, or a burn from a torch. All they had as evidence was that nameless set of partial fingerprints.

God damn it.

Another drag filled his lungs with the sweet warmth. At times these beautiful white paper and tobacco bullets were his only comfort. His thoughts shifted, the photos came back from the Bedlam house; pictures with the Jacobson ring to them. No blood, no bodies, just maximum damage done at high speed with no evidence of weapons or tools. This and nothing more.

His head began to hurt again; this one wasn't going to go away.

"If you think it's bad now, wait for it."

Dave looked up to see Raymond standing over his desk.

Dave managed a weary smile, and nodded at the stained lab coat Ray wore, "You gotta work on your wardrobe Ray."

"Yeah, well, I'm better dressed than the people I work with."

Dave flicked the ash off his smoke and took another drag while Ray sat on the corner of the desk. He produced a thick brown envelope from his coat.

"Show and tell, what've you got for me?" Dave said as he stretched.

"This is a weird one, I brought the full package up for this."

Within moments Dave had cleared some papers away and Ray began to lay out the sheets of fingerprint files. "First things first. These here are the fingerprint records for the prints on the Jacobson case. The reason why we couldn't find them in the system was because they weren't there."

"You're not helping my headache Ray, what do you mean?"

"The prints aren't on record, not on any current record anyway. But on a hunch I ran them through the database system in the outdated files and I got a name."

Dave's eyes lit up for the first time in a week. "Who?"

"This is where things get a little weird. The prints belong to one Jonah Kimby, a retired miner who stayed in town after the mine shut, got picked up in a bar for drunk and disorderly. Not much on file for him just the one arrest and after that he was a good boy."

Ray laid a photo on the desk. Although the picture was grainy from the processing, Dave could make out the seemingly harmless eyes of an old man in his late fifties. It was the face of an alcoholic, scarred from the bottle with his exaggerated and porous nose. Dave knew that killers were never who you would expect, but he kept his mind sharp.

"So where is the weird part?"

"That's just it. Normally a file like this wouldn't have been saved, just deleted after fifteen years. This guy, however, went missing."

"Missing? How long ago?"

"February 11, 1954."

Dave sat very still at his desk, and then deliberately took a long hard drag on the cigarette. It was finished. He added it to the pile in the ashtray.

"That's not possible... How old?"

"His arrest file says he was born in October of 1890."

"You're not going to stand there and tell me a man over a hundred years old, who has been missing for more than fifty years, attacked and ran down four children on bikes, captured them without spilling a drop of blood, and then tore the bikes apart. Tell me you're not going to do that."

"I told you, this one is weird."

"Okay." Dave took a deep breath to rationalize this. "Weird, yes, but not impossible. He could have been in a van, had a younger group with him, coaxed the children voluntarily into the van with a candy story. Then, the younger ones got out and tore the bikes apart, maybe a ritual cult thing."

Ray cocked an eyebrow, "That's not a bad theory."

"Glad you approve of my centurion suspect," Dave said holding his head.

"No, really! It goes with what else I got."

Dave sparked up another leafy friend to help ease into this. Ray pulled more sheets out of the envelope, fingerprint record sheets. "When we went to the Bedlam house we got a bunch of prints, and again we got Kimby's prints in the house. We got five other sets of human prints as well, four of them belonged to the Jacobson children."

"The missing kids?" Dave's headache was in full swing now.

He mulled it over for a moment. Cult activity would make sense. Why else would they bring along the children and leave the prints? But how would they get the children to cooperate without running? It would be a risky operation even for a group of psychos.

"What about the fifth set of prints?"

"Another blast from the past, a twelve year old named Sarah Lillian." Another printed photo, not a mug shot but a black and white photo given by desperate parents. She was beautiful, with short dark hair, and a laughing smile. She looked like the kind of child Dave would like to have, but a brief two-year marriage had taught him that he was not the family type. Another cop married to the badge; a common tale.

"How long ago?"

"She was reported missing as of the twenty third of June 1954"

"So the prints must be fairly developed, she'd be more than fifty."

Ray had a clinical, vicious crime scene look in his eyes. "They're a child's prints. The hands must have been severed and preserved. It's the only way it could be done, but I found no trace of preservative. Whoever is doing this knows their stuff."

Dave was no stranger to death, eighteen years working in Vancouver saw to that. He had almost gotten bored with the mild domestic disturbances in Twillingate, now he felt like someone who wished death on an accident victim. The smart ones were always the worst.

"You said you had five sets of human prints, what else did you get?"

"A whole series of tracks from a pack of different animals, all throughout the house."

"Natural scavengers?"

"Too many different species. Raccoons and bears sure, but not moose and deer."

"More planted prints?"

"Probably."

He took another drag from his cigarette. Special Investigations would have to be called in; it had all the earmarks of a big case. He began to gather the papers back together; he'd have to present this to the chain of command.

Ray started to leave but stopped short, turning back, "Do you think the kids are still alive?"

Dave didn't look up, just continued gathering. "Hard to say."

Chapter 9

The long drive from Saskatchewan had been hard on the Conroyd family. After eighteen hours in a mini-van the two children had finally fallen asleep. However restless their sleep was, Jeff was pleased to finally have silence. The dashboard clock read 2:30 a.m. in an eerie green digital glow, reflected by the rain trying to wash away the windshield.

Jeff was driving now. It was his intention to make it to Aldergrove that night. Trying to save a few dollars by dodging the toll both on the Coquahala Highway had stretched out the journey. Now the hopes of reaching their destination were dying hard in his hands, and at this hour he had to admit defeat.

His wife Lisa had finally made the call to stop at the city of Twillingate, and at the threat of waking the children for another round of screaming, he agreed. Through the rain's relentless beating he could see the road stretch out ahead in its now familiar hypnotizing fashion.

"Are you certain there's a town down this way?"

His voice was hushed but still noticeably irate. Lisa kept her voice to a more soothing tone. "Yes I'm sure, it's farther in..."

Lisa's sentence was shattered by the tire's scream. A ruddy pink mass, its shape hidden by the sheeting water, slid under the mini-van's screeching protest. The van didn't stop for what felt like another mile. Silence thundered throughout the van; neither Jeff nor his wife drew breath. The moment was broken at last by a tiny voice from the backseat.

"What's going on, Mommy?"

"Is everyone OK? Are either of you hurt?" She asked. Robert, the older of the two boys, had spoken first and now little Billy was up as well. At ages nine and four they slept soundly, but that crunch would have woken the dead. Jeff cursed under his breath as he rummaged through the driver's compartment beside his seat.

"It's okay, we've just hit an animal on the road, everything's fine, everything's fine." The words spoken as much for her own comfort had little effect on Jeff. He pulled the flashlight from the depths of coffee cups and mislaid garbage, and then zipped up his coat. Lisa's instincts had started warning her. She latched onto her husband's arm. "Don't leave Jeff! Let's go, let's just keep driving."

The small voice inside him agreed with his wife, but the amount of damage done to him at the end of each month with every car payment made this injury more personal. "I have to check the damage, Lisa, I'll only be a moment. You stay with the kids here and I'll be back in a second."

The firmness in his voice was comforting. "But what if..."

SLAM! The door clamped tight echoed by ten thousand small crashes of rain. He was out the door before she could finish her sentence.

"...What if it's not dead?"

Only an instant after he had stepped outside, he was drenched. The flashlight's beam was barely strong enough to cut through the sheeting onslaught. Jeff followed the spot's weak illumination along the side of the van until he saw the headlights.

The two front headlights were untouched by the collision, making a perfect frame for the twisted plastic and bent metal that lay between them. The grill was mangled: whatever it was, they nailed it in the dead center of the hood. The weakening spotlight flashed in the red wetness of what was once the grill, rain mixing with the blood of the creature they had struck.

From the center of the grill, two groups of four lines were gouged deep into the paint in a great V, hateful, slashing claw marks made as the van smashed onwards. The beam fell downward, showing where the front license plate had been. Another curse escaped Jeff's lips. He dropped to one knee and surveyed the damage to the undercarriage. The darkness that greeted him there was too much for the tiny flashlight to penetrate.

Another curse and the soaked man got back to his feet. He imagined the damage to be close to a thousand dollars. A bright flash caught his eye through the rain some thirty feet behind the van. Another span of the flashlight and the reflection of light came again. Through the window, the bright glow of the interior let him see his wife's obviously uncomfortable state. Ignoring it for now, he trudged through the tiny stabbing spears of moisture towards the reflection.

The sounds of the rain falling through the forest around him made the darkness come alive with a whispered roar. He walked into the rain and had to bring his hand up to his face to shield his eyes. The reflection was soon lying at his feet.

The twisted remains of a license plate teetered slightly as the rain struck it, the slight red stains washing away from the dimming spotlight's view. As Jeff knelt down to pick it up, a wind came at him from the forest.

He heard a sound, like rushing water, like madness in the grass coming for him. Before he could swing his light, a strike lifted him from the ground and threw him hard onto the asphalt.

The cold rain kept him from unconsciousness, Jeff stayed in focus. A strong deep pain filled his unresponsive legs. He tried pushing himself off his face, only to rock suddenly backwards falling back into a heap of his own hot intestines. Turning his head, he could only look past his own severed abdomen and legs for a few raindrops before clutching hands and churning blackness were upon him.

The storm's harsh rains swallowed the echoes of broken glass, steel and flesh, lost into the folds of night.

Chapter 10

If a man does evil for the sake of a god, he is mad.
If a man does evil for profit, he is a soldier.
If a man does evil for evil's sake, he is a scientist.

-Proverb

The rain flowed off the old farmhouse roof. It felt like home to Steve and Jerry as they sat in the attic, transfixed by their newfound treasure. All thoughts of cleaning had vanished hours ago and the two had been engrossed in the strange knowledge of the trunks.

After a meticulous inspection and muttering silent whispers of amazement at each and every piece of the glassware, Steve finally set upon the lab notes. He had taken basic German in high school, and put effort into it to maintain his grade point average, but he'd hated every moment of it. Still, it gave him enough basic understanding to get through the text.

Jerry, however, was another story. Since languages move well in the circle of history, he had thrown himself into the personal journal with the tenacity of a little brother in his sister's diary. Having written German in front of him, it started coming back.

Jerry was the first to snap out of the puzzled study.

"Well," he dropped the book onto the floor, "this guy was an absolute grade-A psycho-bunny, complete with canvas, crayons and hard hat."

Steve looked up from his study with a raised brow. "What makes you say that?"

Jerry folded his arms across his chest in his usual sarcastic pose. "Well, lets just see now. He was some old recluse who had a lab in his basement, didn't go to parties much, unless of course it was a Nazi party, in which case he'd be there with bells on. To top it all off, he spent the war years doing some pretty fucked up research to further the fatherland. Other than that I'm sure he was a hell of a nice guy. I mean why not, everybody cuts up women and children sometime in their life."

Jerry noticed Steve's distant stare. "Why Steve, what makes you say he wasn't a nut?"

"What did they do with Mengele's work?" Steve replied.

"What?"

"You know that Nazi doctor who did all those experiments on the Jews, cutting them up and putting them into pressure chambers, that sort of stuff?"

"Yeah, Joseph Mengele. The Blue Eyed Angel Of Death, he was the famous one, but nobody knows exactly how many of those butchers there were. Hell, from the sound of this shit this guy was one of them."

"Be that as it may Jerry, what did they do with his work, his research?"

Jerry's sarcasm was gone, replaced by curiosity about Steve's questioning. "After the war the information was seized by the Allies. Why, what are you getting at?"

"I don't know much about it from the history end, but from a scientific viewpoint that information put mankind ahead by almost thirty years."

Jerry was disgusted. "Only a scientist could have a view point like that Steve."

"Okay, I know it's a grim way of looking at it, but it's true, right?"

"Yes, yes and there's long since been the idea that there was a lot of research that was done that will never be released. Why? What the hell are you getting at Steve? That this guy wasn't a total nut, or what?"

Steve turned the lab book around on the floor to show it to his friend. The pages lay open to a complex series of intertwined symbols and geometric lines with sporadic German littered about them. "Psycho or not, this guy left some fantastic lab notes that can produce even more fantastic results, and could be easily repeated with all the information provided."

Jerry stumbled back, losing his cool. "Whoa! Whoa Steve! Whoa right there and in a big way! Do you even know what this guy was talking about in his journal man? Like this guy was trying to find out the science of a species in another dimension in order to further the master race. Not exactly sane shit here."

The rebuttal caught Steve off guard. "What? What are you talking about?"

"According to Adolf's Journal here, he says in deciphering that big Latin book they found a way to work with flesh, real flesh, like yours and mine."

Steve was curious. "What do you mean, like sculpture?"

“What it says in the journal, from what I've made out so far anyway, is that there are these creatures, a whole species of beings called the Malcuthrad that live in a parallel world. Supposedly they are millions of centuries older than man, and they're like, interdimensional predators that go to different worlds to collect flesh.”

Steve was bewildered. “Collect flesh? How? Why?”

“I haven't read the whole journal yet so I don't know how. But apparently this whole species used flesh as their medium to construct in their world. For example if we want a can of pop, we go get an aluminum container, fill it with the desired substance and seal it to be consumed whenever, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, the Malcuthrad, their method is to rape flesh from one creature, and then create a living being that has the fluid they desire as its blood. Then whenever they want it, they'll just kill this creature and consume its fluids.”

“So they make all their food out of cellular reconstruction of human flesh.”

“No! Not just their food! Everything! Their houses, their tools, everything that their species use is made from flesh, and not just human flesh either. Flesh from creatures in other dimensions, other worlds, like flesh mechanics in a huge interdimensional scrap yard.”

Steve was silent for a few moments while Jerry caught his breath, his face an expression of deep thought. Jerry sat on the floor and waited for his response. Steve wasn't too sure how to handle this influx of information.

“Okay Jerry I don't know anything about this interdimensional beings, but that would explain the information I got out of the lab book.”

“Why? What is it? A how-to guide on mutilating children or what?”

“Not exactly. The first lab is showing how to bring a fetal rabbit to life, complete. Everything we need to do it is right here except the fetal rabbit.”

Jerry covered his face with his hands. “Steve, were you not listening to what I just said? I'm not a real big religious guy or anything, but if there was anything that I thought came close to pure evil; this would have to be it! This was an old psycho Nazi who thought he could do shit with things from another world. Like, he was loony, plain and simple.”

Steve cocked an eyebrow. “What if he wasn't?”

“What the fuck are you talking about man?”

“What I'm saying, Jerry, is what if this guy wasn't off his rocker? What if he really could bring the dead back to life?”

“Okay. Steve. I think you're taking this Frankenstein shit just a bit too far. The nice scientist man was a crazy Nazi okay? I got some cool books and some war memorabilia and you got a bunch of nifty lab stuff, let's just file everything else under garbage and call it a day. It's obviously bullshit.”

“Yeah, but what if it's not Jerr', what if this actually works? Do you know what that could mean for us and the rest of mankind?”

“Steve! This is earth calling! There's no fucking way, man! Listen to yourself! What do you want to do, hold hands over a dead bunny and pray to the Malcuthrad for eternal life, or what?”

“This experiment could be repeated with a minimum of preparation; like I said we got everything. All we'd need is a fetal rabbit. I mean what harm could it do? I don't condone the Nazis for what they did, but not doing the experiment isn't going to bring six million Jews back. We don't even have to kill a rabbit, we can just get one that was born dead from a pet store. Where's the harm?”

Jerry leaned back and laughed in disbelief. “So, you want to see how much of buddy's theories are real and how much of them are bullshit.”

Steve nodded.

“All right. The university language department should have some kind of a translation program on computer. I can scan the Latin text into to see what it's about, and if you want to try this Nazi voodoo shit in the basement go right ahead. Far be it from me to get between a boy and his bunny. I just want to be there to see you chanting over a dead rabbit.”

“Actually, I'd want it videotaped.”

Jerry laughed. “Better still! This'll be blackmail material for years to come!”

Steve smiled. “I can't think of a better way to christen my new lab.”

The two laughed back and forth at the absurdity of it all. It was far too late in the evening to be serious, and the rain showed no sign of ceasing its relentless beating on the cedar-shingled roof.

Chapter 11

Man is but a dream in the winds of time. We are all part of the greater circle. Just as the spider feeds to spin his web, and the shepherd tends to his flock, our masters, the most mighty Malcuthrad, shall harvest to create the wonders that are themselves wonders, miracles that are themselves miracles. Bringing all that is, into more, and bringing the faithful to suckle at the breast of eternal life.

- *ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER*

June 16, 1954
Personal journal

My work on the wall was completed today. After the builders completed it almost a week ago, my last few barriers had to be put in place to assure my own peace of mind. Tonight was the first time I returned to the lab in almost two weeks. After the accident of G49 escaping into town, there are no measures that can be spared. As it is, however, the subject did return as predicted, but with the corpse of a little girl. The papers have yet to report her disappearance, but no doubt they will in the next few days. There are some questions that I must have answers for, and soon.

The *ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER* states that by using veraxology one can alter the flesh of the unborn, the born dead and the fetus, so it would make sense why the subject would return with a female in order to impregnate or to have her impregnated. However this child was obviously nowhere near the age of puberty and therefore it would have been quite some time before she could have been impregnated and had no chance of being pregnant. This has led me to consider a few possible answers.

1. It could have been a mistake. The Malcuthrad may need to be taught about the species they come in contact with. This would explain the return of the subject with he child. Just as the laws of nature are in our world, a child would have been the easiest prey.

2. The Malcuthrad have the knowledge in how to affect hormonal changes in the human body at an accelerated rate. They could force the child into puberty, for the purpose of providing malleable matter for their own use.

3. Food. I have yet to see any of the subjects eat. In all tests all manner of food living and dead have been placed before them. Not only have none of the subjects eaten but they do not even express the urge to eat. But if in fact she was to be food, why wasn't she partially consumed?

Because of their lack of hunger, their apparent savagery is most curious. Most recently a subject created from an unborn goat was in such a state of rage that it dismembered itself against the walls of its cage in a matter of moments. Because of the unchecked adrenaline that runs through their system, their unbelievable strength combined with this ferocity could be a powerful weapon, if it only could be controlled.

Not much has been successful in the area of control however. They're immune to pain and express no fear whatsoever of fire, sound, blood, gunshots or any violent act. If anything they seem able to feed off the aggression pointed toward them, adding it to their own. Several subjects have had to be destroyed because of reaching a dangerous level of frenzy.

Further to this, the subjects show absolutely no response to drugs or toxins of any kind. Even the use of high concentrated acid once applied to their skin only makes them fly into an excited violent rage as they dissolve. It has become increasingly difficult to acquire reasonably intact specimens for dissection.

On a personal note, I must confess that languages were never my strength and Thesmulcar is proving extremely difficult. More than this, the words they speak and what they say burn in my mind, there's no escaping them. Every time one of the subjects must be destroyed the others break into a screaming chant, no two saying the same thing. At the time it happens I can never understand what is being said, the words slur together. But later, sometimes, when I sleep, their words come to me. One phrase has stayed. Now I cannot even think of my work without it coming back.

“Taste the flesh of God, and the children shall be upon you.”

It seems odd now as I write this, but there is something within it that brings back the memories of our race. I have had remarkable success in understanding their science of virtometry, but like veraxology I am still highly experimental in my research.

It is for this reason, and in view of the recent escape and return of subject G49 that I must find another location to store the subjects in order to achieve long term testing. This will decrease the risk from accidental discovery, and of a subject becoming loose in the lab. I shudder to think what would have happened if the subject had tried to do more damage than to just escape. Beyond that what if the creature was followed back to the house? Because of the house's location, the risk of discovery is minimal, but still I must have more space to continue the research. Should another creature escape from the storage location, the warding barrier of the wall will keep them from the property. In any confusion, I'll simply claim ignorance, and the simpletons who inhabit this place will wash it away from their minds.

As of this time however, it is unlikely that a remote location that is secure and has enough size to continue will be found.

I must keep trying.

-Hans Verruckt

Chapter 12

The relentless nighttime downpour showed no signs of letting up as the new day approached. Dave Madden looked into the dark skies. The clock on the dashboard said 5:30 a.m. It would be another two hours before sunrise, but even then he doubted the light could squeeze past the barrier of the storm clouds. The steady hypnotic beat of the windshield wipers mixed with the haze of tobacco smoke allowed enough comfort for him to take another gulp from the substance that was sold to him as “coffee”.

The cutting beams of his headlights rounded a bend in the road, and then all at once the road was filled with flashing light. A police cruiser blocked the road as he slowed to a stop on the road’s shoulder. He grabbed his rain slicker as a familiar knock came on his window. The dreaded moment had arrived. Dave swung open the door to enter the showering morning.

Sergeant Elson greeted him as Dave slammed on his slicker. Elson was in head-to-toe rain gear himself, but was still soaked. “Nice night for a walk.”

“Now you know what you’re gonna tell me, Elson?”

“No, what?”

“You’re gonna tell me exactly why you called a homicide detective out of a nice bed into the dark and stormy night to look at an auto accident.”

“Right this way detective.”

The two walked through the downpour and past the fire trucks and ambulances that littered the roadside. Dave could see flashes of light erupting from the other side of the longest fire engine, the distinctive flashes of a camera strobe. Rounding the brightly lit red sentinel, the sound of confused voices could be heard and the subject of discussion came into plain view.

The fire trucks had swung their spotlights to light up the area where it lay, stealing it back from the darkness. Resting on its rooftop in the midst of shattered trees a blue Astrovan lay as though it was tossed by an angry giant. It lay upside down in the wet roadside grass, the roof flattened. The entire undercarriage was torn open like the blossom of a steel flower. The interior of the van lay littered about the ground, exposed from the darkness for split seconds by camera flashes interrupting the circling lights of the emergency vehicles.

Dave had worked auto wrecks before, but he’d never seen anything like this.

“Where’s the bodies?”

Elson turned to him. “Now you know what you’re going to tell me Dave? You’re gonna tell me what could have done this and why we can’t even find traces of blood.”

“What?”

“Yup, no bodies, no blood, no fuck all. We ran the plates; got back Jeffrey Conroyd. Him, his wife and two kids were supposed to show up at a friends place in the lower mainland earlier tonight.”

“I guess they got sidetracked “

“Oh yeah, but wait there’s more. We didn’t get nothin’ out of the van’s interior but...”

Elson’s words trailed off as he shook his head, and then he turned toward the ambulance parked away from the confusion. The two reached the back of the ambulance as chains attached to the van groaned, twisting the metal free from its lodging within the trees. They climbed in the ambulance, eager to avoid the onslaught of the sky.

Two paramedics sat inside, their conversation interrupted by the opening door. On the floor between them, a bright blue plastic cooler rested. It was devoid of markings except for police evidence and biohazard stickers that adorned the top.

Dave knew the two medics from local accidents, they were ex-city squad like him. Mike Jansen and his partner Rick Minmay had developed the gallows humor necessary to keep one sane when dealing with mutilation on a daily basis. Dave had seen them crack jokes over dead babies, burn victims and mill accidents. When things were at their worst, that was when the dark wit came out. It made an effective shield.

Tonight was different; tonight there was something in the cooler that had disturbed them. Rick busied himself cleaning and reorganizing his immediate response jump kit. Mike sat with a solid stone grin designed to block emotion. He leaned back slowly, letting out a long sigh as Dave settled in.

“Hey Dave! Nice night for a walk.”

“Yeah, so I’ve heard. Have you got a head in the bucket or what?” Dave nodded towards the bright blue cooler.

“I wish,” Mike’s grin widened. “I’ve been trying to get head for quite some time now, but Ricky boy here just ain’t puttin’ out.”

"I'm starting the truck up for the batteries," Rick said.

Rick climbed over the seat to escape. He tried to make it look like he wasn't avoiding the situation. He did a fair job. Dave had seen fear before in many of its subtle forms, as well as men trying to hide it. Rick was afraid of the bright blue cooler.

There was an awkward moment of silence after the ambulance engine roared to life, Mike was the first to break it. He grabbed the cooler from the floor, bringing it up beside him.

"Well I'm sure you're wondering why I called you here today gentlemen. It seems we've found something a little bit extraordinary."

Mike popped the side latches of the container and reached inside, crunching past the ice packs to a plastic bag. Sliding it out of the cooler, he laid the bag down on the stretcher beside him, in the gentle roar of rooftop rain.

"A fireman found it as he was checking the engine compartment for an explosive threat. It was lodged deep inside the engine compartment. He didn't even get a good look at it until we got over there. We had to rip the whole front of the van apart to get at it," Elson explained.

At first appearance it seemed nothing that one would be disturbed by, especially if he or she had been exposed to severed limbs and the like; It was a severed hand... sort of.

It was torn in a jagged form past the wrist almost to the forearm, with strands of tendons that coiled slightly in the bag. Dave had seen that kind of wound before, it was standard when a limb was severed by force. It was the left wrist and hand of an adult male, but where the thumb would have been, a palm and fingers of a child's left hand had been attached in its place.

At first, Dave thought it had been stitched on as a kind of deranged patchwork, but looking closer he couldn't see where the seam of the two hands joined. It was as though the two hands were born together in a strange mating of flesh. The combined hands were devoid of hair, and where the fingernails had been, the flesh had been worn away to expose the sharp bone beneath. Now, like a soldier's corpse, it sat as a silent witness to conflict.

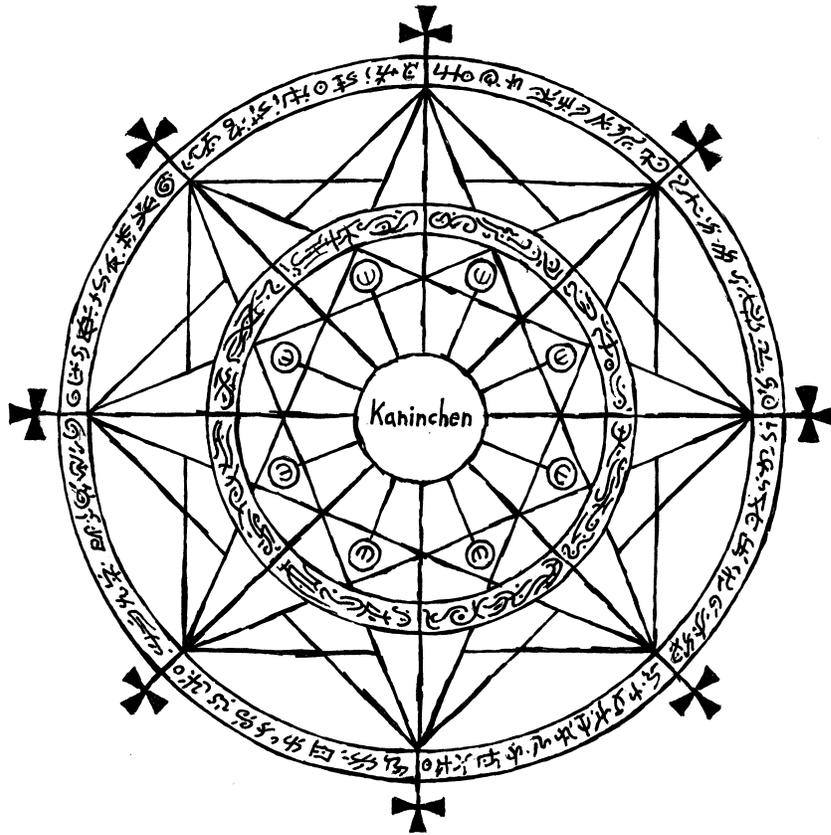
Dave was glad for the rain's rhythm on the roof, the silence they sat in now could have been dangerous otherwise. A thousand questions sang out all at once in his mind, he waited until one found his voice before he spoke.

"Have you ever seen anything... close to this Mike?"

"Nope," he said, placing the bag back gently amongst the ice. "Once the coroner gets a better look and we run what's left of the prints, maybe then we'll have an idea, but up until then..."

He didn't know what else to say, so instead he shrugged, while shaking his head with the same stony grin. Both men turned their eyes back to the Sergeant as he sat in silence. Elson threw up his arms in defense.

"Hey man, I only work here!"

Virtomatrix

Steve and Jerry had seen little of each other on Thursday or Friday. By the time Jerry rolled out of bed that Saturday morning, from his bedroom window he could see Steve's black mini-bus had vanished from outside. With the now standard breakfast of peanut butter and jelly sandwich in hand he ascended to his book-ridden perch.

Registration at Lord Thornton University had been all the horrors and mind numbing frustrations described to Jerry. Both days, Thursday and Friday had been spent in the university halls trying to find the class locations and individual's signatures. Jerry finished by noon Friday and couldn't be happier.

Friday afternoon found him in the library, accessing the different translation programs with the large leather-bound text beside him. If it weren't for his curiosity about this text, and humor at his friend's madness, there would've been no way he'd have the patience. He spent four hours scanning all the pages into the computer and waiting for the printout.

It was an ingenious system, slow, but ingenious. The computer took the page of Latin and using the different meanings of each Latin word combined with the knowledge of modern English grammar, put it together in a translated form. Any words left misunderstood were left as they were and assumed to be names.

Today was the day to attack the newly translated version of the ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER. He'd saved the text for today. He could have started in on it Friday night, but by sheer will he managed to hold himself back. Instead, he spent Friday night organizing and putting the finishing touches on his new study. With the ease of unpacking, it didn't take long. In a matter of hours the old attic had been transformed into a retreat suitable only for the most extravagant.

Jerry lost track of time in the ancient pages. The paper of the text was more like fabric than parchment. After untold centuries it felt supple, almost sensuous as he turned the pages. The illustrations had been labored over with a collection of fine tip brushes so that each page was a work of art. This was holy text for gods best forgotten. Despite his excitement over the tome, he felt a strange uneasiness when he touched it, so he kept the original text open beside him so he could consult the illustrations as he studied the translation.

The attic trap door swung open catching itself on the chains with a loud snap. Jerry almost had a heart attack.

“Jesus Christ, Steve! Don't fuckin' do that! Ya' scared the livin' shit right outa' me!”

Steve chuckled, “Sorry man, you been hiding up here all day, huh?”

“Why? What time is it?”

“Almost six o'clock. The day's gone.”

“No way, it can't be!” Jerry said swinging himself up and onto his feet. He arched his back in a quick stretch and dropped himself into his chair.

This was the first time Steve had been upstairs since the great organization. The room was narrower with the bookshelves that now lined the walls. They went the entire length of the attic stopping only at the end for another shelf packed with knowledge.

Jerry had placed the three trunks spaced evenly along the floor with British, Canadian and American flags overtop each to create makeshift coffee tables. The only other furniture was a ratty old couch that sat across the floor creating a room within the room and Jerry's swivel chair sitting between the turret's windows.

Steve dropped down on the couch, bouncing with an enthusiasm that Jerry recognized, but couldn't place.

“So, what did you find out?” Steve asked.

“About what?”

“The book Jerry! The Latin text! What did you find out?”

“Jesus, Steve, what's got into you! You're bouncing like a madman!”

Steve flashed a wide smile. “I'll tell you in a second. First I want to hear what you found out about the text. What is it?”

Jerry grabbed hold of the sides of his head in panic, unleashing a desperate scream. “IT'S A COOKBOOK! IT'S ...A...COOK...BOOK!”

“C'mon Jerr', I'm serious! What's it about?”

Jerry folded his arms. “All right, I'm sorry. The book is essentially, from what I can tell, a forgotten bible for some kind of old occult religion.”

“How old?”

“Well from what a few very interested library Professors told me, from the way it was made, it could be a over a thousand years old. They were surprised it was in such good shape! See, normally leather bound books dry out over time. But whatever this is has stayed...”

“Anyways...” Steve's impatience surfaced. “What is it about?”

“Well, for starters ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX LIBER translates out to 'The Sacred Book Of The Flesh' and that's what this book is basically about; flesh.”

Steve thought for a moment. It made sense with the lab notes he'd translated, but the childish enthusiasm was beginning to change. At first he'd felt excited that they'd found this strange book of experiments, like some kind of a treasure, but now the work was taking on a more serious tone. The text showed this was not the work of just one crazy old man, but a forbidden culture.

“What kind of religion?”

“Well, see, that's just it. I'm not too sure, but I think the book was part of a series, like a set of books that were written about ancient knowledge for some being known as 'The Watcher'. This one here is specifically about this race of beings called the Malcuthrad. Their kick was basically to work with fetal human flesh, to basically channel the spirits of these Malcuthrad into the bodies of the unborn or of those born dead.

“Why?”

“Well, again this was written by people who were definitely big fans of the Malcuthrad. I guess it was to ask them all sorts of questions about the nature of the universe and shit like that. The book basically assumes the reader knows why he wants to deal with these Malcuthrad guys. Mostly it talks about the their science of spirit and flesh transferal through the use of this system of rituals and symbols.”

“Veraxology and virtometry,” Steve added.

“Huh?”

“Veraxology is the name that Dr. Verruckt gave to what he called the science of working with the flesh. Virtometry was the science of geometric symbols producing power through their shape.”

“That wasn't in the text.”

“No, I got that out of the lab book and parts of his journal. What else did you get?”

“So far not much; it's more of the same on how to work with dead babies and what great beings these Malcuthrad guys are. That's about it.”

Steve fell back into the warm padding of the couch.

“Well...?” Jerry asked.

Steve looked up, “Well what?”

“What did you find out about doctor Nazi’s wild world of sports?”

“Well, I’m sure I probably made a smashing first impression on my chemistry professor.”

“How so?”

“Well, as I was checking over the instructor class lists for my chemistry classes, I saw the name Professor Pagal. So I whipped over to the student building and cranked out photocopies of the lab book to show him.

“What’d he say?”

“At first he just looked at me as if I was nuts but after I let him flip through some of the equations and notes he seemed kinda’ interested. He said he needed the weekend to go over it, and to check back with him Monday. He was pretty curious to know where got my hands on this stuff though.”

Jerry chuckled. “Why? Doesn’t every first year student show up with Nazi war experiments under their arm?”

“I guess not. Anyways I just told him it was in the family and I wanted to see his impression. Hopefully he can read German far better than I, so we’ll get a better idea about what’s going on with all this shit.”

“So does this mean we don’t get to wave our hands over a dead rabbit or what?”

Steve was quiet. It made Jerry regret making fun of him. Steve wasn’t sure if he shouldn’t be regretting some things himself. After he’d dropped off the text to Pagal, he’d spent the whole day busily preparing for the experiment. He was so busy making sure he could do it with the materials he had, but now he began to question the ethics of this work; the bane of a scientist’s existence.

It made him angry. Here he was on the verge of something unknown, a field so fresh that he could be known throughout history as the man who conquered death, who pioneered breakthroughs beyond imagination. Only now, on the verge of such an opportunity, here he was wavering over his fear of the unknown. This was when being a scientist was the most important thing in his life, and that was what he would be now, a scientist.

Jerry knew it was better to leave Steve alone with his thoughts and wait for the result once the gears stopped. Steve’s face grew hard. “Everything is ready downstairs for the experiment, if you still want to help.”

The words weren’t meant to come out as harshly as they did, but Jerry had seen this look of determination before. “Hey, I’m excited about this! I mean seriously, Steve, think what this could mean to fetal rabbits everywhere!” Steve broke into an involuntary laugh; Jerry kept it light. “Do you seriously got all this shit ready to go in the basement?”

“Hey man, I’ve been at this for two days, come check it out!” Steve was on his feet, crawling down through the trap door with Jerry in hot pursuit.

Downstairs, Steve slapped the light switch, letting the glow spill up into the basement stairwell. It gave a-light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel effect as the two descended into Steve’s inner sanctum.

Jerry looked around with a sense of mild admiration. Steve had been busy. What was once a somewhat creepy dark hole had been turned into an effective laboratory. Fresh one hundred watt bulbs shone out every ten feet, set like a grid in the ceiling, chasing all shadows from sight. The once bare walls were now covered with charts and diagrams overtop a shiny new coat of white latex paint. The workbenches had also been redressed in a fresh coat of white, serving to reflect the light back up through the Pyrex glass menagerie that lay in sporadic order.

Steve turned away from the lab, and into the open concrete floor area. Jerry saw that indeed this area had been transformed as well, but in a different way. There, drawn on the floor was an eight foot representation of the ritualized circle from the pages of the lab book. The area within the circle was covered with a complex overlay of geometric shapes and symbols. It didn’t have the usual chaos he’d seen in other occult writings. Instead, it was like an electrical circuit, or a map. Each shape was intermixed but definite within its place, each area connected to the other by deliberate lines. It had been painted in what looked like black latex paint, but for the amount of detail, Steve must have used a model paintbrush.

The rest of the room had been modified as well. The lighting was the same with a bulb lit every five feet. The countertops here lay open, except for a small cage that sat silently waiting. Through the surrounding wire, Jerry could see a small white rabbit bundled into a furry ball, his tiny nose twitching as if wondering his fate.

“I thought this was supposed to be done with a dead bunny.” Jerry said.

“It is. I got him in the fridge upstairs, I picked up the mother of the pinkie as well, so if he did come back, the mother might accept him. Only cost me twenty and I got the both of them.”

“Twenty bucks for two rabbits, and one of them’s dead. Nope, they never saw you coming, did they?”

Steve ignored the remark and continued the check.

The reel-to-reel tape recorder was placed on the countertop with its wired speakers placed down and out, facing each side of the ritual circle. Steve moved to the far corner where a small video camera and tripod was set up. The rest of the room was surprisingly bare.

Jerry looked back at Steve. “I see you must have been a regular busy little satanic beaver, eh? Got all your eye of newt and tongue of bat type stuff from the local Jiffymart?”

“Well, no. But I did use almost my entire supply of base iron.”

“I don’t understand.”

Steve moved across the floor over to the tape recorder, “Well, in a lot of occult writings and ritualized literature the virtomatrix is made out of a particular...”

“Hold it Steve, the... the what?”

“The virtomatrix. All of what we as humans call ceremonial circles, protection circles, talismans, summoning symbols, are a form of matrix. Kinda like a system of wires, only instead of wires we use lines drawn or carved on a surface. Virtometry is the study and use of these symbols and their use of interdimensional energy to affect our world around us. So, rather than refer to these different symbols as being their religious names Verruckt called them a virto-matrix. Follow me?”

Jerry’s expression was a mixture of concern and confusion. “You’re really into this weird shit, aren’t you? Like, this is really doing something for you?”

Steve could understand his friend’s concern but this was science! There was no room to let irrational fears get in the way. He stood strong on his ground. “The more I read into this Jerry, the more it makes sense. Sure, Verruckt did some horrible shit. Sure, he was a Nazi, but a lot of his theories did seem based on fact. I even used the iron mixed with the black paint so it would work as a better conductor. This could be something real Jerry, and if it is, we owe it to humanity to follow it up!” Steve left the basement, each step thumping as he ascended the basement stairwell.

We owe it to humanity. It sounded like the kind of rhetorical dogma that scientists use when doing unspeakably cruel things. Jerry thought it would be best to just let Steve do his thing here, and when the experiment failed, he’d compliment his friend for his effort. Down the road they’d be able to sit back and laugh about it, but not right now, Steve was too close. He moved into the lab section to grab a stool that was tucked neatly under one of the workbenches. The sound of Steve’s feet shuddered back down the stairs.

Jerry seated himself in the corner of the room opposing the video camera as Steve reappeared. In his hands he held a small plastic bag with a tiny form lying pink, cold and still. He moved slowly into the virtomatrix, careful not to smudge any of the lines. Steve opened the bag, shaking the tiny pink form out into his hand, and gingerly placed it in the center of the circle. After walking backwards in a hopping motion to get out of the circle, he paused by the countertop to relax.

“So there, Dr. Frankenstein, do ya wanna’ give the bunny life or what?” Jerry said.

Steve went over every mental list in his library as quickly as he could. Although the question was laid with Jerry’s particular brand of humor it was still valid, and the answer was yes.

“Okay. Jerr’ here’s the deal. You can totally make fun of my efforts after this is over with. But, until then you don’t say a word because you could screw it up if you talk. I’m gonna need you to work the video camera alright?”

“Hey, no problem. I’m not gonna say a word. You can just go nuts, and I’ll capture it all on tape.”

Jerry moved to the rear of the camera, exercising the same care not to step on the virtomatrix in an almost unconscious fashion. Steve moved over beside the tape recorder preparing to let the ancient reels turn out the sounds of the experiment. Another quick check through the mental list and all was in order.

Jerry flicked the small video camera to life. He panned around the room so he could get a feel for its motion on the tripod before he began recording. He brought the frame in on Steve as he checked the reels. Jerry began to feel the anxiety in the air and hoped the tiny pink corpse might stir.

“OK. Jerr’ I want you to pan in on me, and after I give my explanation focus on the fetus. All right...?”

“You got it, just tell me when.”

A quick nod and the audible hum of the camera roared into the room.

With the camera lens focused on him, Steve’s mind came to a screaming halt. Only his breathing escaped. A few seconds later, order was restored and words came spilling out.

“Steven Naylor’s first experiment in virtometry. The subject is a fetal rabbit.”

Steve pointed out into the large matrix symbol on the floor. Jerry’s camera followed his finger’s aim onto the tiny corpse. He brought the camera angle in tight, so that the tiny shape almost filled up the

frame. Jerry was surprised at the camera's capability to bring it in so sharply. There would be no room for error now; if that fetus even so much as twitched it would be caught on film.

An empty hum of electricity came through the old tape speakers in the room. The same German voice came out of the dark speaker mesh, saying machine gun numbers. Without moving the camera lens up or looking around, Jerry stood like a zombie awaiting his master's whim. The tape was turned up to its maximum volume. Then, the chanting came.

"Thera fasted eadryim nin loode yaaaaan, thre fasted nohl minad yaaaaan!"

Neither of the two could guess what language it was. A single male monotone voice spewed out the words. Each syllable and vowel half-spoken and half sung but with emphasis placed on every letter. Now a woman's voice joined in. They repeated the same phrases again, but this time it seemed louder. Then the speakers were ablaze with the sound. Countless voices, all chanting the same phrase in a harmonious chorus.

"Thera fasted eadryim nin loode yaaaaan! Thre fasted nohl minad yaaaaan!"

The sounds of the voices built upon each other cutting their way through Steve's concentration until it filled his very thoughts. It invaded his memory, washing it away until only the chanting was left, each verse slurring into the other. It climaxed as the chants slurred together, the air was slashed with white sound.

A scream. A sound of terror. A scream of animal fear in its base and pure form that broke Steve and Jerry from their trance.

The small rabbit pressed itself as far back as it could against the cage, eyes wide and ears flat. Its whole body trembled as it gasped for air. Its only purpose in existence now was to unleash another cry. Twisting its head forward when it screamed made the rabbit look like it was trying to snap its neck out of fear. Another howl, and the chanting slur filled the room. The very essence of the air seemed alive with an unnatural energy, trying to press its way into Steve's and Jerry's bodies, met by the barrier of skin, of living flesh, and the sound was hateful for it.

Another whine joined in the chorus now. Its tiny cries somehow blended with the chants in a way that made Steve's heart pause. Jerry's eye was glued to the small video eyepiece. He watched the tiny pink form's bucking head unleash a cry impossible for its size. A feeling washed over him, like a blast of madness from this tiny helpless pink demon that lay writhing on the painted floor.

Fear.

Any emotion that they had ever felt before was nothing to the insanity that gripped them now. They saw it. Before them, the tiny black eyes thrashing from side to side searching for shelter. Steve felt a sensation of shame and dread, as though by his own free will, he had murdered everyone he'd ever known. He had brought this tiny spawn that now lay in the center of the room.

The chanting stopped in a severed explosion of silence. Through the shock Steve pulled the plug on the recorder, letting the hum slowly fade out. They were very still, listening to the screaming silence, barely overpowered by the impossible whines of the baby rabbit. Finally, Jerry's whispered words came. "What the fuck..."

What the fuck indeed. It had been so clear to Steve what had to happen. He had gone over it a million times, but in the depths of his soul, he'd never imagined it working.

His body moved on reflex; Steve took the steel tongs he'd laid out and approached the fetal pink creature. His hand shook so hard that the tongs rattled against the cement as he picked up the pink mass.

The caged rabbit lay on its side, unconscious or dead, Steve couldn't tell which. He fumbled with the latch to get the door open. Jerry moved quickly to assist him, letting Steve hold the little paradox away from his body. The latch flew open and Steve dropped the pink form onto the warm fur of its mother. Steve only watched long enough to see the unconscious rabbit drawing breaths, long enough for Jerry to lock the cage. They moved back as the tiny mass worked its way down to suckle from its mother. They stood listening to their own breathing echo into the cement. Eventually, Steve turned and whispered. "Let's go upstairs."

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An hour had passed since the experiment and the two sat at their kitchen table. Steve sat straight with his hands pressed flat on the table in perfect posture, while Jerry supported his head in his hands. The shock was beginning to fade with the chanting in their ears.

Jerry tried to reestablish his bearings. "What did we just do, Steve?"

Shaking his head, the question rocked Steve, but it was fair. What indeed had they done? What had he done? For the first time in his life, Steve was alone in his mind with the reflected light of age-old madness shining on his every thought.

“Well...” he started.

Well what? What could he say? The truth made no sense.

“...It would seem that the experiment was a success, and that we have achieved the creation of life.”

Jerry's shield of humor was nowhere to be found. Steve wanted him to use it in the worst way. Steve threw back his head and took a deep breath to clear his mental fog. He began again. “Okay. Let's get a grip on this. We've gone and conducted an experiment that was beyond the normal parameters of science.”

Sounds good so far, he thought. “We're not used to dealing with something like this. This is a natural reaction to an unnatural situation.”

Jerry was coming out of shock. Each of Steve's words was making the grip on his spine loosen. “That ... seems fairly rational. But what just happened, Steve? How did that just happen?”

Steve thought carefully before he spoke. “It seems that the Malcuthrad need bodies that haven't been exposed to the cycles of life. Instead they take the corpse of...”

A shrill cry cut through the air slashing through Steve's words like a guillotine. A sound beyond physical pain, the sound of a soul being taken, torn away by method of dark knowledge. The two stared in denial at each other while tiny lungs gasped for another desperate wail.

The scream came from the basement.

Before the second cry could reach full volume, Steve and Jerry were out of their chair, half scrambling, half falling down the basement stairs.

The tiny creature's cage now lay on its side. The rabbit within thrashed in violent spastic bursts. In between throws Steve could see half of the small pink fetus as it writhed and wormed its way back into the uterus of its mother. The flesh around the opening had ripped from the forceful invasion. Blood sprayed about the cage, and a small pool spilled out onto the shiny white countertop.

Steve turned to find Jerry, but now he was nowhere in sight. Bounding across the floor he made it to the video camera in less than two strides. He hadn't fully stopped before pressing the manual start, bringing the camera whirring to life. He brought the angle in close on the cage to get as clear a picture as he could of the rabbit's activity. It was then that Jerry came thundering down the steps.

Thrashing about its crimson cage, another cry spilled from the bloodstained rabbit when the last vestiges of itself surrendered to the invading force. They heard the rabbit's scream change, it lost all semblance of mortality. Now the wail became a guttural birth cry, exploding and tearing away at the fabric of reality.

The rabbit hadn't stopped for a breath, yet the cry continued. They watched as the crimson pool of blood around the cage began seeping back into the stained and matted form, being absorbed back into the rabbit through its flesh and fur.

The birth cry ended and the twitching form leaned back on its hind legs to unleash a victory howl. Beyond the savagery of torture, beyond the wrath of revenge, beyond the darkness of death, it was the howl of the Malcuthrad. As the howl came, the corners of the tiny animal's eyes and mouth split as they opened ever wider. There was no blood from these wounds, just the wet glistening of sinew and muscle. The entire jaw was exposed and the ripped wide eyes glared about the room. With the blood reabsorbed, the being took to its feet to survey the room.

It had the appearance of a rabbit no longer. With the skin pulled back in strained cords, it looked more like an infection preparing to pounce beyond the limits of its wire confinement. As the three sat staring at each other, the rabbit spoke. The low wrenching voice of Thesmulcar came all at once, fading in and out from the corners of the room.

“The gates are open, yet I come and my brethren do not greet me.”

The rabbit's lustful gaze fell on Steve and Jerry. “Behold, even now the yield lays ripe for the harvest, as we work in the cycle of Dasturian. Fear not, your brethren will greet you. As it was, so shall it be again. Release this form so that I may harvest.”

Neither of them could move, this was beyond reason, beyond sanity!

“Release me, and be free!” the bloodstained rabbit said.

The command would not be repeated again. A deep snarl came from the creature as it shook from inner rage. In an explosion of force, the being threw itself at the walls of its cage. The force from the blow threw the cheap wire cage from the counter top and sent it smashing onto the floor. The corners were beginning to give.

Unfazed by the fall, the entity within threw itself forward driving the exposed flesh of its face into the sharp barbs of the torn wire. Another howl of vicious arousal came from the beast. Another blow and the rabbit's head was through the wire, twisting and turning, ripping away its own flesh as it writhed. Howling, the terror was about to become free.

The crack of a gunshot destroyed reality. Steve spun to see a still smoking Luger. Jerry had sent a bullet smashing down through the rabbit's head, leaving only a torn neck-stump and the body kicking death spasms.

Again the gun roared, and then again, before Jerry lowered the pistol down to his side. The ringing in his ears was painful, but countless times better than the voice of Thesmulcar. Only shreds of meat scattered about the cage remained where the rabbit once lay.

Jerry turned and walked up the stairs. Steven turned the camera off and followed, slapping the light switch on the way out.

Chapter 14

July 2, 1954.

Personal Journal.

I am done. My work with the Malcuthrad is finished. There is no room for this species in the dream of the Reich! The Fuehrer was not wrong, the Fuehrer was not wrong! He always knew the threat that was my work, which was why the work had to be kept concealed from the eyes of the unwashed. The Malcuthrad are not able to help the Reich. They only want the flesh and care not where it comes from. They took Jews and more Jews. They took animals and the little children I took from the city. Little Sarah, yes they took little Sarah too but that's all! No more!

I am not able to allow such a threat to resurface on the face of this world. So, it is sadly that I report that although my experiments were a success the project itself was a failure. However the research is incredibly useful to the Reich. We will be able to use this against the unwashed when they march on Berlin! Yes! Time no longer matters. They will not have any idea how to fight with creatures that will lie to them.

How can you combat something when it lies to you? How? There is no way. For this reason, while the hoards of the unwashed can try to grasp this knowledge it will surely curse them. This journal is my only defense for the horrors that I had to create in order to expose the possible strengths of veraxology for the Reich. There can be no birth without blood, and the blood spilt in the name of the Reich is forever sacred.

Why are they taking flesh? Why do they insist upon the grasp of mortal men, when it is only the fetal flesh and the necrotic corpses of children that are capable of sustaining veraxil use? Now, I feel the true concept may be lost within this holy book, just as it is in all the books of lies. How sick of the lie I grow. How sick indeed.

Now that the experiments are a loss I must clean the slate of the filth that has been spilt. It must be cleaned. It is my responsibility to show that the pain of the many can indeed benefit the pure. Now that this has ended, I will travel to the site and clean the slate. Finally my work for the Reich is at an end.

That which cannot be made to serve will be broken, that which is broken, will be rebuilt to serve.

-Dr. Hans Verruckt

Chapter 15

The crackling campfire sent shadows dancing across circled faces. Laughing quietly in the rippling darkness, young lovers whispered to each other while acoustic guitar sounds drifted gently through the air. It was the beginning of the school year, and the freshmen of last year were the sophomores of today. This was their celebration.

Earlier, the party had pounded rhythms as couples swirled in the heated dancing of chemically enhanced lust. Now, four hours later, those who were still conscious took advantage of the early fall warmth and lay softly cooing in the dancing shadows.

Although the university populace came from across North America, the community of Twillingate was conservative enough to drive out university parties. Those parties, which now catered to minors, were held in the wilderness away from decent folk. The students didn't mind so much; it was less hassle, more fun, and it was a source of the rustic nostalgia traditions were made of.

Bob Lanigan lay in an alcoholic stupor upon the lap of his girlfriend Laura, who was in a similar state. The night air had lost its chill, defeated by the whites of beer, and rum soaked fruit. Other couples lay in various states around them. Most were having too much fun to notice, and a select few were too drunk to care.

With his eyes closed, Bob could feel Laura tracing the imaginary lines of age onto his face with her delicate fingers. His senses were alive and craving each gentle stroke. Bob had been dating Laura since just after he came to the university some two years previous. She was an art major, caught up in the world of her own torrid creativity and terribly concerned with the ways of the world and how they could be expressed through the use of modern media. He was an engineering student who had fallen in love with her magical intensity.

Again her fingers brushed over his face, stroking him as she might stroke some mighty beast. The sudden movement startled her as Bob turned over in her lap. He pushed his hands down across her hips and lifted his head to kiss her. It was meant to be gentle, but his lips brought something to surface in her that she'd suppressed all night.

She brought her hand up with fierce intensity, gripping his raven black hair in a passion-steel fist. At once she lunged forward pushing Bob over, pinning him to the ground amidst their circle of friends.

The thought that the others might be watching worried him, but excited her into a frenzy. Her shoulder length red hair thrashed as her lips and tongue desperately worked at his ear, neck and shoulders. He could feel himself swell against her as he thrust his hand up onto her breast, feeling the lace of her bra under her university sweatshirt.

A sound came like a train tearing through the trees. It came from the earth and sky as the wretched unseen attacked. Laura instinctively looked to the fire for startled protection, but she saw only a flash of pink as swollen flesh crashed down, extinguishing the flames.

The last sparks flickered into the sudden darkness, marking their passing. Blindness suddenly upon them, Laura and Bob could both hear sounds of movement and madness as their eyes adjusted. Then the screaming started.

When someone is startled by an occurrence, he lets out a scream or cry as a form of defense to scare his opponent and to buy themselves some time. It's an involuntary action that our bodies possess as a defense mechanism. The sounds of twisting flesh and the wet splintering of bone that burned the air were instantly cut with the sound of a different scream, a soul scream, the scream brought by the unconscious mind when the terrors of unpossessed memory come to claim their own. It is the scream unleashed when the mind warns others to flee.

Run! I am lost! The species must survive!

Laura froze. The cries shattered her soul. The blood of the long dead flooded into her mind.

Run!

She scrambled off of Bob. He froze from the terror that had occurred, his mind working fervently to adapt to the sudden attack on his senses, his eyes adjusted with the desperation of the body. Through the canopy of trees, distant stars that still had strength lighted shadows within shadows moving around them. The darkness shifted as sounds descended with the speed of whispered damnation, the speed of the Malcuthrad.

A form without form hurled itself into the harvest. Laura pushed herself back, feeling a twisted hand swing by her face. Not the hand of the predator, but Bob's, as desperation cut his reason. His own dragged demise was lubricated by blood as tiny barbs caught and tore his flesh like hooks. He screamed and vanished, dragged into the darkness by darkness itself. His scream was silenced by a wet crunch, only to be replaced by another classmate's cry.

Laura bolted. Terror gripped her and threw her legs into motion; the shadows became clear to her now as escape burned in her mind. Laura was running. Even through the darkness her will had taken over. Sounds of the harvest tore through the night.

Each of Laura's strides tried to gain more ground than the last, but she could hear the sound of rushing chaos from behind her. A sharp biting pain ripped through her shin. Only an instant of agony, and it was replaced by a numb lightness. She brought her leg forwards, crashing down onto the bloodied stump of her knee.

Laura didn't have time to scream before she fell. She couldn't get her hands out in front of her face to break her fall. She didn't feel her head crack open on the flat granite rock that lay on the forest floor. It was an act of mercy that she never saw the thing that took her flesh into the darkness; the thing that took her to the harvest.

Chapter 16

It struck Dave as odd how certain smells brought back memories, faces long since past. The formaldehyde scent of death filled his nostrils as he descended into the police lab. His shoes called a lonely echoing tone as he walked. There were never too many live ones down in the labs. Just the doctors and the essential staff to whom this had become a strangely comfortable place to work, and the occasional rookie sent down on errands while his mind was still free of easily conjured demons.

Dave hadn't managed a whole lot of sleep after he had left the auto wreck. The small impossible limb they'd taken from the van kept appearing in his mind, defying logic. He'd gone home and lay in bed thinking of all the ways a mutation like that could occur. All he'd come up with for his trouble was a grade-A headache and an empty pack of cigarettes. The lab boys opened shop at nine; it was now ten past, and Dave wanted answers. He needed this to make sense. At least Markowski was still on staff.

Doctor Rodney Markowski had been the head doctor of the Twillingate police lab since the dawn of time. At age sixty-three he was the oldest staff member still on the payroll, two years away from retirement, and as sharp as his scalpel. Dave was counting on him; at least he might have a theory. He swung open the doors to the lab.

The room was a buzz of activity. Glass beakers and test tubes littered the tables, sealing in foul liquids and colors. Three young lab technicians were prodding various devices, observing through large microscopes evidence for unknown cases.

"Where's Dr. Markowski?"

A young man pointed to the door leading off to the side of the lab and resumed work. Maybe they had a lead after all. Then again, maybe not.

Dave felt that familiar nuclear pulse in his head. He made his way to the door of Markowski's office. His light knock brought the familiar sound of the doctor's voice beckoning for him to enter, and so he did.

Markowski's office was something to behold. After years on the force, he had amassed a great number of photographs on the walls. They depicted various dignitaries he'd met and awards he'd been presented with. But mostly, they were disturbing car wrecks and horribly mangled corpses. Underneath the loosely tacked photographs, shelves lined the office in a complex collage of books. Various trinkets and paperwork, from ballistic reports to death certificates, littered every surface. Markowski sat like some wise old toad in his swamped office.

He was a short squat man whose features were vaudevillian. His balding head, crowned by a circle of white hair, coupled with his pudgy build gave Markowski an overall appearance of a clean-shaven Santa Claus.

He was staring intently at what lay on his desk in front of him. So much so, that he didn't even look up when Dave entered. The object was a glass specimen jar. Inside floating in formaldehyde, was the impossible severed hand. Beside it was a forty-ounce bottle of scotch just more than half full, with a shot glass beside it.

Markowski sat fumbling with another shot glass in his hands, but he kept his attention firmly locked on the thing in the jar. Dave couldn't tell exactly what the expression was on Markowski's face. It wasn't the look of puzzlement or confusion that he had expected, instead it seemed more comparable to regret.

Dave had a great deal of respect for this man, he was an authority in his field. Some said he was the best in Canada for forensic medicine. He'd been friendly enough to Dave, but always a bit distant as well.

"Starting a little bit early don't you think?" Dave said.

A smile slipped across the old man's face. "Actually, detective, I think I'm a little late, very late in fact."

He did nothing to change the look of confusion on Dave's face except motion to the antique office chair that sat opposite to his own. Dave took a seat as confusion gave way to curiosity. Long seconds passed as they watched the impossibility before them.

"I was wondering who would be in charge of this case." Markowski looked as though he were going to say more but stopped himself mid sentence. Dave could hear the apprehension in his voice.

He didn't have time for this; he had little sleep and less patience. "Doctor, what exactly is going on here?"

The firmness in his voice snapped Markowski into reality. A man who had resigned himself to the situation spoke. "This is not the first time I've seen something like this. As a matter of fact, I was wondering when I would get a chance to see something like this again."

Dave was perplexed. "You mean to tell me you've seen this sort of thing before? Why didn't you call me right away? I'm totally lost on this one!"

Dave realized that his voice was beginning to rise, and brought himself into check. He waited for the old man's response. Markowski closed his eyes tight and pushed his hands gently away from him as though he were trying to slow the inquiring onslaught. Then, pushing himself back from the desk, he hunched over an old safe. It had been camouflaged up until now by the chaotic foliage of paperwork. He twirled in the combination.

"It was right after I got on the force, I guess that would have been... '54, yes I think so; the summer of 1954. I had just come from university to this department. Twillingate was a lot smaller then; the mine had shut down two years previous and the university was the only thing here, so it was a less than prestigious place. I had just set up the lab and was only about three weeks in when the first of the disappearances started to happen."

The doctor pulled an ancient brown envelope from the safe and slid himself back up to the desk, leaving it unopened under his folded, weathered hands.

"Disappearance? Of who?" Dave asked.

"Family pets at first, some cats and dogs. Then the reports became so frequent, we thought we had a cult on our hands. Then when livestock started to go that's when things started to get really serious."

Dave's mind flickered back to the Thompson house and wondered how many missing livestock claims he wasn't aware of. Markowski went on.

"Things really switched into overdrive when the little girl went missing..."

"Sarah Lillian," Dave finished. Markowski's eyes flashed wide. Dave continued, "Sarah Lillian right? I found prints belonging to a little girl at the Bedlam crime scene. It made no sense until now."

Markowski's eyes narrowed as he continued. "Yes, it was Sarah Lillian, and not long after more people started to disappear. Both the girl's parents vanished when they were out looking for her. Whole families living near the end of town disappeared without a trace. A total of forty-eight people. It was like they just winked out of existence. All in the week after the Lillian girl vanished."

Markowski reached onto his desk picking up the second shot glass and cleaning it with his shirt. "That's when we found him."

"Who?"

"One Helmut Greggor."

Dave searched his memory to see if the name registered even remotely; it didn't. "I'm sorry, that's a name I don't know. Who was he?"

"A doctor, or so he claimed. We found him breaking into the hardware store to steal dynamite. He'd looked as though he'd soaked his hands in tar and been through one hell of a fight. The boys drove up and there he was loading kegs of TNT, screaming like a maniac that he had to 'put an end to his work' and that the 'race was in danger'. In any case the poor bastard had lost his mind. All of his ID said he was an Austrian emigrant and he had nothing whatsoever to back up the claim that he was a doctor. The arresting officers had their hands so full with our man they never had time to check the back of the truck until later."

His aged hands uncapped the bottle of scotch pouring two shots and handed one to Dave. Dave took it. "It was the tow truck driver who found it first, then it made it's way to my lab."

He reached inside the envelope and pulled a thick stack of black and white photographs from within. As Dave flipped through the images, Markowski downed his scotch and poured another.

It was some strange piece of flesh art that mocked all sanity. The photos showed the body of a young girl, naked and broken with a great hole blasted in her chest. Dave recognized it immediately as a shotgun blast, leaving her tiny ribs exposed and protruding outwards like a clutching claw. Her back was arched up, frozen in the desperation of pain. The neck was outstretched, but distinctly not human, leading to the hairless head of a cougar. The jaw was frozen open, showing torn gums with no teeth.

Its eyes were staring into the lens in many of the shots, leering at death's theft. Attached as arms were the hairless legs of a deer or perhaps a young calf, but instead of hooves only large swollen and torn lumps of flesh remained.

On the right hip was the unmistakable right arm of an adult male, it's elbow folded back the wrong way, and it's hand clutching at an invisible foe. The left leg had been replaced with the arm of an infant child; useless and curled up tight against the crotch.

If a picture was worth a thousand words, these photos stole theirs from the texts of obscenity. They had been taken in a well-lit laboratory, slowly spanning around the autopsy table where the body was laid. Dave looked hard at each one before moving to the next. The gradual swish of the photographs was the only thing that could be heard over the buzz of the office lights. Markowski had gone through two more shots before Dave spoke.

"What the hell is this?"

“That...” Markowski took a deep breath, “that is an impossibility. That is the thing that has made me question every law of science. I call it a plexite.”

“A plexite?”

“Latin for a combination creature, or something interwoven.”

Dave tried to wrap his mind around the images before him. “But...What is it? Where did it come from?”

Markowski poured another shot. “I don’t know where it came from and there is no real way to define it. After I took those shots I did the autopsy on the creature myself. There was no dead tissue on the body anywhere, the top layer of skin, teeth, fingernails, hair, all of it gone. The organs inside were as mismatched as the outside. I pulled out two sets of lungs, or what was left of them, and the heart of a cow. Everything that was necessary to sustain life was in there and connected as a mismatched monstrosity.”

“Was it sewn together? A fake made by the psycho you nailed?”

“Nope, there isn’t even a microscopic seam anywhere on the body, and believe me I looked. Whoever or whatever made this hand, made the plexite.”

“This thing was never alive, right? This had to be a kind of genetic fuck up, right?”

“This thing shouldn’t even be lying on the table, so naturally it shouldn’t have been alive. The creature was agammaglobulinemic.”

“What?” Dave said

“It’s a condition found in badly deformed children, usually born dead. It means that there are no plasma cells in the blood.” Markowski threw his hands up in frustration, “Which naturally would account for why the limbs could be grafted on, because plasma cells are what cause the body to reject transplanted tissue.”

Dave’s head was starting to spin. “I thought you said...”

“Yes, that I couldn’t find any seams or scar tissue, right. But that limb had to have been connected because residual fingerprints on the arm’s hand belonged to Marcus Lillian.” He took another shot of scotch. “The girl’s father. He went missing while looking for her.”

A silent stare at the hand inside the jar asked the question; the doctor answered. “The large part of the hand I identified as Thomas Bedlam and the part attached to where the thumb should be, belonged to Sandra, the youngest of the Jacobson kids.”

Eternal moments slid past as Madden mulled over this information. Theories about cars torn open like paper, sheared steel of bikes and shattered timber of houses, all burned in his mind.

“How strong was it?”

“What?”

Dave pointed at the jar. “These plexites, how strong do you think they were?”

“Well, at least I got the consistency of chaos.”

“What do you mean?” Dave said.

“A normal human has about two milligrams of adrenaline per kilogram of body weight in his blood stream. From an examination of the hand and the records from the original corpse, I got a count of fifty milligrams per kilogram in each of the plexite bodies. It’s enough to make any heart blow up like a bomb, but if it didn’t...”

He had to pause just to think of it.

“That creature felt no pain, never slept, and could bench press a house. It would be unstoppable.”

“What happened to the crazy?” Dave asked

“They took him away to Thornton. No idea after that.”

“What name was he under? Maybe I can get a look at some of his sessions. It might give me something anyway.”

“It would be under Greggor. Look Dave, I’m sorry, I got no idea what is going on. This whole thing is crazy.”

Dave got to his feet, stopping as his hand touched the doorknob, “You got an idea. So do I. But it’s crazy.”

He was halfway out the door when Markowski’s voice stopped him. “Hey Dave...”

“Yeah?”

“They’d be fast too. Really, really fast. Okay?”

There was a concern in his voice that touched Dave. This old man of science had just learned that all his rules had changed.

“Yeah, thanks Doc.” The frosted glass rattled as he shut the door behind him.

Chapter 17

Lost books are lost for a reason.

-The Truth

The black Volkswagen sped down the road toward the university. Steve was focused on driving, with little sleep from the night before. Since the experiment, even the simple tasks had required his full attention. It was a wonder that now he could function, in the last twenty-four hours, the rules of his world had changed.

After the ringing in their ears stopped, the two found themselves sitting back at the kitchen table, locked in the kind of confusion that only spiritual trespass could bring. That voice; Thesmulcar...

Steve shook his head, trying to erase the memory; it was too much to grasp now. He had to get to the university and see Professor Pagal, he had to find a rational explanation. Pagal should have analyzed the lab book writings by now. He would be able to put it all back in focus.

What did this mean? What could all this mean? Steve knew he was involved with something bigger than he expected, and involved far too heavily. There were things man was not meant to know, but now he had a 15-minute home video that had those very things illustrated at thirty two frames per second.

This must be why most geniuses in science are mad, Steve thought. If it was true, then both he and Jerry were on their way to being two of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. The thought made him laugh out loud as he drove.

“Stop laughing damn it!” The fear set in again. He yelled at himself inside his head, or was it outside? Did he yell? His senses were betraying him. Quickly he pushed the thoughts aside; it was dangerous to think now. Thinking hurt. Thinking made the fear to start again, that terrible lost feeling that they had felt while sitting at the table.

Poor Jerry. Steve could still see that look of pain on his face. More than once Jerry had looked like he might say something, but he couldn't put the words in order. The two had sat at the kitchen table until Jerry had gotten up and gone to his room. Steve had followed to his own room not long after, but neither of them slept. The painful echoes of Thesmulcar radiated in their souls.

This morning had been easier. When Steve had asked what the plans were today, Jerry's response had been, “Oh, I figured I'd swing by the nut house and drop in for fifteen or twenty days.” Dark humor, but humor nonetheless.

Jerry had come up with the idea to go talk to Perrilican and see if he could find out more on the history of Verruckt. It was a good idea because it kept Jerry busy. An idle mind at this stage was an invitation to madness.

The morning made everything okay. It was almost like a bad dream, until Steve went down into the basement to get the videotape, until he saw the bloodstained rabbit, shattered by gunfire and half spilled from its cage. Then the icy hand that had gripped his spine the night before was waiting for him. He didn't say much after that: what could he say? *Yup. That rabbit that we killed because it was possessed is still in our basement.*

It was 7:30 am now. He wanted to catch Pagal before class started at 9:00. He had heard Pagal relaxed in his office before class. Both he and Jerry were missing class, but this was the last thing he cared about now; he had to solve what had invaded his mind before he could add anything to it.

He pulled into the parking lot. Only the professors and keener students were here with the rush just starting. Stepping out of the van, Steve felt the refreshing cool air wrap around him while the bright morning sun threw its golden rays onto the university buildings.

Thornton was a beautiful place. It reminded him of pictures he'd seen of Oxford and other universities in Europe. The large stone brickwork was under attack from the creeping ivy that covered sections of the buildings in an emerald shield. Over the rooftops, he could see the massive school clock tower and church-like spires rocketing skywards. He hurried to the entrance.

Steve had the tape in his jacket. As he walked through the building, Steve said silent prayers in the hopes that Pagal would be in his office. The long halls with their high ceilings made him feel watched, as if he was hurrying to see the doctor with some great and terrible purpose. He started to laugh again but caught himself with the fear that he might be losing his mind. He refocused on his task, walking to Pagal's office. Then he was running.

The large oak office door loomed up in front of him. The time for prayer was over; it was the time for truth. Steve lifted his hand against the door, knocking loudly.

“Professor Pagal! It’s Steven Naylor! I have to talk to you! It’s urgent!”

He didn’t intended to sound as desperate as he did, but perhaps it was necessary considering the circumstance. He heard the voice of Pagal on the other side and his heart leapt into his throat.

“Come in! Come in Steven Naylor!” the voice said. “Come in and speak with me about urgent matters!”

Steve pressed down on the ornate door latch, hearing the echo sound down the halls. He heaved the door open with only a small whining protest from the hinges. In a second he was in the office and the door thundered shut behind him.

The first thing that hit him was the smell. It was the unmistakable smell of human feces rotting in its own urine. The room was a wreck. Bookshelves had been toppled and smashed. Single pages from hundreds of books lay torn out and scattered, covering every inch of the floor in an unworkable layer of mismatched knowledge. The chalkboards that hung on three of the walls had been covered with a seemingly endless string of formulas. They intersected and linked down to lines working backwards and forwards in a fashion more advanced than Steve had ever seen. In the center of the room was Professor Pagal’s desk, the only piece of furniture left intact and clean. There, sitting on top of it, naked and cross-legged, was Professor Pagal.

His pale, overweight body was hunched forward, with his clasped hands, like an eager child awaiting candy. Pagal slowly rocked back and forth with a wide-eyed smile cut across his wrinkled face. His tongue darted out every few seconds to lick his lips. Steve blinked hard. The stench of the room was overpowering, but the smell was the least of Steve’s worries. On the desk beside the professor, was a four-liter beaker of hydrochloric acid.

Once again all the rules had changed. Pagal sprang forward with surprising speed for a man of his age, landing on the floor crouched like an animal. A few papers flew into the air at his thunderous descent, sending echoes throughout the room. Steve was paralyzed; he could barely breathe. All he could do was stare, like a child awaiting his father’s angry strike.

Pagal stood up slowly, like a dancer, moving his pale swollen form up into a luridly graceful stretch towards the ceiling. Steve couldn’t help but notice Pagal’s erection.

“BEHOLD!” Pagal’s voice boomed at the ceiling. “BEHOLD! THE NAKED APE!”

He let out a burst of laughter that scorched Steve’s ears. As quickly as he started, Pagal stopped laughing and brought his attention onto Steve like a hammer. “So if it isn’t the Trojan himself! Come to get your explanations have you? Come to see what dear old grandpa was doing in his basement with his filthy little notes? Is that it?”

Steve slowly slipped his hand behind him trying to find the door latch. He could feel the cool brass at his trembling fingertips.

Pagal turned his back and walked back to the desk. He picked up the acid beaker, as a child would hold his favorite toy. “It all makes such simple sense. The truth is always simple. It’s all the stupid people who mess it up.” He whirled to face Steve again.

“Well, don’t you see? We’re all just part of the food chain! We’re all just part of the huge interdimensional pyramid that just keeps the worlds humming along! Our world and the worlds outside our own!”

Steve had his hand firmly around the door latch. Pagal paced a circle around the desk as he spoke. “Where do you think all the missing people are going Steven? What do you suppose happened to the thirty-six thousand people who went missing last year in Canada? Where do they go?”

His tone changed now to a whisper of forbidden things. “They go to the birthing matrix Steven!” He looked around the room as if being watched. “So the Malcuthrad can take their place as rulers of the Earth. It’s natural you know? Oh yes, they’ve been doing it for thousands of years! What do you suppose happened to the lost tribes? The Incas for example, or certain mountain tribes in Tibet? What do they all have in common?” He cocked an eyebrow at Steve, as though expecting an answer during one of his lectures.

“Two things. First they all had a society that was based on what we would call occult traditions, but they weren’t magical. Oh no, that was the name the arrogance of our own culture gave it at the time! Now I suppose in light of recent discoveries, ‘magical’ might be called something like ‘virtometry’. Perhaps the Incan’s blood rituals were a form of veraxology. Don’t you see? It fits in so well! Oh yes, and that leads us to my second point. They’re all gone! Vanished! We had no idea how entire civilizations vanish overnight! Not until now, no, not until now. But they can’t take me, oh no, they won’t.”

His voice brought back that desperate tone again. “I answered your question didn’t I? Yes I did! YES I DID! And I always answer my students’ questions. Yes, I always do! If I don’t have the answer I’ll

get back to them first thing Monday morning!” He started walking towards Steve now. “But now I have to go! We must both go Steven!”

Pagal held the acid beaker out in front of him like the symbol of his salvation. Steve seized control of his body spinning around, pulling the door open.

The corridor had started to fill up; it was bustling with students as they moved along making their way to their classes. Steve didn't stop. He could hear the sound of Pagal's bare feet slapping the ground only a few meters behind him, the gasps from the other students. Even though Pagal was old, Steve could feel the madman close behind him. He was running with the fuel of fear to spur him on, and then he heard the crash.

He knew what it was even before the screaming started. Steve had broken more than a few beakers in his lab; Pyrex beakers have such a distinctive sound when they break. The professor had smashed the beaker with his forehead in a single self-loathing strike, sending glass shards into his eyes, and flesh destroying acid over his entire body. Then Steve heard the professor screaming, the shrill of a man tortured by flameless fire tearing at his flesh.

Steve heard Pagal's body bubbling just before the shrill scream of a melting human drowned all other sounds away. In a steaming pool of puss, the acid took him. Pagal's scream gurgled into the whispered hiss of dissolving flesh. The sickening splattered thump of Pagal's meat falling from the bone sounded like soaked rags hitting linoleum.

Harder and faster than ever before in his life, amidst the terrified cries of students, Steve ran.

Chapter 18

Jerry knew that Perrilican wouldn't be up yet. Checking the dashboard clock, 8:05 AM stared back. His night had been less than restful. After a seeming eternity of trying to grasp his actions with Steve, he'd gone to bed. He wished now that he could have been there for his friend more, that he could have been the joker able to wisecrack in the eight minutes before nuclear destruction, but he hadn't been. Everything after that tiny pink mass started to move, was like a dream. Even shooting that... thing was like watching himself act, powerless to stop himself.

The worst part of the night had been the dreams. Black, twisted dreams of skinless children whispering dark things in a language he understood but couldn't repeat. Jerry had woken the next morning soaked with sweat, the memory of his dreams fading in the morning sun. He'd heard Steve get up, heard him moving around, and suddenly he'd had the most unbelievable desire not to be alone. In a flash he was downstairs making a bowl of cereal for himself.

He remembered that Steve had looked a little better this morning, not much, but a little. Jerry had tried as best he could to brighten the mood. Jerry knew that if he had stayed in the house by himself, the walls would have closed in on him.

In order to understand anything, you must first know the history of it; maybe this had happened before. The only answer was Perrilican. They'd both agreed that it would be quicker if Steve went to the university to find out what Pagal knew. Jerry would meet up with him at Perrilican's when he was done.

The morning had gone rather well until Steve had gone down into the basement to get the videotape. It had been easy to blow off the occurrence when it all seemed like a mutual bad dream, but reality had been lurking downstairs and it had stained Steve's face when he'd returned. Not much more had been said after that. Steve had put on his black flight jacket and called as he'd gone out the door that he'd meet Jerry at Perrilican's. Seconds later the black van had rumbled down the driveway.

Jerry wasn't too sure how he was going to question the old man about the house's previous owner. He would no doubt be curious as to why Jerry was so interested, so he would have to come up with some kind of response. He would trust his instincts; coming up with believable lies was easiest when he was on the spot.

Jerry parked the car by the side of the road, walked up the driveway and was surprised to see Perrilican on the front porch, sorting through mail. Perrilican broke into a wide grin and started down the steps. "Hello, hello. You're here awfully early Jerry, I'd thought you were in class."

"Ah... I don't have class today, I actually had some questions about the house."

"There's no problem, eh? Everything is all right?"

"No, no its nothing like that, I was just wondering about the last owner who lived there."

"Oh! Well! Come inside. Yes, come inside out of the morning damp and we'll talk about it."

In exaggerated urgency, the old man moved towards the house. The house still smelled of tea and the stacks of magazines and newspapers hadn't moved from their place, but there was something missing.

"Where's your dog?"

As Perrilican took his seat at the kitchen table, sadness was reflected in his face. "Oh, poor old Lewis, I imagine a cougar got him. I haven't seen the old boy in more than two days. He might still come home, but he's old. Yes, I'm afraid he is quite old," he said, lost in memory for a moment. "But I'm sure you didn't come here to ask about old Lewis! You wanted to know about the old owner of the house, Greggor his name was. Yes, Helmut Greggor."

Jerry paused. He had never heard that name before, but his mind put it in place. Naturally the old doctor wouldn't use his real name, he was a Nazi war criminal after all. This Helmut Greggor must have been his alias. He had to be careful here.

"Yes, Mr. Greggor. We found some old diaries of his. He seemed like quite an... extraordinary man. I was wondering if you knew anything about him." Jerry knew the best lies were always half-truths and the story was a good one to stick to. Old thoughts returned to Perrilican's face again, he leaned back in his chair, heaving a deep sigh.

"Well, I didn't know him myself, no, I only know what I read about him. He was a quite fella, an old Austrian I think. I only know what the papers said, that's how I heard about the estate sale."

Jerry had a lead. "What do you mean? He was in the paper?"

"Yes, well, it seems the man was in the war. I guess he snapped and tried to break into the old hardware store to steal some dynamite. The papers said he was screaming about blowing up the mountain. I guess that kind of thing is common amongst war vets. He seemed young though; he couldn't have been too much older than myself. Still, the war did some horrible things to people."

Jerry sat back and thought for a moment, why would the doctor want to blow up the mountain? He was certainly mad, but his madness was of a different kind. It didn't seem like something he would do. "Any rumors about the house?"

Perrilican brought back his grandfather smile. "Oh, you know, the children said the old place was haunted. That he was a crazed killer who used to murder people there. There was a rumor that he was a Nazi and a witch, the usual stuff for bored kids."

"So what ever happened to him?" Jerry asked.

"They took him away to Tweedsmuir Sanitarium and that was the last anyone ever heard on the matter. I wonder sometimes if he's still up there."

Something cold griped Jerry. "You don't think he's still alive do you? I mean he'd be dead by now, wouldn't he?"

Perrilican let out a chuckle. "I just said he wasn't much older than me, and I'm not dead yet!"

"No. I didn't mean..."

"No. No, I know what you meant. I'll tell you though when you get to my age you start to watch the obituaries for names of people you know, and to be honest I've never come across his. But that doesn't mean anything. He could have been transferred to another institution."

The unmistakable sound of Steve's Microbus came from outside. It came to a stop but the engine stayed running. Jerry took it as a sign. "Well, thanks a lot Mr. Perrilican. I got to go, Steve's waiting on me."

"I'll let you see yourself out, I've got some reading to do here. You boys take care now, yes, take care." Perrilican waved Jerry off as if dismissing him from royal court. Jerry got to his feet and made his way out the front door, being careful not to slam it behind him.

The morning had proven to be quite a shock. Learning that Verruckt might still be alive gave him an odd feeling of anticipation. He wondered what Steve had learned from Professor Pagal. Out on the porch he let his eyes adjust to the brightness of the morning. Then he saw Steve down on his hands and knees just outside the driver's side door. He had vomited and was just trying to get to his feet as Jerry came running to his side.

"Holy shit Steve! Are you okay? What the hell happened?"

Steve leaned back up against the side of the van. He had turned sickly pale and clammy sweat was forming on his skin. He was still trying to catch his breath when Jerry continued. "Look, we better split before Perrilican comes out and sees you like this. I'll drive, we'll leave my car here."

Steve still hadn't uttered a word as Jerry helped him climb into the passenger's seat. Jerry threw the van into gear and pulled out onto the road. He knew his car would be safe, he'd explain to Perrilican later. Another quick glance at his friend and Jerry headed for Lord Tweedsmuir Sanitarium.

"OK. Steve, start slow. What the hell happened to you?"

Chapter 19

Being Native, Chas Easter was entitled to certain benefits, one of which was the right to hunt year-round, regardless of season. That was why Chas and three others from the Manitou Indian Reserve were out with their rifles on the middle of a Monday morning. Their logic was that since the fire had destroyed so much of the mountain, the remaining deer population would have to take shelter in the surrounding forest.

Spread out in a straight line with about ten meters between each man, they marched through the forest. Chas was in the middle, with Hank Redtree on one side, Mark Tarkin and Dave Sund on the other. All four were clad head to toe in various military surplus camouflage patterns, complete with oversized side arms and hunting knives.

This was their usual tactic: get a large string of men together and spread out in a line to flush something into movement. It wasn't even remotely pretty, but it worked. There was the traditional pre-hunt party the night before, so they'd had a late start. Since the reservation was outside of town, it was only a twenty-minute drive until they were in prime hunting territory, and after the fire it should have been positively packed with game.

The undergrowth of the thick tree canopy was at a minimum. This was one of their favorite spots to hunt for just that reason. Sure enough, they had hardly moved twenty feet off the road when Chas caught a flicker of movement off to his right. Mark saw it as well and instantly shouldered his rifle, waiting to catch another glimpse. The ferns that grew up along ancient stones and natural fallen deadwood allowed for easy movement, but clear shots were often difficult to get.

Such was the case now as they had heard something moving just behind a great massive old stump. There was no way to be sure of what it was. All movement stopped along the line.

Cool damp morning air tickled their senses as they waited for the shot. Chas couldn't believe they had found game so quickly, especially just after arriving. It may have just been a bird that flew up from the ground, but the sound was too loud; it had to be an animal of some size. On the far right, Mark signaled his intentions with a simple nod of his head and moved in. His goal wasn't so much to get a clear shot, as it was to flush the animal out into the open and into the hail of gunfire that waited. The only danger was that if it bolted right, Mark would be the only one able to shoot it.

Mark Tarkin was not a small man by any means. At thirty-eight years old he had been a construction worker in Twillingate for most of his life. He knew how to work hard, drink hard, and fight hard, and he had the physical build to do it. His native blood had kept the natural predator instinct, and now this mountain of a man moved with the stealth of a cougar as he circled around behind the monstrous stump.

The force of darkness came at him. In an instant Mark was on his back, his rifle knocked free from his hands. Years of fighting in bars took over and his powerful hands reached up, taking the throat of his assailant in a crushing grip. His hands latched onto the bare skin of a dog's throat.

It had a dog's hairless body, but the face a woman, who had died in an Astrovan a short time ago, stared back down at him. A look of sexual madness was streaming from her eyes. The creature had two human arms growing out of its shoulders, one perhaps having belonged to a university student, the other the large arm of Thomas Bedlam.

Its fingers drilled deep into Mark's shoulders, making him scream as his flesh separated like cooked meat. Behind those two arms four more sprouted from behind the creature like insect legs. They bent and thrashed in the madness of harvest.

The plexite found its grip. Mark's scream was amplified as the creature tore his arms off with a simple twist of its wrists. It showered itself with the blood of the hunter, tossing his limbs aside as a child would throw away gift-wrap. Without his arms Mark was helpless as fleshy fingers tore away his throat. He tried to scream a second time, but the scream became a spattered gurgle as air rushed through the gaping wound in his neck.

The others heard the scream and terrible crash as Mark fell. They circled around the tree in a frenzy to help.

It was hard to say who saw the thing first. Jeff in his haste slipped on what he thought was a wet piece of wood, but landing on Mark's severed arm froze him for a merciful moment of shock. Hank rounded the tree in time to see the last gush of Mark's blood splash against the plexite's chest. Chas was the last one there, nearly tripping over top of Jeff's frozen form.

They watched as the abomination turned awkwardly on Mark's seeping body, absorbing Mark's blood into its stolen skin. The creature's neck strained, lifting the woman's face into the air. She licked her lips and her tongue played in rapture, licking the air.

It was then that the plexite saw the other hunters. Its ruby lips pursed, then peeled back to show a toothless maw. Arching itself back the plexite threw its limbs wide in combative yearning, like some great fleshy spider, and released a howling cry into the bright morning air.

The roar of gunfire chased its scream through the trees and off into the remaining forest. Its call was a command to fire and the three men unleashed a volley of death into the flesh-puzzle before them. The rifles were all semiautomatic, allowing three shots from each before the form tumbled backwards onto the forest floor. The bullets exploded through the plexite's body, leaving great gaping holes and fleshy shards as it thrashed in a bloody spray.

The eerie silence of the forest returned. The loudest sound made by each man was that of his own panting breath, which drowned out the rustling jerks of Mark's corpse, echoed by the twitches of the now slain demon. The three men looked back and forth at each other with confused fear washing between them.

Another sound came.

"Listen!" Chas said, holding up his hand, straining to hear over the sound of his own crashing pulse. He thought for a moment that perhaps he had imagined it, but soon the others heard it as well.

It sounded like an ocean wave as it crests the shore. A faint, distant crash of water as it falls and turns in on itself, rushing at the sand. It was a sound that welled up onto them, growing louder and louder as it came from the forest ahead. The men backed up, holding their rifles shouldered and ready to fire as they moved.

Each man swept a wide arc of the tree line ahead. They could see a short distance before the ancient virgin growth created a jagged wall against their eyes. They were uphill from the sound but despite its ever-growing volume they couldn't see the source.

A single form dropped into sight only forty feet ahead of where they stood. It paused and the adversaries confronted each other through their gazes. Chas and Jeff saw the pink form clearly. It was another plexite with a hairless goat head attached to a body that could only be described as vaguely canine. Now the purpose of the howl became apparent, it was calling the others to the hunt.

So often a man will question himself before acting. So often he will look into the depths of himself before committing an irreversible action that reveals his true nature. There was no such hesitation here for Chas Easter. He dropped his rifle and ran. Jeff probably would have done the same except that his rifle sight had locked on the beast before him. The decision was made by his fingers, sending death to the plexite at eighteen hundred feet per second.

Redtree fired as well, but the roar of gunfire did nothing to deter Chas from his course. He knew his jeep was close and the keys were still in it.

Screaming.

Guttural wails of children born of madness came from the creatures that leapt and ran with frenzied hate into the hail of gunfire. Their nerves no longer carried pain from their plexite puppet bodies to their Malcuthrad minds. There was only the Malcuthrad desire, the Malcuthrad instinct to harvest, to procreate, to gather flesh.

Chas moved with a speed he had never before known, crashing his way through the underbrush as he approached the road. He was oblivious now to the sting of his skin tearing under the tiny claws of the branches and the whipping pain on his face. As he broke from the tree line and onto the road, the shooting stopped in the forest below, but the rushing wave came closer through the brush.

He was close to the jeep. Chas swiveled his body onto the road and raced against the fear. Still the sounds of rushing came, and by the time he reached the jeep, Chas knew his friends were dead. He turned the keys and the engine roared to life. He smashed his foot down onto the accelerator. The tires spun against the loose gravel until the jeep slid into motion.

A great crash came through the jeep's canopy behind him. Chas turned in time to see a mass of pink flesh, wild and flailing, clawing through the fabric sidewall and into the back seat. The howling bald face of a female child thrust itself forward. Chas turned and swung a great meaty fist with all his strength.

His hand caught the creature square in the face, shattering the cheek, jaw and forehead in one massive strike. The child's eye burst, sliding out of its socket as the plexite tumbled from the vehicle, grinding hard into the increasing speed of the road. A quick glance to be certain it was gone and Chas slid back into the driver's seat.

A turn in the road leapt out at him. He saw it through his panic just in time for his body to obey his commands; he released some pressure from the accelerator, and feeling the jeep begin to slide, slammed his foot back down as he powered through the turn.

Just as the jeep centered itself on the road, another fleshy thing came into view. Chas could see that this creature was far bigger than the others back in the forest. It stood up from a four-legged position, arching to its full height. From the unmistakable mass, he could tell it had the body of a bear, with its legs

spread wide, and the scarred antler-less head of a moose attached at the neck. Like some great demonic horse, it screamed a challenge to the jeep.

Chas knew that if he stopped, the speed of these creatures would have him in a matter of moments. He couldn't be far from town, so he dropped his foot heavily onto the gas, speeding toward the monstrosity. The plexite dropped to all fours and charged.

Hunter safety as well as Canadian law requires that all firearms stored in a vehicle be kept in a locked container, with the ammunition kept in a separate locked container as well. However, this makes defending oneself against bears rather difficult should the need arise in a hurry.

Luckily, being located so far out of town meant two things: First, the threat of bear attack was very real, especially after the fire. Second, the police were rarely at the reserve checking vehicles for loaded sawed-off shotguns. Chas Easter had one such shotgun that he kept in his vehicle for just such an emergency.

He reached past the clutter of the back seat, and found the rough texture of the cut down stock right where he'd left it. It was an old double barrel his father had given to him. He kept one tube loaded with double ought buckshot, and the other with a heavy grain solid slug round. It was the same kind of slug he heard the RCMP used when stopping vehicles that rushed roadblocks.

He swung the barrel hard into the flat safety glass of the windshield, his adrenaline giving him the strength to clear it in almost one sweep. The glass exploded inwards with the wind, but he couldn't do much more than blink his eyes for fear of flipping the jeep. Such an accident would mean certain death, one way or another.

He swept the weapon from side to side, frantically clearing the remaining shards of glass from his view. The wind blasted him in the face; Chas squinted while the flapping of the ripped canopy around him vibrated into a roar. It was getting close now; the creature wasn't farther than fifty meters away and closing.

Chas brought the shotgun to rest on the dash, trying to grip it firmly against the wind as he drove. His hand hurt, he might have broken it when he smashed the plexite that crawled in behind him, but there was no time for the pain now.

Thirty meters...

He had to wait until the last possible second for the plan to work. The creature had to be the right distance away. Not so far that he might miss, and certainly not too close.

Twenty...

Ten...

Five...

In an instant the final decision was made. The shotgun fired, ripping the charging plexite's front right leg off just below the shoulder. The creature's surprise turned to fury as suddenly its body tumbled, spinning it out of the vehicle's path as it sped by. Over the sound of the roaring engine, Chas heard an unholy howl coming from behind him.

In an instant he was clear. Seconds passed like hours as he sped back to the reservation. The wind whipping his face forced him to squint through his watering eyes to focus on the road ahead. He had to watch for more of those... things.

What will I do once I reach the town?

That question brought another plan into his mind as quickly as it was asked: get back to the house, get another rifle and get to the police station. Another turn and the first houses of the reservation could be seen.

Three hundred meters ahead, Chas saw a man race out onto the road with a gun. He brought the shotgun up to his shoulder and fired a blast into the bushes at the side of the road. A quick fan of the action and he tried another shot, but the weapon was empty.

Chas suspected what had happened, and his suspicions were confirmed as he saw the ruddy twisted form of a plexite leap onto the now helpless man. It cleared the bushes and the road, thundering down onto his back. Chas saw an explosion of blood from the man's head.

Chas set the jeep's course directly at the creature. He pounded the gas pedal into the floor, sending explosive power to the tires. The plexite heard him as he came, and turned in one leap to assess its attacker.

Its hairless sheep's head let out an ungodly wail. It was no wonder now how the creature leapt so well. It had the rippling toned flesh of a cougar's body, except for the human hands that gripped at the earth where the paws of the great cat had once been. It was much smaller than the bear thing Chas had charged only moments before, but it didn't care. In long predatory bounds it gathered momentum, charging the jeep. Chas had him now; the bush guard on the front of the jeep would smash that body into meat.

Or so he thought. At the last moment the plexite gave a mighty leap. It came into the cab over the bush guard, missing Chas by only inches, but making him lose control of the jeep. It rolled, bouncing high and hard from the momentum as it did so. Chas was in the vehicle, spinning, and then it seemed for a brief

second he was in flight before smashing down hard onto the front lawn of a nearby house. The Jeep continued to roll, catching the ground and tumbling through the air like a snowball until it came to an explosive halt.

The screams of the crash mixed with the screams of people all around him. Chas was still conscious, but he couldn't move his body; his neck lay at an unnatural angle as he stared at the sky. His world was all sky and screams.

He saw a red smear, and was gone.

Chapter 20

Detective Dave Madden followed the serpentine road around the Lord Tweedsmuir Sanitarium until the lush green hedges gave way to the staff parking lot. He parked beside a black Volkswagen Microbus that had a bright biohazard symbol painted on the back. Stepping out of the vehicle he took a moment to light a cigarette before going inside.

May as well. He thought to himself.

As he lit the smoke he took a long look around him. He often thought how strange it was that most asylums and hospitals were portrayed as a snake pit; Tweedsmuir was anything but. Its long rows of gardens carefully tended, the emerald lawns, even the Victorian architecture made the building seem more like a manor than anything else. Through the hedges he could see the long housecoats and lawn shoes worn by the voluntary inmates as they walked peacefully about the garden. It was almost enough to make one want to go crazy. His impatience got the better of him, Dave turned toward the hospital.

Compared to the exterior's antique grandeur the inside was surprisingly modern, with polished white industrial flooring, framed by brighter white walls that led into the reception area. There was no mistaking it for what it was now; a nut hatch. The stiff odor of antiseptic lingering in the air gave a feeling of uneasiness that always accompanied hospitals. Adjacent to the reception desk was a waiting room with long sterile rows of beige vinyl couches where loved ones could visit.

A pretty blue eyed young nurse looked up from her paperwork. "Can I help you sir?"

"My name is Detective Dave Madden. I have some questions concerning a patient you had here named Helmut Greggor and I was..."

"Oh, are you with the other two gentlemen?"

Dave stopped. "Other two gentlemen?"

"Yes, they've been waiting for Dr. Prudens to come back from his morning rounds so that they could have approval to visit Mr. Greggor."

Another hit. "Wait now... Are you telling me Helmut Greggor is here in this hospital?"

"Oh yes, I can't remember him having a visitor in the time that I've been here..."

"Where are these two men?" Dave's tone became severe.

The nurse pointed to the waiting room. "They're in there."

He started to turn away, then stopped. "Did they give their names?"

"Yes..." She made a quick glance down at her roster. "Steven Naylor and Jeremiah Slate. Is there a problem officer? I can call security if you..."

"No, no that's fine, this isn't anything like that. I'll just wait for the doctor as well. Thank you."

At least he hoped that there wasn't going to be a problem. Whoever these two were, he didn't even have enough to make a suspicion charge. Normally he wouldn't be so jumpy on a case, but this case was one bent, twisted thing after another.

Dave walked into the waiting room with a confident stride, the same one used when he had to exude a commanding presence. There was no way for the detective to know what to expect walking into that room, but when he saw the two young men sitting there, he knew by gut instinct that they weren't responsible for the crimes.

They both looked like hell. The one on the right who was wearing all black, looked as though he was going to be sick, or perhaps just was. The other one was wearing a tattered bomber jacket, and was shaking his head as though he had painful thoughts.

They were the only other people in there, but neither one of them noticed Dave's entrance. They had learned after almost fifteen minutes of waiting that Dr. Verruckt, or Helmut Greggor as he was called, was still alive and they could visit him if the doctor said it was all right.

Jerry lied, saying it was for a school paper on long-term patients. Despite Steve's surreal story about what happened at the university, it wasn't affecting him badly, not yet anyway.

Steve felt anxious about seeing Verruckt. On one hand, this was the man who might be able to put the entire puzzle together, clear up all the confusion that was tearing at the fabric of their reality. On the other hand, however, they had discovered a Nazi doctor who had spent the last fifty years in an asylum. Steve had already dealt with one psychotic today; he wasn't sure he could do it again.

A short, burly, red haired man in a long coat was in front of them. In his hand he held police identification. All the color left in their skin, was instantly gone.

"Detective Madden, RCMP. Can I ask you a few questions?"

All Steve could do was stare. Through a tight throat, Jerry said, "Yeah, sure."

Dave sat on a couch a few feet away facing the two. "Can you tell me all you know about one Helmut Greggor?"

Upon hearing the name, Steve exploded into sobs, and the whole story came pouring out of him, the house, the trunks, and the experiment that had gone so horribly right.

Halfway through it, Jerry got up to get some damp paper towels from the bathroom for Steve, the rest of the time he gave simple explanations of things Steve was blurting out.

During the mix they introduced themselves.

Dave had to rush to keep up with Steve. He burned off the rest of his notepad and had written halfway down his pack of cigarettes by the time they were finished. Steve had given the short version, but even that was unbelievable. If it weren't for Markowski's photo, he would have called the two of them insane. Something inside him told Madden that these boys were telling the truth, or at least they sure thought they were. They definitely had more information on this Greggor/Verruckt character, and they were desperate to talk to him, as though their very sanity depended on it.

After Steven stopped rambling, Dave tried to digest the information. "This is all part of an ongoing police investigation. I don't think you guys are in any trouble, but I would like your cooperation on this case."

Detective Madden saw that these two could provide a wealth of information, but Dave saw a couple of scared kids. The two didn't even have to think about it; both sounded their agreement.

A tall thin man with a pleasant smile stepped quietly into the room, "Is everything all right in here?"

"Yes, everything's good," Dave said, moving swiftly away from Steve and Jerry to talk to the doctor. He felt he could at least give the two a few more seconds to compose themselves.

He took the doctor's hand in a firm grip. "My name is Detective Madden from the RCMP. Would it be possible to speak with a patient of yours, Helmut Greggor?"

The doctor's eyes seemed hard but intensely curious behind the well-tested smile he'd fixed in place. "As Mr. Greggor is one of our elderly patients, we are his legal guardians. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask what this is about."

Dave had to think fast. "We think Mr. Greggor might have witnessed something some time ago that has relevance to a case we're working on. I just want to ask him a couple of questions that's all."

The doctor turned his eyes down in a thoughtful nod. "Well, I don't know if you're going to be able to do that."

Dave cocked an eyebrow. "You're denying us access?"

"No. No, you can see him, but I don't know if he'll answer any questions. He's been here a very long time. No one could even remember him speaking until just recently."

Steve and Jerry moved up off the couch and stood behind Madden. Dave continued. "When did he start talking again?"

"The night of the fire. It was quite a sight."

Dave nodded. That night would live in police legend forever. Everyone in town had phoned in saying the world was ending.

The doctor continued. "Well, as you can imagine, quite a number of our patients were very disturbed by seeing the fire but Mr. Greggor was hysterical and had to be sedated. It took three orderlies to hold one eighty five year old man down."

"What was he saying?" Steve asked, reminding Madden of his presence.

"A phrase in German over and over again; Sie sind frei. Sie sind frei."

Dave didn't recognize it. "What does it mean?"

Jerry's voice spoke low almost a whisper. "They are free, they are free."

The doctor nodded, "Yes that's right, and now he gets quite agitated if we try to talk to him. He simply curses us in German, and if we press the issue he puts himself into a hyper-exerted state and must be sedated. So you see, I don't think he'll be much help."

Dave looked back at the two young men. "If you don't mind doctor we'd still like to talk to him."

"By all means, I'll call some orderlies and you can see him right away if you like. However, if he agitates himself we'll have to sedate him."

Dave nodded his thanks and the doctor was off to the reception desk. He turned to assess the condition of the two young men. Steve still looked rough, but much better than he had when he first saw the kid. The emotional outburst was probably what he'd needed for the short term. Jerry was staring into space, his eyes brimming with concentration. This was not standard procedure, but for the first time in four days Dave felt he was making some headway, and he wasn't about to stop now.

"Are you guys going to be okay?"

The fantastically twisted tale they'd told him was coming back on him now. He'd have to see the videotape and all their evidence before he bought into it. This case was getting far beyond the realm of reason.

“Yeah, we’re okay now,” Steve said. It was a lie, but he had to say something.

Moments later the doctor returned with two large men dressed in white shirts and pants. He spoke with a soothing, hypnotic tone. “If you gentlemen are ready, you may see him now.”

Dave wondered if this doctor could even speak in a normal way anymore. Working around the insane for years had to have an affect on a person. He decided not to worry about more than one psychopath at a time.

Steve walked slowly behind the small crowd. The two orderlies walked in front followed by the doctor and the detective. Steve was glad Jerry had hung back to walk along side him. Jerry wasn't talking, but somehow just him being there was a comfort.

The hospital hallway was an eerie place. The echoing footfalls combined with the sliding whispered steps of patients as they moved in other rooms gave a don't-ask-don't-tell aura. As they walked, Steve noticed that no one was confined. Most of the doors were open and the patients wandered in their surreal slow motion fashion.

He couldn't bring himself to look them in the eyes. The patients' eyes that he did glimpse all possessed lost stares, helped along by medication. Steve wondered what these people would be like without the drugs.

The whole group piled into an elevator when its doors slid open. The doctor pressed the third floor button. The doors shut and the elevator lurched into motion.

Dave felt the tension growing, but he kept it hidden. He thought it strange somehow that he'd never had call to come to this hospital before now. There were never any calls of disturbance, never an escaped crazy, just the quiet reserved view of Tweedsmuir and its euphoric patients.

He looked again at the size of the orderlies who rode with them. “Do you have many violent patients here?”

“Yes, we do, actually. We specialize in the more disruptive disorders. It's not very well known, but we have three sub-basement levels that are containment facilities for extreme cases.” The doctor's matter of fact tone suggested a hint of pride.

“You're telling me you've got criminally insane cases here?”

“Oh yes, some of the more famous cases as well. The people you saw outside are part of our extended care wing. We generally don't advertise that we are a maximum security installation.”

Steve blurted out, “But there's no fences! No guards, nothing!”

The doctor's soothing whisper came back, “Sir, we're not a prison, we're a hospital. I can assure you the security on the lower levels is absolute, but this is a healing environment. We really can't promote wellness if this place looks like Alcatraz.”

The elevator stopped and they all followed the orderlies out into the hall. The soft white doors were locked on this floor. This had been more of what Steve and Jerry had imagined an asylum would look like.

Dr. Prudens continued. “Most people think of the disturbed as crazed axe murderers, when their real threat is to themselves. If someone is truly mentally ill, even if he has committed crimes, in many ways they are just as much a victim as the one attacked, if not more so.”

Steve felt the sickness and guilt return, seeing Pagal's staring eyes from deep inside him. Jerry's audible whisper cut into his thoughts. “Oh yeah. Sure buddy. Hitler and Manson are actually really nice guys! They're just misunderstood.”

The doctor stopped in front of a door. He looked through a sliding shutter, and the orderlies took ready positions on either side. It wasn't noticeable to the untrained eye, but Dave had seen more than one SWAT team in action, and these were men with the relaxed alertness of experienced fighters. Dr. Prudens looked through the steel mesh.

“Good morning Mr. Greggor, you have some visitors. May we come in?”

The doctor's voice was echoed by a silence from within. After a moment he closed the tiny shutter and gave a nodding signal to the orderlies. They brought out keys, and a moment later the door swung open into the hallway.

The room was small, only perhaps ten by eight feet. Inside was a simple looking bed with a wooden night table that had been bolted to the floor. Sitting on the bed in front of the large Plexiglas window, was the man they called Helmut Greggor.

He was tiny, seemingly swimming in his gray canvas coveralls as he sat on his tightly made bed. His feet hung over the sides barely touching the ground. He slumped forward, hiding his ancient face while his hands lay lifelessly on his lap. Dave couldn't imagine three orderlies having to hold this old man down.

From the elevated window, all of Twillingate city, with the great charred monolith of Mt. Skihist reaching to the sun, silhouetted the old man's form. Very slowly, he lifted his head to look at his unwelcome guests.

His was a face of judgment. The deep weathered wrinkles and lipless slit of a mouth cast a strange effect against his pearl white skin. Tiny splotches of purple liver spots speckled his bald head like moles, and his eyes shone from dark dreams despite the wrinkled fog of age. Even as he sat deathly still, he had the look of wisdom that went beyond good and evil.

The two orderlies slipped inside and took their positions unobtrusively on either side of the door. The small group filled in a few feet from the tiny man. His body was small with six large men standing over him, but his eyes gave an eerie presence. Those eyes drifted slowly over his three visitors. The doctor and orderlies were unimportant; he focused on Madden with a stare.

“Leave me alone.” His thick German accent was cold, barely even human, but Dr. Prudens didn't give in. “Mr. Greggor, this is Detective Dave Madden of the RCMP. Along with Jerry Slate and Steven Naylor. They have some questions they want to ask you.”

There was a slight pause. Prudens' words didn't register on the old man's face.

“I don't want to talk to anyone. Please, leave me alone.” His eyes dropped back to the floor.

Dave spoke out. “Mr. Greggor, we have some questions concerning a case at the time you were arrested. You had a...” Dave really didn't know what to say. This went beyond bizarre. “...A creature in the back of your truck. We were wondering if you could tell us any thing about it. Where it came from, if you had killed it, anything at all you might remember.”

Silence.

Steve and Jerry swung their eyes onto the detective. Dave could feel their eyes on him but he ignored it. This was a police matter, they didn't need to know about the creature. Greggor sat, staring defiantly at the floor.

“Mr. Greggor please, there have been some disappearances and anything...”

“It's no use detective, he's not going to speak to you. There's no sense in getting him agitated, you should probably go,” Prudens said.

Dave was becoming desperate. This line of questioning was the only lead he had but he still had information to get from Steve and Jerry. He had to exhaust this line but it seemed the doctor was right. He turned to speak to the doctor when Steve blurted out, “Dr. Verruckt, please! It's about the Malcuthrad.”

Dave spun in place to see the old man's eyes locked like steel onto Steve's form. An intensity was there, an intensity of mind and body flowed from the ancient man. Steve felt the old Nazi's eyes drilling through him; at least now he knew the old man was listening.

“Dr. Verruckt, my name is Steven Naylor, Jerry and I moved into your old house at 2975 Avendale. We found your lab notes, and we redid the first experiment. We were successful, but the creature started to speak to us, talking about a harvest...” Steve came to the realization that he had no idea what to say next. Prudens was watching quietly waiting to see the response of his patient. Jerry saw the lull in Steve's thoughts and spoke quickly.

“We need to know what you did with your experiments doctor. What did you do with them?”

The old man's wide eyes shifted back and forth across the room, his mind a flurry of activity.

“The book is wrong.” He spoke in low tones, his accent making the language thick and hard to understand.

Silence. Dave looked over at Steve and Jerry to see if they knew what he meant. The two were staring at each other as though no one else existed in the world.

“Which one doctor, your lab book?” Steve asked

Verruckt shot up straight his tone harsh. “No! My notes are flawless! They gave me false data! They said it could only be made from the fetal flesh. The 'ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX' said they were not able to reproduce themselves. How could I have known! There was no data. NO DATA!”

The old man's intensity grew as he spoke. “I knew they were becoming more as they spoke of the harvest. The experiment was a failure. The whole project is a failure!”

Dave wondered how long Prudens would allow this to continue. The old man's intensity was growing stronger by the breath.

“I took them deep into the mountain. I isolated the experiment for the safety of the project. But they were building a matrix. I had set a virtomic barrier to hold them in, but it was only to be temporary. They have to be destroyed before they can complete it! The harvest will come and they will clean this place of flesh. They're building now; they'll kill us all to bring in their kind! They've done it before! Thousands of times before! The house is safe by the virtomic wall built around it. You must destroy the matrix or the great harvest will begin. It will begin and there will be no stopping it!”

The doctor gave a signal to the orderlies. Instantly they were beside the old man gripping his arms tightly. Verruckt was near screaming now “Sie sind frei! The fire freed them! They must be stopped before it is too late! They are stronger than ever before!”

Prudens pulled a needle from his coat and walked in front of the orderlies. His voice carried the tone of authority. "Detective its time for you to leave. Move out of the room now!"

Legally, the doctor didn't even have to let them see the old man, so he thought it best not to push their luck. He grabbed Steven and Jerry by the arm pulling them out of the room.

The two went along in a daze of shock. Once outside the room they heard the screaming from the other cells. Like dogs in a kennel, when one started, the whole hallway kicked into a chorus of anguish. Verruckt's German screams could be heard from within the room as he fought with the orderlies.

"KEIN MEHREIT FUR DIE MITLEID!"

Chapter 21

Most truckers were pleased with the opening of the Coquihalla Highway, but Desmond Killroy was one of those few to whom the highway didn't make the slightest bit of difference. He still had to haul logs down to the Skihist Mill along Highway One, and every day just at noon he stopped at Twillingate for a burger. He didn't care if he was hauling wood for the Pope, he was stopping at Dak's Daycare. He'd been doing it for close to thirteen years and saw no reason to stop.

As the large Kenworth rounded the bend that came to Twillingate, the massive fallen form of a virgin growth tree sprawled out across the road, creating a coniferous wall of wood. He had enough time to slow the rig, feeling the large load of raw timber shift in the trailer behind him. He'd been through more than one roadblock in his time.

As the rig slowed the gravity of his predicament set in. He didn't have enough space to spin the rig around, it was too far to back up, and there was the risk of jackknifing the truck, which would make the process even more awkward.

The rig slowed to a stop, Desmond let the engine run as he slung himself out of the cab and down onto the road to get a closer look. At about six foot three, and three hundred pounds, with savage tattoos running over his skin, one might think him a dangerous man, but in fact the reverse was true. He had fought for most his life so he, like most truly rough people, didn't fight unless pressed.

The way his Santa-like gray beard framed his weathered face made him look like a folk singer biker bushman. His worn Dayton trucking boots, tattered blue jeans and plaid Mack jacket were the unofficial uniform of the loggers in British Columbia, and by the way Desmond's clothes were worn in, one might think he'd started the tradition. A large hand made bowie knife hung from his waist in its sheath. He'd only ever drawn it twice in anger; both of those times he had soaked it in blood, and never felt remorse. BC was still rough country, and what happened in the bush camps stayed there; there was no law in the wilderness.

The tree was huge, dominating the road with long thick branches sprouting from its massive trunk. Desmond worked his way to the left to see what could have felled such a giant. The large gaping claws of roots that spanned the three-meter base looked as though they had been torn away. Somehow it had been ripped up from the soil and pushed over. From the crater that it left in the earth it was plain to see the scratching and the spray of dirt that was spread when the giant fell.

Desmond didn't know why, but a sudden uneasiness came over him. This tree had obviously been felled to block the road, but why? There were no protesters or signs, and why did they fall the tree that way?

He slipped his hand on his hip as he thought. The familiar brush of his belt knife gave him comfort. He still had the problem of turning the rig around as well. He hadn't even started to deal with that yet.

The sound of padded feet slapping against the road was coming up fast behind him. Desmond spun in place and felt the cool grip of his knife handle as he slipped it from its sheath.

He saw a flash of pink, and a hairless form flew through the air. The plexite's adrenaline leap came with such speed and force, Desmond didn't have time to act other than to bring his hands up to guard his face before it slammed into him. It was perhaps blind luck that the creature caught the blade in its throat.

Desmond was knocked only a few staggered surprised steps back and his balance was caught again. Had it been another man, any other man, it might have thrown him, but Desmond knew the true law of combat: it's not how hard you can hit, it's how hard you can get hit.

He looked down at the bloodied knife in his hand, then at his attacker. He'd thought it was a hairless deer, and he was almost correct. Except, that is, for the silently screaming human head where the deer's head should have been. The plexite's canine form thrashed about on the road, pumping blood out of its gaping throat wound. Silent screams, desperate for air came from the bald face, its skin red and torn from its own thrashing on the road. Throwing its head back to howl, only to open its throat like a second jaw. The plexite savagely twisted itself and fell still on the road, eyes staring.

Desmond stood stunned, wondering what had just happened. This creature was the most terrible thing he had ever seen, yet somehow familiar. It was like seeing an ancient enemy for the first time, a childhood nightmare returned.

The truck groaned. The steel in the old Kenworth's logging trailer warped as it tipped onto its side. Desmond could only back away as massive tons of logs shifted, smashing together with the hollow thunder of timber. The whole spectacle seemed to happen in slow motion. A few moments passed and the delicate

point of balance was lost, tipping and throwing the giant trees out onto the road. With a mighty grind, the explosion of steel came smashing hard into the pavement.

The roar of the spectacle tore through the wilderness while Desmond could only stare in disbelief. He couldn't think of anything that possessed the raw might to throw such a weight onto its side. Another roar came from stolen flesh. A creature leapt from behind the flipped trailer and up onto it.

It was a Minotaur, the same creature he had seen in old Sinbad movies and comic books. It was the creature from legend, created by ancient magicians to hunt men's flesh in the labyrinths of ancient kings. But they'd never existed, how could they have? Those were simply stories from ancient scrolls. The Bible was found on scrolls, so if you believe the one you might do well to believe the other.

There was nothing mythical about the form that now stood before him. Its massive human body was a bristling wet pink, with muscles bulging from every part. The disproportionate hairless head of a bull was swinging side-to-side, jaws foaming wildly below its searching eyes. Its hands tensed, opening and closing, desperate craving hands that shook with each shuddering breath the beast took. Then its head twisted, craning to unleashing a hateful scream into the wild.

It was a war now. There was no hope of him escaping this creature, so the rage of self-preservation filled Desmond. A voice told him of this ancient enemy, this natural predator of man. He had never run from anything in his life, and now something in his soul told him he could not, must not run from this terror. The adrenaline soaked body of this beast would catch him if he ran; its huge hands would break him if he turned his back.

The monolithic monstrosity watched gloating as Desmond slipped the blood soaked knife up into his teeth, never taking his eyes from the ancient evil that stood above him. He stripped the padded Mack jacket from his barrel chest, dropping it in a pile beside him. His black T-shirt stretched across his chest, spreading the wings of the Harley Davidson logo wide. He'd never fought men bigger than this thing, but he had fought three and four men at a time, and this time it was a war of the flesh. The righteous rage of a human champion welled up within him.

Experience told him that the creature was alone. If it wasn't, he would've surely been dead already. It was him and the beast, winner take all.

The beast let out a guttural snarl and dropped to the ground, rabidly charging at its human foe. Desmond stood hunched low like a quarterback, waiting for the creature to close the distance, waiting for the precise moment to strike. It came at him, but the empty air where Desmond had stood was replaced by a blur of steel that ripped open the plexite's side.

It loosed another scream of hatred and rage as it crashed onto the road, thrashing in its own blood. It squatted and stood, seemingly unaffected by the wound, but the rich blood flowing down its naked side told Desmond different. If it could bleed, it could die, no problem.

Another leap, another slash from Desmond, who moved his body with the firm grace of a panther. This time the blade buried itself deep in the thigh of the plexite, cutting the muscle and arteries up to the pelvic bone, letting the meat dangle loosely by shreds of skin. Blood spilled down onto the road like piss splashing over its feet. Facing the wide eyes of the Malcuthrad, Desmond prepared himself for another strike.

The creature looked down at itself, and the hateful eyes returned to him again. A guttural hiss escaped its jaws as it crouched low, moving in the circle of death. Desmond had seen this before; combat with any living thing is always the same. Speed, surprise and aggressiveness of action are vital. If this is not successful the enemy must be outwitted, using fear while waiting for weakness.

"There can be none who stand before us! You are the harvest! You are the seed we have sown in the beginning of all things. We are your gods!" The thing said.

Not much had shaken Desmond in his life. Even when he had killed a man, it had never gotten deep into his soul. But the words this creature spoke in a language he did not know but understood cut into his core. There was weakness.

The beast drove its body into the human, lifting him off the ground and bringing him down hard onto the asphalt. Desmond knew what was coming and instinctively twisted his body to take the blow on the shoulder rather than the back. Adrenaline reflexes spurred the plexite on to finish the man. Even as he felt his shoulder crush under the weight, Desmond knew he had a shot.

The demon released him for an instant to deliver the final blow that would destroy this son of man. Its power was enough to tip a fully loaded truck, but a bared blade knows no respect. With his good arm, Desmond brought the knife down, slashing deep across the throat, across its collarbone and down the beast's arm. He knew it was a good strike by the jerking tugs of tendons snapping, split by the blade as it cut. Then the mind shattering pain of his shoulder exploded within him.

The plexite Minotaur tried to unleash a howl but only the silent gape came. Its arm wrenched further back, no longer possessing the tendons to hold it forwards.

“Fuck... You!” Desmond cried, striking again, feeling the blade slip between the plexite’s arm and shoulder-socket. He drove the blade home with such force that he rocked the gaping plexite onto its side. A huge meaty fist thundered down catching him squarely in the chest. Desmond felt his ribs snap taking the blow. The plexite’s hand went up again, but Desmond brought up his legs and kicked himself along the ground away from the fountain of blood coming from the thrashing demon. He was free of the deadly embrace.

Desmond dragged himself back, trying to put some distance between himself and the twitching empty vessel that had been a plexite.

Voices.

A car had stopped behind the tipped trailer and a young couple came around to see what had happened. If Desmond hadn’t been moving when they saw him they would have thought him certainly dead.

A young woman on the passenger side let out a scream that choked itself out. The male driver came closer to see if Desmond was truly alive.

Shocked, the man spoke, “Are you okay?”

Desmond chuckled, and then froze as pain exploded in his chest. He tried to bring his voice above a painful whisper. “Just fuckin’ great.”

Chapter 22

Jerry picked up his car and met Steve and Dave back at the house. As he drove up the driveway his thoughts drifted back to what the madman had said about using virtomic wards to seal this place away from the demons; a virtomic seal.

He noticed the wall as he drove into the yard. The same tiny wall he'd seen when they first moved into the place. He thought it would be useless, but now it kept out that which they feared most.

After he parked beside the other two cars, Jerry walked back down the driveway to the wall, to get a better look at it. There was nothing extraordinary about it, just awkward stones fitted together with concrete mortar.

Closer examination of the top of the wall revealed etched symbols. They ran along the top in an unbroken chain as the wall weaved through the trees. Jerry knew that this must be the ward that Verruckt had put in place. But why? Did he expect this to happen? Plan it somehow? One thing was certain; the old maniac in the sanitarium was desperately afraid of what would happen if these creatures were unleashed onto the world.

As he walked back to the house he wondered if being locked in an asylum, assumed mad and living in fear for the rest of your days was an adequate punishment for a Nazi doctor. He decided it was.

He could hear the television in the living room. This was the fourth time that Detective Madden had watched the tape in its entirety. Steve had brought down the books they had on virtometry and veraxology into the living room, the notes open and lying about on the floor.

Jerry came in and sat down. It was bizarre to see the rabbit caught on tape. In some ways he was glad he had a chance to see it on the television because that made it seem more distant, less real. Dave had been in the basement; he'd seen the complex virtomic symbol that Steve had drawn on the floor. He saw the remains of the rabbit's corpse, but nothing got to him more than watching this tape.

He listened to the recorded blasts of the Luger at the end of the tape. He slumped back in the chair and stared at the now snowy screen with intense concentration. Dave tried again to digest the information. Steve was equally silent and sitting very still on the couch.

"Mind if I smoke?" Dave asked.

"By all means," Steve answered.

The pain in his head had started after watching their disturbing home video the second time. After the fourth time he felt like a worm was eating his brain. Steve and Jerry had explained the concepts to him quickly at the hospital, but now he had the explanation. It was all sliding together like a giant magnetic puzzle out of control. The only problem was trying to see the big picture.

Jerry brought a plate in from the kitchen for Dave to use as an ashtray, and then joined Steve on the couch. Dave took a series of long drags in the exploding silence of his own mind. He was half done his cigarette by the time he spoke. "I should ask you guys if you would mind helping me figure this fucking thing out. You seem to have a much better grip on this Nazi shit than I do."

The two were relieved for many different reasons; Jerry spoke for both of them. "Sure thing, Detective. We'll do all we can, but I don't know what it'll be worth."

"Dave."

"Huh?" Jerry said.

"Dave. Call me Dave for Christ sake."

"Oh, sure." Jerry felt a sudden drop in his confidence level. Having the law involved made him think that somehow everything was going to be okay. As though this Detective could wave his hand and all this would no longer be maniacal. Seeing this middle aged man with nicotine stains on his fingers and constrained focus on the snowed TV screen made him think that Dave was just another guy sucked into the confusion.

Steve was more optimistic. "Detective, why are you here?"

Dave shook his stare from the screen, "What?"

"I mean why did you come to the hospital looking for Verruckt? You mentioned something about a creature in the back of a truck, what was that about?"

Dave thought about it as he took another long drag from the cigarette. Normally, he would have called the case in, but there was nothing normal about this case. All standard practices and guidelines were blown; he needed to be sure of the facts before he tried to explain this one. These two kids knew some of it, so they may as well know the rest. It could make more sense that way. He told them everything; the hand found in the car wreck, the picture of the creature, the prints, Markowski's plexite, everything.

After two more cigarettes he needed something to drink. Steve got him a glass of water.

“Do you want anything stronger?” he called from within the kitchen.

“No, if I start, I'm not going to stop, just the water.”

Steve brought the glass placing it on the coffee table, the ice cubes within clinking like wind chimes in the stillness of the house.

Jerry spoke. “I don't understand something here.”

“That's okay, I don't understand a single goddamn thing here so you're not alone,” Dave spoke, taking another drag from his fourth cigarette.

“No, no that's not what I mean. Steve, remember in all the experiments, what was the one requirement that the Malcuthrad had before they could make one of these plexites?”

Steve thought for a second. “They had to have the flesh of a fetal child. The Malcuthrad can only take flesh that has no soul according to the book right?”

Jerry nodded.

Dave was confused. “Hang on here gang you lost me. What?”

As Steve turned towards the detective, Jerry got up with realization on his face and disappeared out of the room, footsteps echoing up the stairs.

Steve spoke up, “Okay. We know that these Malcuthrad come from some kind of parallel dimension. However, in order to be physical in this world, that is, in order to actually exist on earth they have to have some kind of body. Right?”

Dave nodded, “Right.”

“But, in order to get the flesh, or to get a body, according to the big Latin text and all the experiments, they had to use a body that had no soul. A body before it was born, a fetus. That's why the Nazis were so interested in making these creatures we call plexites.”

Dave made a mental note to read more. “Yeah but how do the plexites get here? Where do they come from?”

“Plexites don't 'get' here, they're created here; supposedly out of fetal flesh. The Nazis and ancient scientists they called sorcerers used the outworld science of symbols to create a bridge between our two worlds, bringing the Malcuthrad spirit across. Once across, the spirit of the Malcuthrad was placed inside a fetal corpse. The corpse then had a soul and could live. That being is what we call a plexite. It's like forced reincarnation.”

“So why would the Nazis be doing this?”

“Because they wanted to use virtometry in conjunction with the flesh science of the Malcuthrad, veraxology, in order to create the master race. Once the war was going badly, Dr. Verruckt high-tailed it out of Germany under the assumed name of Helmut Greggor. In Canada, he continued with the experiments in order to make sure the Fuehrer's dream lived on.”

Dave took a long drag on his cigarette, letting the information sink in. The history was starting to make sense. “So what you're saying is that the disappearances that happened in the fifties were because of Dr. Nazi. He went and kidnapped people to do experiments on to see if he could make these plexite monsters.”

“No, that's impossible.” Steve shook his head.

Dave took another reassuring drag before speaking smoke words. “Impossible! This whole god damn thing is impossible!”

“No, no. You don't understand. Verruckt was a Nazi and a psycho, but he was a scientist first. If he had done any experiments to alter an adult human being it would be in his lab book. Also the Latin text states that only the flesh of a fetus could be used, so there would be no reason for people to disappear. That's the reason this doesn't fit. He said that the book lied. He must have meant the Latin text, but I don't know what it lied about.”

“Well, explain to me then how the rabbit was possessed. It wasn't dead but it still got fucked over.”

Steve was trying to keep it as simple as he could, but he was not doing a very good job. “The fetal rabbit crawled back into the mothers uterus, using it as a gateway, a kind of doorway into her soul. The adult rabbit was fighting the invasion, but it was useless. When a fetus turns against the source of its life, the body has no physical or spiritual barriers; it just crawled in and took over.” The sound of Jerry's thumping footsteps came down the stairs. He came into the room carrying what looked like a set of rolled up posters.

“Okay, I've been thinking.” he said. The other two leaned over as he unrolled one from the stack, showing it to be a topographical map of the mountain. “All right, we know that Verruckt was using the basement to create plexites in order to create the master race, right?”

Both Dave and Steve nodded.

“And how many experiments are in that lab book Steve?” Steve picked the lab book from the pile and flipped to the back checking the numbers.

“Three hundred and forty three separate experiments. Why?”

“Where did he keep them?”

Steve looked for an obvious answer but found none. He turned to Dave who had a confident smile. This was a good lead, and his gut told him the same. Steve and Jerry were both studying locations on the topographical map.

“Do you guys remember what the doctor said at the hospital?” Dave asked.

“Dave, the doctor said a lot of things at the hospital,” Jerry said.

Dave went on, “No. On the night of the fire he said that the old Nazi was freaking out saying some shit in German that ‘they’re free, they’re free.’”

“Yeah that’s right,” Steve answered.

“And the old guy said he locked them deep within the mountain...”

“Here!” Jerry called out looking down at the tiny symbol on the mountainside, “the old mine! That’s why he wanted the dynamite, because they’re all locked in the old mine!”

Steve nodded and carried on where Jerry stopped. “Verruckt knew that he couldn’t keep the experiments in the house because of the obvious danger, so he moved them up to the old shut down mine. He must have realized that they were up to something and decided to destroy them by blowing it up. He talked about a birthing matrix, it must have been something the Malcuthrad were making.”

Dave followed the logic. “So you’re saying these plexites are the ones responsible for the missing persons back in the fifties?”

“Right! Verruckt realized they were taking people and decide to end the project. He put a temporary virtomic seal on the mine shaft and then came to town to get the explosives he needed to finish the job.”

Jerry picked up the brainstorm, “That’s why he had the plexite in the back of the truck when he got arrested, because it was one he killed getting out of there.”

“Okay that makes sense, but what exactly is a virtomic seal?” Dave said.

Steve took a breath. “It’s a symbol that uses the technology of virtometry in order to hold outworld forces at bay. They’ve been used for thousands of years; only they were usually called wards and talismans. He was arrested before he could finish getting the explosives, so that seal has been the only thing holding those creatures back for the last fifty years.”

Dave stood up and began walking in slow deliberate circles. “So these Malcuthrad got released by the fire, and have been attacking and taking people and everything else they can catch up to this mine shaft.”

Steve and Jerry nodded.

“Why? Why would they be taking everything up there?”

Steve and Jerry looked at each other with uncertainty. “Maybe it’s got something to do with the harvest that the rabbit talked about, or this birthing matrix,” Steve guessed.

“But there’s no way to be certain unless we go up there.” Jerry added, excitement building in his voice.

Dave heard it and knew it had to be stopped. “Wait now, there is no we in this. You two will stay right here and let us handle it. We’ll take an entry team in there and see what’s going on. Remember, this is all theory. We’ve got no solid evidence yet. If this is true then we’ll get some outside help in on this and get it sorted out.”

Dave thought for a second about what the report would look like. He would have to send a message requesting outside help to stop outworld invasion from ancient demon Nazi kidnapers. His head hurt.

“So what do we do?” Jerry was eager.

Dave knew the guilt the two felt and how, somehow, they wanted to make this right. He changed his tone to a more gentle pitch. “Nothing. You two have done all you need to do, which is more than you had to. If this pans out I’ll make sure that everyone knows who figured this mess out. You guys gave us a lead, but now you have got to leave it to the police.”

He grabbed his jacket from the back of the chair. He had a direction now and was set to follow it through. “You guys stay here and get some rest, God knows you look like you need it. I’ll give you a call when we find out what’s going on at the mine...”

As he spoke, Dave opened the door to leave, and froze. The color drained from his face as he stared out the door. Steve and Jerry threw open the curtains letting the vision flood through the window.

Increasingly dark clouds had moved over the mountains, darkening the day. Still, enough light came down to let them see the hulking, twisted shape that stood at the end of their drive. It saw them as

well, thrashing its form showing angered lust. The men could see another shadowed shape lurking beneath the trees, then another, and another.

With the door open, frantic squawking could be heard coming from Dave's car radio.
The screaming had started again.

Chapter 23

The first of the calls came in from the edge of town just as the rain started. Then, as if it was some kind of creeping hysteria, they crept further into the town as Twillingate's sanity started to dissolve.

Now the lines at the police station were flooded with calls. Most were from people phoning to say that animals were attacking the neighbor's house; others said that they were demons. None stayed on the line after being on hold for more than a couple of minutes.

Sergeant Elson was in the lead car as the convoy of three cruisers sped toward one of the city's perimeter hot spots. Each car had two officers in it, the lead car held Elson and Corporal Singer.

The radio was screaming like a baby. One was a man in anguish, but it was silenced almost immediately. The air raid siren of the local fire hall could be heard calling volunteers from their homes in an effort to handle the extra calls.

This was chaos, the kind of chaos that gave men nightmares for years. Fifteen years on the force and Elson had never seen anything close to what was going on around them. It was like a war brought on by a faceless enemy coming at the town from all sides.

They didn't have an address to respond to exactly; instead they headed for the district that had the most calls. The most logical assessment of the situation was that there was some kind of mass animal attack brought on by starvation, but even Elson didn't believe that one. It was all they had, so the men were going into the situation geared for it. They brought out the shotguns.

Rain fell against the cruiser's windshield. The chaos on the radio fed the feeling of panic growing within them. They knew this wasn't a wildlife call gone bad; and any doubts they still had ended when they turned into the subdivision streets.

Two hundred meters down the road, a twelve-year-old girl was running hard through the splashing rain and puddles. She was in stockings feet with blood from several savage cuts mixing with the rain and dripping off her body. Her screams, silenced by the distance, shone from her face as she ran. They could feel her terror even at this range.

Elson dropped his foot down on the accelerator, closing the distance between them. He slid the car sideways to make a partial shield across the road. The other two cruisers saw the signal and followed into their well-rehearsed positions. It was a standard police procedure, that's why Elson did it. He knew the men would be tense so he tried to keep everything to drills. Singer was out of the door in a flash and had the shotgun pointed over the hood covering whatever might be following the child as she approached.

Elson got out from the drivers side door, and was barely out of the car when the little girl ran hard into his chest. She was hysterical. Screaming uncontrollably with the light of madness in her eyes. Rather than try to take comfort in Elson's arms, her fear had driven her so deep into the primal mind that all she could think to do was flee.

The girl tore herself free and ran, showing no signs of stopping. Corporal Singer let her run past him, the other officers behind him would catch the girl, that was their job. His job was to be the fire support and to cover any problem that could arise with Elson.

The sting of the rain felt cold on his face, but still Elson was sweating. The sirens had been turned off so now the sounds of the neighborhood reached the officer's ears, but the red and blue lights still circled, sweeping through the prism of falling wet. The thick hedges and full trees hid most of the houses from view. They heard the sounds of breaking glass and cries cut short. An explosion of glass and wood erupted from their right, not more than fifty feet ahead, and a form tore through the brush onto the road.

It didn't pause from its full stride and was moving too fast to get a good look at it. Singer just saw a blur of pink and then let go a blast that startled Elson. The shot caught the creature in the chest throwing it tumbling back to lay twitching on the road, only fifteen feet from where Elson stood.

They had thought it was some kind of dog, but even through the ribbons of flesh that held the blasted body together, it was obvious that this was no dog. Most of its body had been destroyed by the buckshot blast. The naked face of an elderly woman stared up at him from the asphalt, its facial muscles still twisting from the adrenaline.

Elson didn't have time to think about the severed hand they'd found at the Conroyd van. Another shotgun blast echoed. The scream of that same twelve-year-old girl erupted from behind them. The others had grabbed her, and placed her in the back of the squad car for her own safety.

But there was no safety.

Singer and Elson spun in place only to see the chaos of shapes crawling towards them. At a quick count Elson guessed at twelve creatures ripping at the squad cars. The officers didn't fire a shot. These things were on them too fast.

A plexite with a pig's body and seven arms came at the squad car like a mismatched puzzle of limbs. Over the hood and through the windshield it tore, with such ease it seemed the glass wasn't even there. Only the explosion told of the barrier. The little girl wasn't screaming for long before a powerful hand grabbed her eye sockets and tore her head clean from her body in one savage pull.

It was hard to say who fired first, both Elson and Singer cut loose with the ammunition that they had. There were only five shots in the shotgun but that wasn't really the point. With the speed these creatures attacked, there wasn't enough time to fan the actions three times before the plexites swarmed them.

Elson felt the hit between his shoulder blades like an ax strike. An explosion of pain that brought on a falling darkness

He didn't know how long he had been out. The first thing that hit him wasn't pain; it was the smell. As his vision returned he realized that he was lying on the road looking underneath the squad car. He couldn't open his right eye because of the thick pool of blood that was gently lapping like tiny waves against his face. He guessed that the blood wasn't his, some of it probably was, but the majority of it couldn't have been otherwise he would be dead.

He tried to move but couldn't. Only his eyes could move. The total lack of pain told him that things were bad. He remembered feeling the blow to his back. A faint pain came back floating like a memory just below his neck, between the shoulder blades. His back was broken most assuredly.

Surprisingly, this was calming to him, probably because he knew there was nothing to do now but stare underneath the car and hear the noises around him. From his location he could see the boot of Singer's left leg reaching off beyond his field of vision. He wondered where the right leg was that should be lying sprawled beside it, but then he realized where the majority of the blood was coming from.

He thought. He tried to imagine some action to save himself, but there was nothing. He was dead. Thoughts of his son Shawn began to flood in on him. He didn't want his son to die.

He had bought a house that was outside town. There wasn't another house for close to two miles and the only thing near by was the road out of town.

His wife Julia always listened to the scanner in case something happened to him. Certainly, if any thing went this insane she would have grabbed Shawn and ran. They were as far away as they could possibly be from this side of town. They must have escaped on the highway.

He clung to the thought as the only form of hope. Hope for his family, he knew his own hope was gone. The sounds around him now were an insistent moaning of blood-wet flesh rubbing together.

There was a splash in front of him. Elson swung his eye down to see what it was underneath the car. It was another plexite, only this one was much, much smaller. The hairless body of a rabbit was in the pool of blood with its back towards him. It sat perfectly still for a second then lowered itself flat against the road. The tiny ruddy body began to swell.

Elson watched with a morbid fascination. This was something no living human had ever seen. The rabbit's bald body continued to swell, becoming redder with each passing second. He could feel the blood on his face starting to recede, giving him the answer to so many questions.

The creature was absorbing the blood, that's why they never found any at the crime scenes! They had taken every drop with them by absorbing it into their twisted bodies. Elson felt a tug on his neck as his body vomited. The puke sprayed uncontrollably out of his mouth, splattering into the blood pool, sending tiny ripples like a splash in a calm pond. He made a guttural sound as he threw up, causing the now blood-fat plexite to spin and stare into his eyes.

Sometimes life will bring about a coincidence in our everyday events that makes us wonder if there is a God. Like sitting on a bus and realizing that the person next to you is an old school friend, or meeting someone by chance who dated the same person you did. We usually explain these coincidences by saying to ourselves 'It's a small world'. This was the case now as Sergeant Elson watched the face of his own son on the bloated body of the bloodstained rabbit.

He tried to scream, but this body couldn't receive the messages from his severed spine. There was no mistaking it, this was the face of the boy he had given life to. The most he could do was open his mouth in a virtual scream that let nothing out, but a breath of air was let in. He wanted to die. He wanted to tear away his own eyes and pull out his own intestines, but he couldn't. All Sergeant Elson could do was watch the plexite that had stolen the flesh of his child resume its squatting position and continue sucking blood off the road.

It's a small world.

Chapter 24

Dave stood, staring out the front door at the shape under the trees. It was a centaur, the half-man, half-horse creature from Greek mythology that heroes had slain to prove their worth.

Steve and Jerry both stared as realization washed over them, underneath the horror out there, so many myths became clear. Mythical creatures always had the similar traits: the three-headed dog Cerberus, which guarded the gates of hell; the Gorgon Medusa with a human head and snakes growing like hair. All of the ancient deities were combined into the reality of the plexite that stood before them.

It was the confirmation that locked reality into Detective Dave Madden's mind. Up until this point, it had all been photographs and theory. It had all been somehow alien and disassociated, but not anymore.

The plexite centaur flexed itself nervously. It advanced a few paces and then retreated back, moving sideways out of his field of vision, only to return moments and resume its attempts to advance. It wanted to come closer, but it couldn't; and they saw the frustration building within it.

The barrier.

Jerry remembered what Verruckt had said about the ward he had placed. The barrier was what kept the plexites out, what kept them safe, what kept them alive.

The paralysis of Dave's body was gone. He reached to withdraw the nine-millimeter pistol from his shoulder holster. He cocked it, and brought it to bear on the creature. He could see the plexite's hatred even in the shadows of the trees. Dave heard the police radio blaring. It howled in chaos as one message cut off another, each call frantically searching for backup only to be answered by another location pleading for help as well. Some were just cries of desperation.

Dave moved quickly out the door and made a lightning fast check to his left and right. "Stay in the house! Lock the door behind me! If you've got a gun, get it!"

His words weren't lost on Steve. Turning he saw Jerry had the German Luger pointed out the window at arm's length. In a way it was disturbing. Jerry must have carried that gun all day as they drove around, but there was a certain selfish comfort in that as well.

Dave moved down the steps of the front porch with combat readiness pulsing in his blood. Each step was well placed and firm; at any moment he could release a barrage of fire into the creature that stood before him. He couldn't figure out why it wasn't advancing. It saw him now and lashed forward with its stumps of flesh where the hooves had been, only to retreat, hideously angry.

As Dave got to the bottom of the steps, the centaur let out a cry. From all around him in the tree line, other unseen creatures echoed it in their desperate frustration to reach the untouched harvest lying beyond their grasp.

He could feel his very bones crawl at the sound. It was like the roar of a mountain lion but with much lower more guttural tones. The plexite backed away and then lunged forward with unbelievable speed. Markowski's words came back to him now.

"They would be fast, very, very fast."

Dave had emptied the magazine in less than two seconds. The pistol's fourteen bullets tore through the plexite's body before the first ejected brass casing touched the ground. The first few bullets caught the plexite in the human sections, its stomach cutting up into the chest and into the head, face and eyes; the pistols kick lifting the bullets as they fired.

The plexite's throat took two hits; and the hollow point bullets ripped open its flesh in an explosion of blood. Dave watched a bullet tear away the left side of its face; another round removed the head completely. With not even so much as a scream, the body collapsed, crashing down onto its side with a wet thud.

Before the echo of gunfire could die, Dave reloaded a fresh magazine; again, the fevered, howling choir came. Then the sound stopped, as if a switch had been thrown. Nothing could be heard except the ringing in Dave's ears from the fired shots.

Something leapt from the trees and landed far within the wall's circle, only to collapse in a rag doll fashion, seemingly lifeless. It was only ten meters from the car when it landed, far too close for Dave's comfort. He fired three shots into the hulk of flesh and began advancing on it in the same firm-footed manner.

When a living thing dies, there is residual movement of the nerves. Dave had seen it many times when he'd worked the streets of Vancouver, but there was no movement in this tiny form.

The body of a sixty year old man, with disproportionately huge hands where both feet and hands would normally be, lay perfectly still as the bullets slammed into its body. Lifeless eyes stared up from the

hairless head of a badger. Dave took no chances and fired a single shot between its eyes, shattering its head and splashing brain matter onto the ground.

Dave backed away and got to the trunk of his car. Fumbling for his keys with his left hand, he kept his right hand firmly wrapped around the pistol, sweeping back and forth across the tree line for any possible movement.

He found the keys and within a few awkward seconds he popped the trunk open. One quick last check for movement and he tucked the pistol into the back of his pants.

Steve and Jerry watched anxiously from the window as Dave turned from their view, rifling through the trunk of his car. Eternal seconds later he threw a black gym bag onto the porch. Slamming the trunk lid down and holding a riot shotgun in a combat stance, he began scanning the trees once again.

"Better open the door," Jerry said. Steve moved quickly. He threw the door open, seizing the black gym bag and dragging it into the house. He was surprised by the weight and imagined it was extra ammunition.

Dave wasn't far now. He moved quickly to the base of the steps. At the last possible second he turned and charged up into the house, slamming the door hard behind him. With his back against it and the shotgun pointed at the ceiling, Dave slid slowly down the door letting out a long sigh.

There were no thoughts now. There was nothing, just the silence of the house and the deafening gunshots still ringing in his ears. Steve moved closer, dropping the gym bag. He sat against the door.

"You okay?" Steve asked.

"Oh yeah. I'm just dandy," Dave replied.

"I guess things are bad huh?" Jerry asked from the window. His voice motivated Dave, he took the gym bag and started to rifle through it.

"Yeah, they're bad, but I don't know how bad yet."

From the bag Dave produced a small black box that looked like a radio. As he switched it on the voices crackling from the speaker revealed it to be a police band scanner. The reports were less frequent now. Lights flashed in sequence as it scanned over the radio bands. They picked up an ambulance that was in Essendale, just outside the university.

"...I can't see anything around here. They said that something was happening and there's overturned cars but... What the..." The transmission was silenced by a crash and the sound of rending metal.

Their spirits sank deeper. For a long time they sat there trying to think of what to do. A few ideas were born, but they died deep within their minds before they could have been verbalized. There was no form of positive action to be had. Steve tried the phone only to find the line dead, serving as a painful reminder that the Malcuthrad weren't just some savage breed of animals, but an intelligent species.

"We should just sit tight here and wait to get rescued," Jerry spoke plainly as though it was the only logical course of action. Indeed, the idea carried some merit with Dave as well; he was about to announce the same conclusion.

"True, I mean it will only be a matter of time before the feds wind up in here with the army and kill all these things. Waiting is the only thing we can do," Dave said.

"We mustn't wait," Steve said. "If we wait there won't be any rescue and we'll wind up starving to death."

"OK, now you're talking crazy, Steve. You think that the world is just going to forget about this place?" Jerry was trying to be sarcastic but his voice betrayed deep worry. Dave sat quietly and listened.

"Jerry, the Malcuthrad have done this before. They have wiped out entire cultures, whole civilizations! They know all about being subversive until they have strength. Why else did they attack the town but to draw more humans to the area, to their harvest? It was so they could ambush them and take their flesh, and then take their rescuers flesh. They could spread all over North America stealing flesh and putting an end to life as we know it. Even best case scenario, do you have any idea how many more people are going to die before we get the upper hand?"

Dave spoke up. "You're probably right, Steve, but what's our alternative? These things are all over the town, destroying everything in their path. No doubt they have a perimeter set up around the town to catch anyone who even thinks of escape. The only thing we can do is wait."

"No," Steve said.

Jerry was getting frustrated. "What do you mean 'no'? We're fucked, Steve! There's nothing more we can do."

"No, listen to me! Where are they taking all of the people they kill? This precious harvest of theirs, where is it going?"

Jerry and the detective sat silently. "To the mine!" said Steve. "To where they have set up their birthing matrix to bring new spirits across from their world to inhabit the flesh of the dead."

“I thought that was impossible! The book said they couldn't do it,” Dave said, still trying to digest the idea.

“Yes, the book said that it wasn't possible, but Verruckt said the book lied. Besides, they have to be doing it, otherwise where are all these things coming from? I'll tell you where, the mine! And that's where we have got to go.”

Jerry looked at his best friend as though he had gone totally mad. “Steve, what are you talking about? Even if we could fight through all these plexites, why the hell would we want to go to where they're trying like hell to take us?”

“To destroy the birthing matrix,” Steve said.

The idea exploded through the room like a funeral pyre. Dave and Jerry both sat back and contemplated the idea. Steve continued to fuel the flame. “I can make explosives with what I've got downstairs that could take out a house. That mine is a confined space, so the explosion would be even more intense. Once we're up there we get the bomb close to the matrix and blow it. We could probably seal the mine, and with that gone, when the army shows up, it won't be a vicious cycle. The plexites will stop being made, and once they're all killed, then that's it! We've won! But if we don't seal that birthing matrix now, the cycle of regeneration will continue and nothing will stop them.”

“We're dead if something goes wrong,” Jerry said.

“We're dead anyway,” Dave said.

Chapter 25

The squad car screeched its tires through the rain slick streets of Twillingate. The futile dome lights were flashing, catching the rain in their red and blue beams. Officer Dale Rockford wasn't rushing to calls, but away from them. Half an hour ago he'd seen twenty-five cops in full riot gear reduced to ribbons, shards of meat and bloodstained bone.

He ran.

Once inside his squad car his main priority had been to get away from the edge of town where the slaughter was happening. That was when Code Delta-One came over the radio.

Code Delta-One was only used in severe riot situations. It was an order for the police to return to their home station and defend against the rioting force. The rest of the populace would have to fend for themselves; the police always looked after their own.

He took a corner too fast and the cruiser swung dangerously close to another overturned car. Cursing the weather and himself he fought for control, regaining it just in time to see a tiny pink creature disappear under his tires. The car barely bounced as it crushed the tiny plexite.

He recognized the type of creature from those he'd seen at the edge of town and knew more would follow. That's how it had happened on the first call. The first ones they'd found had been small and fast like some kind of high-speed reconnaissance.

Then the larger ones had come with their horrible clutching hands and toothless crushing jaws. They were what had murdered the team; they couldn't be far behind the little one.

The squad cars were scattered in front of the police station, some still running. A quick visual count through the rain said six, maybe seven cars parked askew from each other in chaos. He came up too fast, slamming the brakes he felt the car's traction break free, and it started to slide. He pulled the wheel too hard to the left and the car slide sideways into another cruiser. He wasn't hurt, but it cost him a few precious seconds, seconds that should have been used to get into the station.

Dale threw open the car door and grabbed the shotgun from the passenger's seat. He wasn't fully out of the vehicle before he began sweeping left to right with the weapon. He had seen one of the SWAT team caught from behind and vowed not to die the same way.

A few quick checks through the gray light of heavy rain and he bolted for the station doors. The rain stung his sweat soaked face as he ran. He was certain the creatures were behind him, but he dared not look. He ran through the littered cars before reaching the front steps and spun, the shotgun ready at the shoulder.

Nothing.

There was only the rain's gentle beat off the metal cars, and the slight motion of tiny rivers washing over the street. He looked up at the station windows and saw that desks had been pressed up against them as a makeshift barricade. The blinds moved; someone was looking out.

Dale rushed up the steps only to sweep the twelve gauge behind him again as he reached the doors. Did he see something? He wasn't sure. He thought he saw movement, something ducked behind one of the squad cars.

Through the station's glass doors he could see the hall had been barricaded. Large wood and metal desks had been turned on their sides to create a tall rectangular block. He could see two desktops pressed against the glass and not much else, but he knew there had to be more barricade behind it. There was no way they were going to clear that just to let him in. There had to be another way.

He rushed back down the steps to where he thought he saw the blinds move once before. Thick rosebushes with vicious thorns prevented him from getting directly below the window. Dale got as close as he could, and started to yell.

"HEY!"

Nothing. Not a sound, or a flicker of light, nothing.

"HEY! IT'S ROCKFORD! WHERE DO I GET IN?"

A tiny section of blind rustled as a ventilating window slid open. It was a window he had opened many times on hot summer days, but the blinds were still drawn and no voice answered him. A sound did come, but not from the station; it came from behind him, in the street.

Dale spun around sweeping frantically from left to right, trying to locate a target. He had heard something; it wasn't his imagination. It sounded like the unshod flapping of fleshy feet against the wet road. The source of the sound was gone now, or perhaps just out of sight.

Silence.

There was only the rain's mocking jitter on the cars. Reality crept forward. They weren't going to let him in; these things were too close to risk it. He felt the cold blade of betrayal slip into his back, and his hope bleeding away.

Quickly his mind ran over possible solutions to his predicament. He had nowhere left to run, the station had abandoned him, and the plexites were close now.

Another sound came from behind him.

Dale's heart leapt with the chance of hope. The police always looked after each other; those were his brothers in there. He spun around, only to see the long black barrel of a police rifle pointed out the window.

The truth became painfully clear. They knew he was almost out of ammo. They knew there was no chance for him. They knew the creatures were close. They knew what it was to die in their rending fingers.

They knew.

They remembered.

Dale didn't hear the gunshot.

Chapter 26

It was morning.

Dr. Hans Verruckt stared complacently out of his barred window, watching the hospital grounds below. Just barely beyond the trees and hedges, he could make out the streets, but only in parts. He had been sitting there for almost three hours, totally immobile. Before that he'd felt an itch on his nose.

He saw the stars hiding behind a veil of purple when the sun turned the horizon to gold. The dawn always upset him. He found great comfort in looking at the vastness of space from his tiny barred window. It made him feel small and insignificant, as if all the screams he'd caused, and blood he'd shed weren't really that horrible. After all, the universe is a vast place. If some people die, it doesn't matter. Nothing could possibly matter, not for the puny, not for man.

He watched the staff arrive, walking slowly and sipping their coffee as they made their way into the hospital. Half an hour later, patients were escorted out into the garden to sit and watch the world go by. He saw Ms. Weston hobble over to her favorite garden patch and carefully groom the soil for any unwanted weeds. He saw Mr. Crew, who used to be a scientist much like himself, move across the lawn to sit on his bench. He would stay there for the rest of the day, only moving for the occasional seizure.

At about nine o'clock the clouds started to roll in, but no one seemed to care. There was no sanctuary for any of them in the asylum, only medicated television. Verruckt heard the sirens go off just as the first few drops of rain fell. Ms. Weston tried to shield her precious plants by leaning over them with her arms outstretched like great wings. Mr. Crew simply threw his body trembling on the ground when the rain started.

Verruckt saw the first of the plexites at about the same time as the staff noticed the rain. He watched as they came. They were as he remembered: twisted tiny pink shapes that watched from the hedges of the hospital grounds.

The larger ones that did the harvesting, they were as magnificently efficient as he remembered. The staff didn't notice the first patients go down or the first few orderlies being torn apart.

He watched a twisted crab like creature with four human legs and two arms attached to a human female torso with a pig's head as it attacked Ms. Weston. Swinging a powerful claw arm down, it caught her collarbone, opening her chest wide. Her organs spilt out, still working, onto the rich green grass.

He watched Mr. Crew's head come off in one powerful strike, killed by a hairless dog that now ran on human arms. The screaming invaded the hospital as the plexites invaded, reaping flesh from frantic bodies.

The Malcuthrad after all were beings of energy. Souls without bodies so to speak, and flesh is what they needed to be in this world, and in man they found a most willing creature.

Man was a being willing to threaten the existence of his entire species for a mere few trinkets like power and wealth. Verruckt had often wondered in the years since the war, what would have happened if the so-called freedom loving people of the world had learned of the plexites? Would the Jews not have used the same knowledge to take the world? Of course they would, man's arrogance knows no bounds. Any people would try to use the Malcuthrad to make an army, but the Malcuthrad only want the flesh, they only want to bridge between the worlds and extend their grip into the physical Earth realm.

He watched the corpses being dragged away, knowing what awaited them. They would be torn apart and placed in a great channeling chamber, a living chamber that would channel souls from the Malcuthrad's dimension and give the newly mismatched bodies life through the rebirth of stolen flesh.

Perhaps the flesh was never really ours to begin with. We were their harvest after all, waiting to be reaped.

Reaping...

Reaper...

The Grim Reaper...

Perhaps, he thought to himself, this is where the famous image of the fleshless skeleton comes from: reaping the harvest of flesh for the Malcuthrad while they have taken that which was on his bones.

The Grim Reaper is a plexite.

He thought of this as the screaming grew in intensity. He heard doors being knocked down and the protesting cries of the other patients, but still he stared out, thinking on the origins of the reaper. Only when his door came crashing in did he turn to see the faces of the children, his children, who came for their father's blood.

In a way his conscience was finally at ease. His experiment had been to find and create the master race and he had done just that. He had found the Malcuthrad. He had rediscovered them and brought back

the rightful rulers of earth to claim their harvest. For the first time in years a smile found its way to Dr. Hans Verruckt's lips.

Then, his head was torn off.

Chapter 27

An interesting thing happens to a person when they accept that their fate is sealed. They go forward without any kind of reservation or doubt. This would be why the old saying goes: beware the man who has nothing to lose. Such was the case with Steve, Jerry, and Dave.

Jerry and Dave had been moving with the conviction of the doomed. In only a short while the two had gathered together all of the possible supplies they might need to make their perilous journey, and all the weapons they could muster. Dave had the most experience with the shotgun, so he was the best one to use it. Jerry still had over a hundred bullets for the Luger, so his weapon was ready. It was decided to let Steve use the Glock sidearm that Dave carried.

Jerry found a collection of old glass bottles and capped jars. After siphoning the gas from the van and the Pinto, he filled an old wooden fruit crate with makeshift firebombs.

Dave had gone outside despite the rain and smashed all of the windows out of his car. He would have much preferred to have a truck, but his car would have to do.

After returning, he heard Jerry and Steve wrestling with an old water tank, trying to bring it up from the basement. He gave a hand, but it was a colossal effort to bring the object to rest on the main floor.

The three sat panting after moving the great monolith. Steve was panting harder than any of them.

“When I was working in the lab and learning about different explosive compounds, I always used to daydream about the day when I would have to make a bomb. Y’know, to like, save my family from ninjas and stuff.”

“You’d save your family with a bomb?” Jerry asked mockingly.

“Hey, it could happen!”

“It’s true actually,” Dave spoke as he began loading his shotgun with the carefully counted ammunition. “There was a case a couple of years ago in Vancouver where a student at Simon Fraser University had to save his family from the Japanese Mafia. They still employ ninjas.”

Jerry was shocked. “Really?”

Steve was already laughing and Dave had broken into a smile. It was the kind of tension breaker that was needed. Soon Jerry chuckled. In order to shift the attention he brought up his curiosity about the tank.

“So, did you pack this thing full of an explosive mixture and set a clock as a fuse?” Jerry asked unimpressed.

It wasn’t much to look at, and for all the time that Steve had spent on it, Jerry imagined something different from what lay on the floor in front of them. It was an old water tank. A cylinder five feet long and fourteen inches wide, sealed on all sides except for a tiny hole at the base. Steve had duct taped the tiny battery powered alarm clock with only barely noticeable wires going into the tank.

Steve spoke, surprised by the lack of creativity on Jerry’s part. “Oh no, this is much, much more than that. This is effectively the most powerful explosive I could have made! I used a highly reactive core, hooked to an electric fuse to initiate a spark within a sealed one-liter milk carton filled with liquid Ether. Then around that I packed almost one hundred pounds of aluminum phosphate and filled the remaining space with what I had left of pure oxygen.”

“So what you’re saying here is it will blow up right?” Jerry asked.

“What I’m saying here is that I’ve made a fuel air explosive right in my own basement!”

“A what?” Dave cocked his brow.

“A fuel air explosive. The military developed them to use instead of nuclear weapons. It basically turns the air for about a couple hundred meters all around it into an intense ball of fire and burns everything down to almost an atomic level. If this is detonated deep in the mine, it will suck the air out of every tunnel and burn it. The resulting vacuum should cause the mine to collapse in on itself. If not totally, then in a great many places.”

“And you knew how to make this?” the detective spoke with mortified surprise.

“Yup. Got it off the Internet about a year ago.”

“Not a good day to be a ninja, I guess,” Jerry said with newfound respect.

Dave loaded the last of the five shells into the shotgun, and after working the action, he slid the sixth one into place. With the weapon on safety he put the other shells into the bag.

“Okay. The way I see it, we’ve got to make the car as hard to get to as possible and still be able to throw out as much fire as we can. The canister should be able to fit in the trunk with effort. Will that thing go off if we shake it around or what?”

Steve shook his head. “No, it’s totally stable, but are you sure it’s going to fit into the trunk of the car?”

“Are you kidding? That good old trunk would sleep six if you laid them sideways! Don't worry we got lots of room.”

“So then what?” Jerry asked as he strung a rope tether through the handle of a large meat cleaver he'd brought from the kitchen. “We just drive through the town up to the mine shaft and drop Steve's toy down the hole or what?”

“Essentially yes,” Dave answered, zipping up the bag. “But this isn't going to be as easy as it sounds. This would be the last thing these things would think of us doing, but we’re still going to have a hell of a time.”

Dave's features changed to a grim warrior’s smile. “We're going to kill, and keep killing, until we can stop their breeding. Otherwise who knows how many people will die.”

He hefted the bag and dropped it by the door. A last minute check of the gear they were taking and they would have to go; time was essential now. He lifted two old gym bags and paused to open the front door. The most valuable thing they found was the Coleman lantern from long forgotten camping trips. This was their main source of light other than Dave’s police flashlight, and a welcome addition.

“I suggest that you two go upstairs and write letters to your families saying what happened here and anything else you want, I’ll get this shit loaded. We'll put the bomb in last. Hurry up, we don't have a lot of time here.”

It stung Steve and Jerry, but perhaps not as much as it would have only a week prior. Steve and Jerry took the advice, and went upstairs. Halfway up, Jerry stopped and looked back at the detective.

“Do you want some paper Dave?”

“Got no one to write.”

Chapter 28

Geographic Outworld Deployment
R4-9129-192-V33T5J44-A
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ILL SANCTUS EX VERAX (Sacred Book Of The Flesh)
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“The great and mighty that come to us in our dreams. The great and mighty who speak to us in the tongues of Babel and before. They are our true teachers and parents that bequeathed to us life, long before the names of the gods of Abraham and Ishmael were ever known. Their might was that which gave the people strength over the first great death. It was they who let us grow and taught us of their way of harvest. It was they who washed away our enemies, keeping their flock safe.

This is the legacy and empire of the Malcuthrad, which I bequeath to you my son. Know that this is the way in which our guardians watch over us. This is the way the sacred being cradles us into the night and in preparation for the new world. For them, we are all the newborn. For them, we are all the supple and the new.”

The bomb was laid in the trunk sideways, with the remaining gym bags positioned around it to keep it from rolling about. Steve and Jerry stood on the porch with Dave, reviewing for the last time the roles each of them had in their mission.

As ordered by Dave, they wore tight-fitting clothing, giving the plexites less to grab. Steve wore a skintight black sweater under a warm windbreaker with his black jeans and safety goggles to protect against the wind.

Jerry wore high collar hiking boots and managed to find a long-sleeved “Porn On Beta” T-shirt over which he wore his leather jacket. Tied around his wrist, he kept a freshly filled windproof butane lighter to use with the firebombs. The second set of safety glasses he kept on his forehead like sunglasses.

Dave didn't have the luxury of a wardrobe with him, but he'd always made it a habit to keep a change of clothes in the car in case of emergencies. Now he stood, dressed in blue jeans and a maroon sweatshirt emblazoned with the Canadian Airborne Regiment's logo across the front. He took a black flight jacket from Steve's collection, and a black ball cap to keep the rain out of his face. From the trunk, he had his old pair of SWAT boots and a set of shooting glasses that fit better than Steve's lab goggles.

“Okay, Steve, you're going to be the driver, so all you should focus on is the road. That's it, period. Forget the pistol in your belt; no matter what happens you just keep driving. Jerry, you're going to be in the back seat with a lighter and the bottles. Your major role is going to be keeping plexites off the back of the car and lobbing fire after anything that might be catching up. You got the Luger and don't be afraid to use it, if just one of those things gets in the car, we're fucked. I'm going to be in the passenger's seat primarily to protect Steve and covering the arcs all around him, as well as covering the front of the car.”

He held out three tiny wrapped packages. Steve and Jerry each took one. “These are ear plugs. As soon as that car starts to roll, put them in because it's going to get awful loud once I cut loose with the shotgun. Steve, don't be afraid if I push the shotgun past you as you drive. You're not going to get hit, but I have to cover your left flank. Also Jerry, from the back, make sure you keep an eye on the driver's side flank, just in case. We all got to work as a team on this one or there's no way we're going to live through it.”

His words were met by solemn nods from the two friends. Dave looked around the porch as though he would find the words left unsaid there, but there was nothing. Slowly the three stepped out into the rain.

The car seats were long since soaked. Each of them took their positions in the car. The rain swallowed the sound of the slamming doors.

Dave switched his attention to the driveway. The large centaur plexite corpse was gone, and an unnatural stillness was interrupted only by the rain's whisper in the trees. He lowered the shotgun for a moment to put in his earplugs. Seeing him do it, Steve and Jerry both followed. Then, with a quick nod, Steve turned the key and the engine roared to life, sending a strange feeling of joy over the occupants of the car. Dave brought up the shotgun and flicked off the safety. Steve punched the gas.

The plexite guards that had been wandering back and forth by the front wall were nowhere to be seen now. The car punched past the safe border of the yard and into the trees. Jerry thought he saw something move behind them as they swerved hard onto the road, but it vanished in the passing brush.

The road was slick and the car swayed violently; Steve powered out of it and started to pick up speed. Jerry took a moment to make certain his wooden crate of explosive bottles was jammed tight on the floor between the front and back seat. He quickly adjusted his position, looking to the left rear of the car. He felt the biting comfort of the Luger in his hand.

For what seemed like a long time they saw nothing as they drove towards the town. Dave didn't know whether to be thankful or worried that they slipped away from the house so easily. He decided he'd be a bit of both. He regretted that they had to drive closer to the town, but it was the only way to get onto the mountain road that led up to the mine. They would take the outlying streets and stay away from the carnage that had to be happening in the center of town. It was still a monstrous risk.

Ahead, they saw the first signs of the harvest. An overturned car lay half blocking the road caused them some alarm, but they would have enough room to get around it. The car was an older station wagon. It'd been flipped onto its roof, and the driver's side door was torn away. There was no sign of its driver anywhere. The dark sheen of the wet metal made it shiny. Even with the clouds overhead blocking the sun, they could see the dull sparkle of shattered safety glass on the road.

Movement.

Dave brought the shotgun to bear at the driver's side opening. There had been movement, he was sure of it, even at this distance. Steve saw the flicker of action as well and tightened his grip on the wheel trying to stay focused on the road.

From within the car, a large slug-like body emerged. It was the hairless torso of a cow being propelled along the ground by an uncountable number of tiny limbs attached to its underside.

Arms of infants, tiny bald limbs of forest creatures, raccoons and rabbits, were all frantically scurrying to move the great body like a caterpillar. A small cat's head was attached to the bulging body, with wild staring eyes that shone through the rain at the oncoming car. The body arched back nearly buckling its spine as it lifted itself and howled an alarm.

Dave knew that when you were going into a situation that had unpredictable circumstances with only a shotgun, it is best to stagger your ammunition. That is, to alternate your shotgun shells with the punching power of a solid slug, followed by the tearing tissue damage of buckshot.

He'd used this technique in the past with great effect, and he was counting on that now as he brought the weapon sights onto the plexite's screaming head. The first blast sent a solid slug of steel-coated death smashing through the plexite's face. Where once the cat's head had been, there was a fine red mist that silenced the scream. Steve was startled by the mighty blast even through the earplugs, the car swerved. Dave shot him a hard look. Any kind of a mistake at high speed, especially on these roads, could prove fatal.

It would be better to die in the crash than to survive to be "rescued".

Steve kept his focus on the road ahead. In an instant they were around the overturned station wagon, leaving the gurgling twisting corpse behind. A flash in the rearview mirror came as Jerry lobbed a lit bottle of gas through the back window and onto the wreckage.
WUMPF!

The car and creature were instantly enveloped in a cradle of fire. The burning gas touched off the car's own residual fuel, sending an immense secondary explosion high into the air.

"Take it easy on those bottles!" Dave yelled over his shoulder. "We only have twenty of them so make them last!" Jerry knew it hadn't been necessary to throw that one, but he'd felt he should get at least one warm up throw in before the big game.

The three couldn't hear it in the car, but the creature's howl echoed through the forest in that brief second. Hearing their sentry's cry, the Malcuthrad's plexites were coming like ants to answer the call.

Steve saw over a dozen dark shapes coming out of the forest foliage to greet them in the distance. The realization came to Madden as he watched them: these weren't some demonic animals, this was a system.

The plexites left their less able brethren in obvious locations so they could draw fire and act as a kind of alarm. Then, the faster, lighter plexites would take their positions to collect the harvest. Dave had to admit, they were efficient.

"Dave! What do I do?" Steve screamed over the wind.

The detective turned to see Steve's eyes wide with terror. He was staring straight ahead his hands white knuckled onto the wheel. "Stay right in the middle! Give it everything you got and don't slow down for fuck all!"

Steve nodded. He was scared, but did as he was told. The engine's roar became louder as he pressed the pedal to the floor. Dave swung his arm back catching Jerry on the shoulder and pointing out past Steve's left flank. Jerry understood and drew the Luger from his belt preparing to fire over Steve's shoulder and protect the flank.

They were still a long way off. Dave called back to Jerry. "Don't fire until I do!"

Dave knew the mountain of ammunition they had with them would go fast once things heated up. Steve locked his concentration on the center plexite still over five hundred meters away. It couldn't be much farther to the side roads, which would take them to the mountain, another kilometer, if that.

He sank low in the seat to give Jerry as much room as he could to swing the pistol. With the increased speed the rain stung his face. Even with earplugs, the roar of the wind through the car was deafening.

Jerry used the seat ahead of him as best he could for a windbreak. Dave was in the front seat, squinting his eyes against the rain beading on his lenses, the black ball cap turned backwards to keep the wind from catching it.

The distance was disappearing. Dave leaned forward, slipping another shell up into the shotgun chamber. The plexites were a collage of vandalized flesh, each one a mismatched masterpiece sent to slay. They were moving too fast for Dave to get a good look at them but it didn't make much difference; they were the enemy.

At sixty feet, Dave cut loose with the twelve gauge. The plexites had never encountered guns from the moving cars they had attacked before, so their technique was not so refined.

The first blast caught the larger center plexite in the chest sending it toppling backward onto the pavement, writhing. The second shot caught a manlike plexite in its hips, tearing it in half and sending intestines spraying into the air like tentacles.

Without realizing it, Jerry emptied his Luger at the three plexites immediately to the left front of the car. Five shapes dropped as the car thundered into their midst. Those that weren't thrashing on the ground leapt through the air, desperate to capture their prey.

The car bounced as the front tires rushed over a fallen plexite, catching on its body as the car sped on. Dave pulled the shotgun back into the car, already holding a fist-full of shells. Jerry was reloading as well, but it was hard with the constant lurching motion of the car.

BAM!

The roof of the car warped downwards as the crushing landing of a plexite came down on top of the car. Another landed on the hood but at this speed there was nothing for it to gab onto. Flailing, it tumbled off the side with a sickening crunch. A third creature landed on the trunk, one twisted, bare, fleshy stump catching on the back seat as the vehicle sped on. Another fiend grabbed hold of the rear bumper, trying to gain enough speed to leap onto the back of the car.

Steve pulled the pistol from his belt and fired three shots through the roof of the car. Then he swung his arm wide behind him as Jerry ducked low, and fired three more shots in a shoulder check.

The bullets tore through the roof, catching the creature by surprise and sending it tumbling off to the side of the road. The second burst caught the demon's human face. The first round tore away the lower jaw. The second and third shattered the skull, spilling the brain matter forwards and splattering Jerry. Jerry came back up from the seat holding the meat clever he'd taken from the kitchen and brought it down onto the creature's wrist, severing it clean. The body tumbled away over top of the dragged plexite that still clung to the rear bumper.

Jerry grabbed another bottle of gasoline and lit it. Swinging himself dangerously far out of the rear window, he slammed the burning bottle down onto the trailing monster.

WHUMPF!

As an explosion of flames engulfed the form; a howl came up from it as it tried to hang on. Jerry saw it's flesh melting, but the plexite still held, howling in rage. Jerry knew this was dangerous so close to the gas tank. If it clawed itself forwards and touched off the tank...

He pulled himself back into the car. "Shotgun!"

Dave heard him, and with only four rounds loaded racked the slide and handed it back. Jerry flew back out through the rear window space. He would have slid right out of the car if Dave hadn't grabbed his feet and prevented him from going any farther. Jerry brought the weapon to bear. Even through the stolen melting flesh and flames, the plexite brought its gaze up to meet Jerry's.

BOOM!

The blast threw threads of human meat everywhere as the plexite tumbled in a burning mass down onto the rain soaked street. Dave pulled Jerry back by the feet and he slid into the back seat. Only then did he realize how hard he was breathing.

The mountain road turn off was coming up fast. Steve dropped the speed too slow for his comfort, and took the turn as carefully as he could. As the car twisted, a hunk of mangled meat slid out from underneath it. It was part of a plexite that had been caught in the undercarriage. It must have ground away against the rough asphalt until the car's shifting in the turn knocked it free. Dave and Jerry both noticed it, but quickly returned to loading their weapons.

Ahead of them, the black mountain loomed like a tombstone. The rain got colder as it spilled into the beaten car. A quick flash and the report of thunder said the weather was turning worse. Dave slid the last shell into the shotgun and cocked it to load a sixth. The weather wasn't the only thing that was going to get worse.

Over the dull roar of the engine the radio came to life.

"Anyone in Twillingate, respond please, this is the RCMP trying to establish communications within the area, over."

Dave couldn't believe his ears. The signal was weak but readable.

"Keep driving," he told Steve and grabbed the radio mic. "RCMP this is detective Dave Madden, badge 7654366, calling out of Twillingate. Do not enter the area! I say again do not enter the area! Situation Code 999 Delta! I say again Code 999 Delta! Detective Madden out."

He dropped the receiver to the floor and turned the radio off. He knew he had to tell Steve and Jerry something. "It's okay! We've got support coming! I told them that there was a riot situation and the military was to be called in. All we've got to do is make it up to the shaft and we'll get seen by the rescue choppers. Win, lose, or draw, now we at least got some outside help."

Steve only nodded and Jerry sat back in the seat. They were both comforted by the thought; now they didn't have as much responsibility resting on them. Dave would have taken comfort in the statement as well, except that he knew he was lying.

Chapter 29

A couple of Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers and a park ranger were called in to investigate the alleged 'animal attack' reported by an excited couple, who were now taking the victim to a hospital. The cops had got there first, but had not been heard from since they exited their cars.

When the ranger drove onto the scene he was greeted by a twisted child dragging the lifeless corpses of the two officers off the road. The ranger threw it in reverse, smoking the tires as he exited.

The call changed from an animal attack on a trucker, to two officers down with a deformed killer dragging bodies from the road. Every cop within a hundred miles responded to the call. It was when the RCMP called for officers to assist from Twillingate that they realized how bad it was.

The two cruisers were still running, only twenty feet from the flipped rig. The cops trained their rifles, cautiously looking for any movement. The police had set up a position fifty meters back from the overturned rig.

Twillingate's phone lines were down, and there was nothing moving in or out on the road. Then, after trying multiple bands and frequencies, at last someone with authority answered from within the city. "Code 999 Delta" was what Detective Dave Madden called over the radio; if not for his badge number, no one would have believed the call.

The code was used in dire medical emergencies involving an outbreak of a highly lethal substance, a virus or some kind of condition that was out of control. The standard procedure was to call in the military and quarantine the entire area, with force if necessary.

The officers who responded piled out of their cars and set up multiple roadblocks on the turnoff into the city. The cops at the inner roadblock set up by the rig had a far more serious task. Their orders were very specific: no one in, no one out; use of deadly force authorized, zero contact.

All thirty officers had the fear of infection growing within them. Hysteria is created in the human mind when the threat of disease is present; it breeds a kind of paranoia that is beyond compare. After an hour on the hoods of their cars, they were ready to kill women and children. Then the first plexite showed up.

A faceless shout went up from the police line as the plexite rounded the overturned truck. The awkward bare torso of a deer hobbled into view. It limped because it had three human arms on its right side, countering the deer's own two legs on its left. Its human adult head gawked in a wide-eyed manner of madness at the bristling weaponry that had come to be trained on it.

Another plexite scurried over the top of the rig to get a look at its adversary. This one had the body and head of a six-year-old boy. The hairless leg of a goat trailed uselessly from where its right arm should have been, down and along the ground. The police went through the formality of saying "Halt!" before gunfire ripped the two creatures to shreds.

The shots faded as the repeating roar of fifteen helicopters came over them. Two transport choppers and a legion of black Russian made HIND gunships, devoid of markings, came over the ridge. The ships were bristling with state of the art slaughterhouse technology. These weren't Canadian ships, or American. These were sinister metal government beasts of the air, vehicles designed to slaughter, to eradicate, to cleanse.

The gunships passed overhead with a turbine scream, while the two transport choppers set down behind the squad cars on the road. The police watched nervously as men in strange black armor and full face masks exited the helicopters.

This situation had just gone beyond classified.

Chapter 30

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, 'till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

-Revelations 20:1

The plexites had focused their attention on the town of Twillingate. The harvesting web was closing tight around the perimeter, and growing smaller with each passing hour. By the time Madden's cruiser got past their roadblock, the plexites were already within the city, busily reaping the fields of flesh. Now was the season of killing.

The creatures with speed but meager size that had come from the birthing matrix were sent out to become the scouts. They knew death would cycle them back into the birthing matrix, so the fear of death was non-existent. They would soak the blood spilled by the reapers and return to the shaft allowing themselves to be slaughtered. Some sought death with alien desires of coming back as a reaper; one who kills.

The reapers were the ones who followed close behind the scouts, hearing their Thesmulcar whispers of places to attack. Reapers don't need much, only a rough estimate of their prey's numbers and how far they were spread. Then it simply followed to harvest, with speed, surprise, and aggressiveness of action.

After the reapers finished, it was the gatherer's task to bring the flesh back to the mine. Like bees flying to their hive they arrived in chaotic waves bringing hulking loads of the dead back to the mine. Sometimes there were so many of these gatherers at the entrance that they scrambled over each other to get inside. At other times there might be none. But after the gatherers searched an area, it was certain that nothing living remained.

The loss of life was apparent as the tattered car pulled into the edge of what had at one time been the Manitou Indian Reservation.

The buildings were open, doors lying shattered. Cars lay scattered and overturned without a single window left intact. One truck was still running as their cruiser rolled by. All was still; only the whisper of the rain mourned the strange funeral parade as it passed Manitou by. The gatherers had long since left this place and now nothing remained alive.

The rest of the fifteen-minute journey was made white knuckled, until the trio hit the edge of the tree line and entered the burned zone. The forest made it easier to hide the car, but now nothing prevented their enemy from seeing them approach. The black charred stumps and ash mounds left over from the fire took away the double-edged comfort that the forest provided.

As they drove Dave wondered if the plexites cared about the car. Every damnable thing was trying like hell to get them into the mountain, and now they came of their own free will.

His smile was the only thing that was dry. The rain was getting more severe by the second. With the trees gone, the wind had picked up and was buffeting them in their soaked clothes. Without the threat of immediate combat they began to curse themselves for not thinking of raingear. Steve was shivering uncontrollably, and Jerry wasn't doing much better. Even Dave was having difficulty from shaking, but it couldn't be helped. It was do or die now.

The road to the mine was featureless. The scorched dirt weaved along its cut in the mountainside. Steve couldn't believe the stark black emptiness around them. The crunch of the tires through the wet charcoal seemed to echo louder than the car engine. They turned a corner, and there it was; the mining camp.

Any remnants of a fence or barrier were nowhere to be seen. Only the wide flat ground and open cement slabs supporting burnt wreckage that had once been shacks remained. The whole camp had been carved into the side of the mountain with walls of charred black sweeping mountainside.

They stopped the car, but the engine continued in its rumbling echo, taunting them with isolation. A flash came, and thunder rolled longer than ever it had before in the history of time. The rain echoed within this place, whispering death. On the far side of the camp, they could see the remains of the old rail

cart's path leading to a surprisingly small hole into darkness. All three of them had forgotten about the cold. A fresh surge of adrenaline made them shake with anticipation. They couldn't rationalize why they hadn't been attacked.

In the Indian reserve, everything was gone. Surely there had to be some type of guard, something that awaited them here.

Dave got out of the car to check the area, swinging his shotgun about like his source of salvation. Steve followed suit drawing the Glock pistol and holding it at arm's length, waiting to fire. Seizing this moment, Jerry quickly unseated the fruit crate full of firebombs and pulled himself out the back window. Dave was getting that headache again, he wanted another smoke. They put the car between themselves and the mineshaft as a feeble source of cover

"Shouldn't we be knee deep in those things right now?" Jerry asked.

His question echoed through the rain. Steve knew it was here, it had to be. Everything pointed to this place. All evidence told them the birth matrix had to be within the mine.

The book lied.

Verruckt's words echoed in his mind, bringing the specter of doubt. Yet still his instincts stayed true.

"They've got to be here!" Steve said.

"Are you sure? Maybe they can reproduce on the spot now, like its fuck all to these things, they invented this shit!" Dave spoke while still scanning the emptiness of the camp.

Jerry heard Dave's words, but his instincts were on fire as well. He held the Luger in one hand and a firebomb in the other as he scanned the ground.

Nothing.

Something.

"There!" Jerry cried and pointed his Luger at the entrance. The low moans of gatherers spilled into the stillness

Because the town was so far away, the plexites had formed into groups when they'd traveled to and from Twillingate. It wasn't that they sought safety in numbers, but that they would stand close together with their arms intertwined to make a living platform on which to pile the carcasses of the dead. Then the grim procession would lead on to their hive, lead on to the rebirth.

There were about twelve of them at first glance as they spilled out of the entrance. The rain became frozen shards of fear. The plexite gatherers saw them, and unleashed a howl that promised the coming of others. Dave had never been so aware of the limited amount of ammunition carried in his shotgun. They were a short distance away, perhaps two hundred feet from the car, but they were closing fast, their cries calling for pain.

Gatherers didn't have the speed that the reapers possessed. What they did have was strength, to go along with the natural savagery of the Malcuthrad.

Onwards they came, in their churning mass, paying no notice to the fierce wind or the rain's sting. Steve brought the pistol up and began firing at the seething horde. Jerry followed, sending the Luger's bullets hurtling at them as they came. Every instinct in Dave's body told him to do the same, but his training told him different.

He stood like an angel watching the oncoming tumult. The bullets were taking their effect on the plexites. The first ones fell and were trampled by the others. Madden only had six shots with the twelve gauge. Steve's Glock had fifteen, and the Luger had at least nine. That made 24 shards of steel to cut the crowd down before they got in range. All at once, and far too quickly, the fire from the pistols stopped. The plexites continued to come, crawling over each other making a shapeless mass; drunk with the savage desire for flesh. Dave took over with the heat of the shotgun.

BOOM!

One plexite leading the pack had a gaping hole torn through its chest. Another behind it had its human legs torn away from beneath its canine chest and head.

BOOM!

The face of a screaming woman disintegrated under a hail of buckshot.

BOOM!

A solid slug smashed into a horse's head and the wide hairless body of a pig buckled under itself. Steve's Glock was already reloaded and he waited for the creatures to close in. He had seen what Dave had done, and right or wrong, repeated the tactic.

The whoosh of a bottle came as it hurtled through the air, flying to a terrible crash and explosion of flame. Jerry was so busy trying to light a second bottle against the rage of the storm that he hardly took notice of the first firebomb's effects.

The blast of flames showed how dark it had become. The plexites unleashed another howl over the wind, their pain and frustration sending twisted shadows across the fading light of the mountainside. The gasoline flame melted the first plexite's flesh off its goat-like body, sending it into heaving throws of agony in its own spilled fluids.

BOOM!

The buckshot caught one scorched plexite, ripping a woman's throat and shoulder away in a geyser of blood. The plexites were close now, far closer than Dave wanted them to get, thirty feet if that, and three still charged.

BOOM!

The blast stopped the lopsided run of the leader sending him tumbling backward in a heap. Steve could wait no longer. He unleashed the Glock, firing three rounds at each, switching back and forth until the gun was empty. The bullets tore through the plexites bodies. One crumpled into the mud; the other's momentum carried it into the wet ash, stopping inches from their feet.

They stood watching the carnage along the route to the mine's entrance. The storm buffeted them with wind, but no more plexites came. The sounds of their battle would have drawn every plexite from far and wide and yet nothing came; but they would, and soon. The men had to act fast.

"Is anybody hurt?" Dave spoke as he dropped to his knee, reloading the shotgun. He had to yell over the wind.

"I'm okay!" Steve said.

"Yeah I'm good." Jerry was frantically loading single bullets into the Luger's magazine.

Still nothing came.

With a solid pump to chamber the last shotgun shell, Dave rushed to the rear of the car. The other two saw what he was doing and helped him wrestle the trunk lid open. They hauled their gear toward the mouth of the mine.

They dropped the majority of the gear just inside the shaft, past the charred body of an old mining cart. The cart dripped rainwater onto its long seized wheels. Dave took his large police-issue flashlight and flicked its penetrating beam to life, cutting away the darkness beyond.

The bright spot followed the tracks as far as it could before its light gave away into the void. The shelter he found just within the mine provided little comfort. Although he was clear of the wind and only speckled by the rain, the smell of the mine wafted over him.

It was as nothing he had ever experienced before. The rancid, putrid odor of rot was so thick it seemed warm. He flicked the beam of light around looking for anything that might be waiting.

The three men rested for a moment, removing their earplugs. The sounds of lurid drips from within the shaft seemed far more ominous than the rain outside. Beyond that, there was only silence.

It was the kind of silence that screamed at funerals, the kind of silence that followed when a shot rang out in a family home. It was the silence of the grave where all the natural noise of the earth was sucked away into oblivion.

Inside, clustered in great heaps, were what appeared to be rags. Some were new and brightly colored while others were old and had mildewed into the colors of the earth. Piles and piles of these rags lay strewn about the mine as though dropped by some careless derelict. Slowly the atmosphere swept over Dave as he watched the darkness.

Clothes.

They were the clothes of the people of Twillingate. Left here at the entrance to the Malcuthrad hive as the useless bits of peel around the fruit they so sweetly stole. Onwards and farther back, the piles continued, covering the floor, not a bloodstain on any of them.

Jerry gagged

"Jesus, Jerry, easy!" Steve said as Jerry dry heaved onto the ground. The nighttime darkness was complete, their only source of light was Dave's flashlight. He busied himself by trying to start up the Coleman lantern they had brought, all the while doing nervous checks at imaginary sounds in front and behind.

Or were they imaginary?

He tried not to think. In a matter of seconds the Coleman spot was burning brightly around them, plunging everything close into the light, and all beyond into instant darkness.

"Now that is a great fucking smell!" Jerry sat back and propped himself up against the mine wall, waiting a few seconds to regain himself. "Well, gang, were here, now let's just roll this thing into the mine and get the fuck out'a here!" Jerry said as Dave hung the lantern on a loose nail in the shaft support.

"It's not that simple," Dave replied. "It's not enough that we blow this place. We've got to be certain that we destroy the birthing matrix. What if these things put in a back door since they were let out? We got to be sure."

Steve looked further into the darkness and could see the reasoning behind Jerry's desire to drop the bomb and run. The piles of clothes scattered intermittently, covered the floor in a most unappealing way. Quickly he went to the bags they had lugged up from the car, bringing out a long extension cord he had brought from the house. The action caught Dave's eye.

"What are you doing?"

"I figure if we were going to have to lug this thing deep into the mine its gonna be awkward as hell trying to carry other stuff. I figured we could tie some handles onto it." It was simple, and brilliant. Now that the three were immersed in the silent darkness of the tomb, all the rules changed again.

Dave shook his head in disbelief. These kids had absolutely no training for high stress situations, and yet, despite their shivering and obvious fear, they prepared to carry on. Perhaps this was something man had learned from the Malcuthrad as well: the ability to adapt.

It gave him an idea. Reaching over into the black gym bag, he took out the roll of black duct tape. Taking his flashlight in hand, he began wrapping it cocoon style to the end of the shotgun. He tried to keep it as straight as possible so that it would act as a sight as well as a light source. All he would have to do was put the center of the beam where he wanted the bullets to go and it was a sure hit, even if it wasn't, close enough counted with buckshot.

It was obvious that Jerry wanted no part of going deeper into the mine but there was no arguing with the logic of the situation. After Steve cut the cord into two equal lengths, he tied his half tight around the bomb, leaving one end long to make a carry loop. It was less likely to slip that way, and he wasn't certain exactly how much hand strength he had left.

Jerry positioned himself so he was at the front of the tank as they walked. Steve took up his position in the rear and carried the automatic pistol in his belt. He had to keep the other hand free to carry the lantern so that he could quickly check to see if they were being followed.

Dave stuffed his pockets full with the remaining shotgun shells and did a shake test to ensure the flashlight was solid.

"Okay, before we leave this is how it's gonna go. I'm going to be up front about twenty feet ahead of you two. Whatever you do, don't get closer than that. I'll be searching for anything ahead of us with the flashlight. So if I go down, you two have a few seconds warning."

They both nodded in agreement. It wasn't a pleasant idea, but it made sure they wouldn't all die at once. "Also," Dave carried on, "whatever you do, don't throw one of those firebombs unless you absolutely have to. All these rags in here, the smoke would kill us before the fire ever would. We don't even know if the plexites breathe."

"They do," Steve spoke surely as he readied himself for the inward journey. "In order to exist in our world they have to take on a life form as well as all the abilities of that life form. They still have to breathe like you and I."

Jerry cut in, "Well shit! No problem, let's just light the rags on fire and gas those motherfuckers in their nest!"

"The problem with that idea is that it would take too long," said Steve. "Remember, we could get swamped by the plexites when they come back, and that could be at any time. Also, smoke rises. It would never reach the depth of the mine."

Jerry wished there was another way but he nodded. Dave snapped onto his feet, flicking on his flashlight into the darkness beyond the lanterns ring. The beam cut out like a lance into the long tunnel. Its mocking silence called to them from within.

"Are you two ready?" Dave called from his position ahead. After a few grunts and groans, they hefted the water tank onto their shoulders.

"Yeah we're okay," Jerry called, trying to be brave. He'd always hated closed in spaces, for no real reason. This time he had more than enough reason to hate it.

The silence from the tunnel ahead was maiming. As they walked, the only sound that came was the gentle swish as they stepped past the fabric-covered rock. Each sound was stretched into leering whispers by the long stone corridor.

Dave led the way, sweeping back and forth with the cutting shotgun light, keeping a careful eye on the larger piles of clothing, making certain they were nothing more than what they seemed. He had seen how savage the Malcuthrad were in their attacks, but they also struck with militant precision. It wasn't a great leap of logic for him to suppose there might be traps.

Farther and farther they pushed into the mine. The raging storm had become a memory, only to be heard when the thunder rolled. At least it wasn't as cold as it had been outside; despite the horrible smell, they wouldn't freeze to death.

Cold.

The idea cut Dave's brain. They were walking into the solid rock of a mountain, they should be freezing right now, but they weren't. Any doubts he had about this being the right location for the birthing matrix were gone, just as certainly as if he had found the matrix that very second.

Finally a shape emerged out of the darkness and Dave froze, signaling back for the others to do the same. Steve and Jerry dropped to their knees letting the cylinder fall with a gentle thud onto the piles of loose clothing. They both drew their pistols and held their breath, straining their senses for information.

Dave tried to focus on the shape ahead. It looked like a large brace that held a kind of fenced-in platform. Large pulleys worked a complex system, threading a rusted cable back and forth before letting itself back down through the guide. Dave recognized it after a few more seconds for what it was. "It's an elevator, a mining car lift."

Dave got to his feet and noticed that the frequency of the clothing scattered on the floor was not as dense here. His voice blasted much louder than he intended, but it was welcomed by the others.

He checked the paths of stone under his feet as he approached.

Closer now, he could see that his guess was correct. From around the edges of the lift he could see where large areas had been worn away. The plexites had dragged themselves and their stolen flesh into the lift's shaft, only to have both return with the forbidden breathe of life. Shining his light past the elevator Dave could see that the shaft ended only a few feet beyond. This was the main lift; their direction had been already chosen for them.

Steve and Jerry both watched eagerly. From their position in the discarded rags, they could see Dave's beam dancing around on the lift as well as on the back wall. It was comforting to see him come away and close in with them. "The shaft ends just beyond the lift. I tried to shine my light down to see how deep the shaft went, but there wasn't enough power."

"So now what? We plant the bomb on the lift and get out'a here right?" Jerry said.

Dave smiled, "Well, yes and no."

Steve was confused. "What are you talking about?"

"You two are going to get out of here after you help me load this thing onto the platform. I'm gonna take this down and have a little-look-see at what's happening down there."

Chapter 31

Steve didn't know what to say. Both he and Jerry thought uselessly for a few moments, but the unknown factor of the Malcuthrad's return sped the argument in Dave's favor. There was no time left to prepare, there had to be action. Begrudgingly, the two helped Dave move the makeshift bomb onto the lift. It was an old manual pulley system and would probably work after they rattled the gears.

The scratching whine of the ancient steel roared like a demon in the stillness of the shaft as they slid the makeshift bomb onto it. Dave was certain that it had to have been heard. After the bomb was loaded, the three leaped from the lift once again, sending the scream of steel across the darkness. It took eons for the echo to fade. They strained to hear the sound of the plexites approaching.

Nothing.

Deafening stillness filled the air. It wasn't the quiet of the earth now. It was far more lurking and it filled the shaft with its intensity, like the silence of a breathless scream, the soundless pause of a child that has stopped breathing.

A few moments, then a few more still, and Dave moved again. Turning to the others, he said, "All right, this is it! You head back to the entrance and wait there with the lantern, I'll be back as soon as I drop this bastard down the hole."

Steve had to say something. "The timer is a clock radio, and you just set the alarm."

"Yeah I took a look at it," Dave could see the concern in the white light of the lantern. He wanted to tell them he would be fine, but they all knew it was a lie. Instead, he grabbed Steve by the shoulder.

"Just wait for me at the entrance, I'll be back as quick as I can."

"Good luck!" Jerry called out, louder than he should have, but Dave had already turned away and stepped back onto the lift.

He waited for a couple of moments with his back turned, crouching as he rechecked the device. He wasn't too sure why, but he didn't want to watch the young men leave. Perhaps it was their togetherness that was keeping the overwhelming fear at bay, but now it was Dave's focus that would keep him on-line and in control. His police training counteracted his body's natural urge for preservation. But even so, Dave thought the flesh on his very bones somehow knew the terrible danger he was in.

After the shuffling of Steve and Jerry's feet faded through the piles of clothes, he turned to see the bright light of the lantern steadily moving away. It was like watching a star traveling in the intense blackness of space. He tried not to think about what would happen if he broke the flashlight.

Reality came creeping back. Dave picked up the shotgun and pointed it through the steel mesh floor, down onto the walls. Only the jagged rock caught the invading beam, revealing large worn gouges in the walls of the pit. It answered the question of how the plexites got out of the mine.

He wondered if this lift couldn't go back up, would he have enough strength to make the climb? He knew the answer was no, but he took a kind of grim comfort in the fact that the shotgun had a slug for him if he needed it.

The cable that moved the ancient elevator was a miracle of mechanical engineering. The steel rope came up through the floor, spiraling back and forth through a series of complex pulleys, then down to a hand held turn wheel to control the speed. A huge safety lever had been applied to seize the line eons ago and he worried if the cable would just simply snap and send him to his death. This coupled with the threat of a surprise attack from above made Dave realize he had to make a fail safe.

Turning back to the tank, he set the alarm for thirty minutes and let the red LED display begin its countdown. Fifteen minutes each way would be more than enough, he thought. If not, it could be changed. At least he'd have the satisfaction of knowing that his mission was already accomplished. Now time was on his side.

Madden turned his attention back to the lever that held the lift in safety. Gripping the cold damp steel, he gave a sharp pull, sending the switch forward. The entire lift roared in a deafening explosion and dropped what felt like ten feet. In reality it was closer to six inches, but Dave's stomach fell farther.

The slack was tight now as Dave spun the wheel. He could see the hole swallowing him, sucking him into the blackness. He did a sweeping check with the shotgun's light. The rate of the descent was around thirty feet a minute, but that was fine, the grinding of the gears seemed more comforting than the strict stillness.

He propped the shotgun barrel in the mesh of the floor so that the beam would stay pointed down into the darkness below, becoming his only window into the void. His hearing was useless now with the squeal of the winch, so his eyes became the warning system. His trust in Steve and Jerry was the only thing preventing death from above.

He stared into the creeping darkness, wondering at how he had come so far, so fast, and so easily. The miracle of circumstance had shone through before in his life at strange times, but the feeling that his luck was due to some higher power or god wasn't totally unappealing to him. Perhaps there was a greater good in the galaxy; perhaps there was something that watched over his actions, guiding him to attain what was a righteous goal.

Still the cavern stretched up from below. Madden darted his eyes from the creeping walls back to the readout of the timer as it slowly ticked the minutes away. He had only gone about three minutes down into the shaft when a gap in the rock revealed itself from the tunnel. A large steel gate blocked it with a sign that read: SHAFT CLOSED. DANGER!

Ain't that the truth, Dave thought with a chuckle. Another sign and gate mirrored that one on the opposite side of the lift, sealing both entrances and informing the detective that his quarry lay deeper still.

He shone the flashlight through the mesh on each side, pausing from the hand wheel, but the light fell away into the darkness revealing nothing but untouched stone.

A sound.

With the scream of the winch stopped, Dave was sure he heard something coming up from deeper within the mine. He propped the shotgun against the lift wall, pointing down to the shaft below; it could have been just the echo, but it sounded more guttural. He realized that instead of getting colder, his descent was actually getting warmer, and the sickly stench was being carried up from below on a very slight breeze. The Malcuthrad had to breathe, this shaft had to have had a ventilating system to keep air flowing in the darkness, but the Malcuthrad had made their own ventilation system to keep themselves alive.

Dave felt a sense of victory now. He knew the Malcuthrad lair had to be the sensitive spot since it was located so deeply within the mountain. He admired their choice of location, although Verruckt had inadvertently handed it to them on a platter. The shaft was far enough underground to take a nuclear strike and still be all right.

He remembered now how all the monsters of legend lived within caves. Minotaurs and dragons always came from deep within the earth. The concept of hell was a hole in the earth. Maybe this was where the fear of such places came from.

No time to think now. His head hurt so much that he couldn't remember what it felt like not to be in pain. That same pain stretched down to his arms as worked the winch to speed his descent, he found himself using both hands and his body to keep the lift in motion.

He had passed five other sealed shafts now, or was it six? The same metal gate and sign sealed each one. Sweat from the labor of the wheel, and the increasing heat stung his eyes, then the flashlight's spot fell on the distant floor below.

The end was near. Dave darted his gaze over to the timer; it had taken him twenty minutes to reach his destination.

Instead of twin steel gates on each side of the shaft, there was only one opening on this bottom line. The gate, or what was left of it, was warped shards of steel twisted by human hands and the will of the Malcuthrad. The smell was overpowering. The lift dropped the last few inches locking into the ground with a final grind that blasted through the shaft. Dave dropped to a kneeling position, shining the shotgun down the center of the shaft and expecting all of Hell to be waiting for him.

Nothing.

He could feel the slight breeze and the odor came from within this line, but it was further in still. The walls and ceiling of this shaft were the same as the others, but the floor was devoid of rail-cart tracks. Instead it was as though it had been polished smooth, rubbed clean by the passage of a thousand tons of meat and bone.

From farther down he saw something; a light came from deeper within. Dave swung the weapon down, pointing it into the rocks to hide the light beam and give his eyes a chance to adjust. He dared not turn the light off for even a second here, not this close.

The light was faint, but it was present. He could see a faint red glow fifty meters down the shaft in a square of an opening, telling him that the light must be coming from a larger chamber beyond. It wasn't enough light to see down the shaft, but Dave imagined it illuminated the room beyond.

A scream came through the darkness. It was the same sound that Dave was sure he had heard only minutes before, only now it was far, far closer.

It was a kind of birthing moan, mated with a chorus of other voices, and spawned by the protest of flesh. It filled the shaft for a long second, an emotional screaming within a whisper. It was the wail of the newborn plexite, the birth-cry of the Malcuthrad.

There were eight minutes left on the red clock. Madden knew he should roll the bomb off the lift, add another thirty minutes to give himself a grace period, and make a run for it. But that wasn't going to happen.

He had to know the face of his enemy. He had to see the Malcuthrad in their own place, had to violate and invade their inner sanctum with the same disrespect with which they had violated so many others. It was a concept of justice even more twisted than normal, only grasped by a mind whose sanity slipped away in the night.

He felt adrenaline rush through him as he stepped off the lift, leaving the timer untouched. It was a high; he walked down the shaft to see the forbidden. It was the same high that many men had felt as they were swept up in the charge over the top into no-man's land, believing the lies of bagpipes and bugles. It was the high of righteous madness in war.

He walked straight to the entrance. He had won, and this sacrilegious sight would be his winner's circle. With less than six minutes to live he would bask in the glory of this battle until the wash of light swept over him.

He strolled as a victor to observe the spoils of his conquest, allowing his senses to open wide, to let the horror of what was to be destroyed fill him utterly. If he had paused, even if he sat down and attempted to think of what the room held, he would not have, could not have, prepared himself for what he saw.

The room was huge. A guess would have placed it at one hundred yards across to the other wall; a wall not made of stone. The entire realm was lined with living flesh in bulging and bubbling vessels that belched forth the horrible ichor that filled the air. The flesh was a product of the Malcuthrad's twisted technology. They were able to attach living creatures to each other like a great quilt, then open them up to let their dangling intestines cling to the mass of mucus that covered everything in sight.

The light, the fetal red light that filled the room, originated from the sides and ceiling creating a stained glass affect for this church of living death. Below him the ground bowled down into an immense pool stretching out and encompassing the entire floor, except for a strange blood-red lining. The pool itself could have been made of nothing else but blood, yet limbs floated with heads and bodies all twitching and churning as though boiled by the fires of Hell.

There were creatures plastered up tight against the walls. Dave recognized some of them immediately as plexites but they were unlike any kind of plexite he had seen before. They had only the upper torso of a human male. Where the legs had been, only tendons grasped out from their bodies holding them loosely onto the mucus-covered walls. They leaned out over the pit. The only things that hung below them were their long, erect penises, swollen with the sickly rhythms of the room. Their arms had been extended by the Malcuthrad's knowledge of veraxology to encompass longer joints. These arms dangled in the blood, as a boy would trail his feet in his favorite stream. In between each of the males, there was the complete torso of a human woman, and the greatest horror Dave Madden had ever seen.

The women were not plexites as the males had been, but living, breathing, conscious women attached to the pool. Perfect rips in their skin allowed their tendons to root themselves into the walls. They were so well attached that they couldn't turn their heads. Every single muscle in their captured bodies had a tendon and vein that held it in place and kept the women alive. On each woman, just below the navel, they were opened. Their uteruses had been opened to the rest of the walls that held the pool, to connect each to the other in a gigantic womb.

Screaming.

A chorus of screaming. The male spider-like plexites that trailed the pool's edge began thrashing and lashing about, their long arms churning up the blood into an even greater broth of meat. Their hulking cocks swollen to a purple head exploded long thick jets of infected semen out into the pool.

The moment the men climaxed, the women began screaming again, but it wasn't the heavy lustful moans that the males bellowed, it was much worse. Some women could no longer scream from having bitten off their tongues in ravaged throats. Some stayed very quiet but shook with the agony of birth. Of the estimated fifty that were around the room, one had at that moment given up all use as a womb mother.

She was a woman not more than twenty-three. Even with the tendons and organs of the matrix to keep her alive, there was no more nourishment to be squeezed from her tiny body. As some of the women screamed and cried, the two male creatures turned towards her, with their cocks still throbbing. Their long arms grasped and tore away hunks of her flesh, hurling them out and into the vat of blood until nothing remained of her on the wall.

Dave was sure that the spot on the wall would not be empty long before another woman was brought back to life, awakened to the kind of hell that could go on forever. Dave watched as the girl's tiny head floated in the birthing bile, churning and bubbling while the teeth and hair and all other dead tissue were stripped from the body, dissolved.

Then as the women around the pit continued to moan, a being emerged from the blood broth. It was like a diver returning to the surface, breaking free of the liquid bonds. Through its head, it unleashed a birth-cry into the air of the matrix.

There would be no rest for the meat.

Dave stared as the form lashed, its awkward limbs struggling through the blood and other dismembered bodies to the sides of the pool. It tried to crawl up and out of its own afterbirth but somehow it wasn't strong enough with its awkward limbs mismatched together. The two closest males watched, with their long arms trailing in the blood, for the newborn plexite to make it up from the blood and flesh of the womb. After several attempts it became apparent that it wouldn't make it.

The moment they realized that the body was inferior, the males lashed with their long arms to complete the task they had been set and designed to perform. Reaching out, they seized the newborn and with a series of twists and sickening cracks tore it literally limb from limb, sending pieces floating back into the broth before it had time to scream.

The truth came flooding into Dave as he watched. The book hadn't lied like the crazy Nazi had said. It just didn't take into account the level of technology that the Malcuthrad had achieved in their knowledge of veraxology.

The Malcuthrad's plexites could only be born through flesh that was without spirit, but what the plexites were doing with the bodies was dismembering them and placing them inside a huge makeshift womb; a birthing matrix. The flesh could be reborn through the bodies of captured women, into the twisted forms of the mismatched plexites, yet with the spirits of the Malcuthrad.

The concept of God and the righteous lie faded from his mind. These creatures weren't about evil, any more than the cattle slaughterhouses are evil. It was a question of survival and reproduction. Man is just another link in the food chain. The thought that some universal being would actually care about us in our lives, was beyond arrogance.

There was no God, only the food chain.

Dave wanted to scream, but he heard the buzz of an alarm clock for an instant, just a split second, and then everything turned white.

Chapter 32

Steve and Jerry hurried down the shaft as fast as they could, trying to exercise some caution to the path ahead of them. The fear of pursuit came at them like maggots crawling in their spine. They felt the plexites, only seconds away from leaping upon them, tearing away their very flesh. When they dared to turn their heads, only the mocking echo of the descending lift, and of their own footsteps, was heard in the darkness.

It was an eternity before the roar of the storm outside the shaft could be heard. The entrance came into view and the squeaking steel was overpowered by the night's rage. Steve paused for a moment squinting his eyes at the mouth of the shaft and drew his pistol. He saw a large hulking shape at the shaft entrance.

With the snap of reflex he raised his hand and fired three shots down the shaft. Jerry was so concerned with what was behind him, the sudden roar of gunfire made him screech and trip as he grabbed his Luger.

The two young men watched as the sparks from the bullets hitting the overturned mining cart showered down. Steve had fired three shots before he had realized what it was that he had shot at. Despite the ringing in his ears, he broke into a nervous smile.

“Holy fuck, Steve! You trying to kill me here or what?” Jerry said.

“Sorry man, you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah I'll just wait for the ringing to stop and my heart to start again.”

Steve helped his friend get to his feet and they returned to their journey. Within moments they were standing beside the mining cart and embracing the nighttime storm. They'd never imagined that a night storm of near freezing rain might be something that they wanted to be in, but compared to the darkness and stench of the mineshaft, it was heaven.

Steve turned, pumped the pressure valve of the lantern to turn the light to its brightest peak, and hung it as high as he could reach on the twisted charred steel that surrounded the mine's entrance. It threw the light far out into the yard making the rain sparkle like crystal tears in the storm's rage. The cold and damp crept back upon them as they shifted back inside the entrance for only partial cover, each pressed up against the mine out of the lantern's light. The burnt out mining yard fell into plain view.

Jerry felt the silence closing in. “How ya doin' man?”

Steve shook his head. “I don't know.”

“What do you mean man, we got this thing licked! Dave will be outa' this shaft soon, and we'll be outa' this shit hole.”

Steve looked away from the yard. “Yeah? And then what? Go back to school? Become a scientist for the betterment of mankind? What the fuck are we gonna do Jerr?”

Jerry hadn't thought that far ahead. He'd only managed to concern himself with the immediate future, and rightly so, but Steve still had the ability to think three moves ahead. It was beneficial in some cases, but this was not one of them.

“You worry too much, Lets just get our asses off this mountain. Hell! We'll probably be on talk shows as heroes getting all kinds of rewards for our research. We'll carry on in genetic engineering to create custom women for the masses at an affordable price! Only thing is, they speak a language we'll never know, and try to kill everyone on the block, but hey! We still got a few bugs to work out of the system!”

Steve began to laugh and at that moment felt an immense love for Jerry. They had been through so much together and yet the poor dumb bastard still had a sense of humor. Unbelievable.

Movement.

Jerry saw it first along the edge of the light, another spot of motion from around the ring had a flicker, and over the sound of the storm they heard wet ash being clawed as hands that never tired dragged tons of flesh.

They all came into the light at once, as though they had lined up around the lanterns ring before entering. All of them, every last plexite that had left to harvest the town of Twillingate had come back.

Without seeing beyond the ring of light, Steve and Jerry knew the plexites were countless. The slight grunts, clutching of a thousand hands, the dragging of the dead and blissful murmurs that came from the monsters now filled the air between the sounds of the storm.

The Glock pistol bit into Steve's palm as he tightened his grip. There was no hope of killing them all, he could maybe drop two, perhaps three before the wave of horror swept over them. Jerry looked at the faces in the blasphemous mass and thought he'd seen a few of them before. Some of the dead were students, some he had seen around town.

The thoughts of flight were pointless. The mining yard had been carved into a crescent leading to the hordes of creatures that came. With them so close, perhaps forty meters away, there was only one option left to take. Steve turned to see Jerry with his back against the wall, thinking the same thing.

If they allowed themselves to be taken they would end up like the others, transformed into something beyond hideous, beyond madness. If they fought valiantly, it wouldn't matter; the pistols only had a few shots before they were empty.

Making a run up the near vertical climb of the wet mud outside would be certain death, and flight down the mineshaft would only corral them into the place the plexites would take them anyway.

No way out.

With tears rolling down his cheeks, Jerry tucked the pistol underneath his chin. His eyes were wide, staring at Steve who only watched, shaking his head, but he knew it was the only way.

The roar of helicopter blades came pounding through the storm. Bright lights shone down like the vision of God. Three helicopters shone their spotlights down, illuminating the spectacle on the mountain.

There were thousands of plexites, seething and screaming in anger at the helicopters beyond their reach. They littered the mountainside with dead bodies, and bodies that should have been dead, clustering in great pulsing crowds and unleashing a roar that rivaled the thunder above.

A crack of lightning illuminated more still, showing the size of the plexite army as they stopped their advance, turning their hateful eyes skyward at the strange birds. The lightning showed a whirlwind of helicopters coming at them from across the town. Then the roar of the choppers guns cut into the night air, like the sound of death engines revving high.

Jerry was dragging Steve into the tipped mining cart. "Get in!"

The gunships were firing wildly all around them, raking the ground and the mouth of the mineshaft covering the whole mountainside with the hail of hatred. The police cruiser was shredded instantly, amidst the red mist and bone chips of the dying plexites

Then there were more gunships. Steve and Jerry knew the other helicopters had arrived, because the engine roar of machinegun death had become a deep, constant howl; even the screams of the Malcuthrad in their own slaughter couldn't compete with the magnificent destruction of the black choppers. Two plexites scramble for cover overtop of the cart and into the mine spilling blood down and dripping over the lip of the cart as they fled into the safety of the dark shaft.

Then Steve felt the mine entrance sucking air into it. In that instant he knew Detective Dave Madden was dead.

The opening of the cart was tilted slightly from the entrance. When the collapsing mines concussion wave hit, it tipped the cart on its side and pushed it along the ground. Steve and Jerry were thrown unconscious from their hiding place and into the fray.

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It was hard to say exactly how much time had passed before Jerry felt the firm grip of a human hand on the back of his neck through the rain that pelted him. He screamed, releasing the death rattle of a human embracing hell.

"Easy! Take it easy, calm down and don't move! You'll be okay!"

A synthetic voice passed through a filter, but it was English, comprehensible English and not the filth of Thesmulcar. A hand with the biting grip of rubber pinched his skin. He tried to turn his head but the grip tightened and he could feel a solid knee in his back.

"Steve! I have a friend Steve..."

"It's okay. We have your friend as well. Now don't do anything stupid and you'll be able to see him again. Now put your hands on your head! Slowly!"

A strange thing about gun barrels is that physically they're almost indistinguishable from a piece of metal pipe, yet they feel totally different when jabbed into your back. The difference was very apparent to Jerry at that moment.

Slowly he raised his arms and folded his fingers on the back of his head. The rubber-gloved hand moved to let him complete the motion. There was a bright light shining on him from behind so even as he turned his head there was nothing that he could see. Instead he heard more filtered voices and the scattered array of gunshots that sounded through the night rain. He didn't have the strength left to wonder about what would happen now. It didn't matter, they had won.

They had won!

Chapter 33

The greatest deception the devil ever did,
was to convince the world he did not exist.

-Unknown

“Top story tonight, the Canadian town of Twillingate, in British Columbia, was exposed to a deadly chemical spill, possibly the worst in history. The tetratoxin known as Hydrocloron nine was released into the atmosphere by an explosion at the local university. The entire area has been quarantined and military advisers are unwilling to speculate as to the number of casualties, but civilian sources say it could be hundreds.

Hydrocloron nine is a toxin that attacks the nervous system and brain, having unpredictable effects on the victim, ranging from hallucinations to psychotic bursts of violence. The military was quick to explain that because of the mountains surrounding the small city, it would be easily contained. The gas becomes inert after exposure to oxygen for four to seven days, after which time the military will allow public access to the city

Jose Perdomo, a bush pilot from the area stated...”

Desmond Killroy turned off the small radio beside his hospital bed. Moving his arm hurt, but not as much as listening to the radio report. He had been in the hospital for a few days, but it was hard to be sure how long exactly. They kept him so doped up that it was a wonder he was awake now.

There was only one nurse who entered or left his room. Her job was simple: administer drugs, check vitals, and give him food. His joints felt stiff, his chest hurt like hell, but he was free. Thoughts of an escape plan were almost complete when the door opened and a tall thin man in a black suit entered, quietly shutting the door behind him.

Desmond laughed. It quickly turned into agonizing coughing as his chest lunged in a vicious cycle.

“What’s so funny?” the man in black asked.

“You guys,” Desmond said, still hacking painfully. “Don’t you think it’s time to change the color of your suits or what?”

The thin man looked confused. “I don’t understand.”

“You know. Shit goes down, aliens attack, UFO’s crash, and everybody says men in black suits show up.”

The tall man smiled, pulling a chair from the corner of the room. “Right suit, wrong organization I’m afraid. We’re older than the other guys.” He sat down by the bed, letting Desmond see him clearly from where he lay.

“Whadda’ ya’ want?” Desmond asked.

The thin man cocked his eyebrow. “Aren’t you going to ask me the usual? Who am I? Who do I work for? What was that thing I fought? By the way, very impressive. Not anyone could fight hand to hand with a creature of legend. You’re a real hero, in the traditional sense of the word.”

“I didn’t ask because it doesn’t matter. You work for the government.”

“World government,” he corrected him.

“You have some name like Agent 47...”

“Moses, actually.”

“Moses?”

The man in black smiled again. “Moses. I’m in the business of recruiting, Mr. Killroy.”

He sparked Desmond’s interest. “Go on,” he said.

Moses shifted in his chair unbuttoning his sport jacket for a more relaxed posture. “Mr. Killroy, what happened to you wasn’t as isolated an event as you might think. The town of Twillingate was just one battlefield in this war. We need soldiers Mr. Killroy, soldiers like you.”

“Why me?”

“Well you’ve already been exposed, and you have no family. You’re a prime candidate.”

“If I say no?”

Moses’ smile widened. “Then I become a drug induced hallucination. We don’t need you Mr. Killroy, we’ve already recruited two brilliant young men from this incident. You would be going through your orientation training with them.”

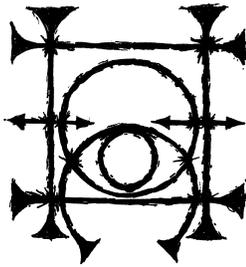
“Who are they?”

“Their names are Steven and Jeremiah. Now, Mr. Killroy, are you interested?”

Desmond thought silently for a few seconds. “Maybe.”

Moses stood up to leave. “Excellent. Our people will be in touch.” He paused when he got to the door. “I’m always curious, what made you consider it? Fear? Anger?”

Desmond smiled. “They took out Dak’s Daycare, the best burgers in the Rockies. Somebody is gonna pay.”



The End

My Life With The Thrill Kill Kult:
After The Flesh

