

An aerial photograph of a vast, green, hilly landscape, likely a savanna or prairie. The terrain is covered in dense, low-lying vegetation. In the center of the image, there is a semi-transparent grey rectangular box containing the title and author's name in black text.

The Devourer of
Flesh and Bone
by James Forestier

Prologue

The street stood quiet and deserted. In the autumn night air, no birds could be heard for they had all fled from the coming winter. Most of the trees had shed their fall leaves, transforming from colorful to mournful. Their skeletal claws raked against the nearby houses with every wind. The urban wildlife, too, was absent.

No squirrels scampered from tree to tree, looking for that one last nut to complete their collection. No alley cats prowled the bushes and back yards. The street was quiet and empty. Even the wind had gone, as if it were also afraid.

A dark shadow had fallen across Spring Hill Road. An inky blackness crept over the street that not even the silver moon above could penetrate. It wound its way sinuously, creeping from side to side.

As it passed each streetlight a wisp of blackness reached out, extinguishing the streetlights in its wake and casting the street further into darkness. A deathly chill emanated from the shadow, its passing leaving a layer of frost upon the ground and a mist forming around it in the deserted street.

A figure stepped out of the darkness appearing as if out of nowhere. He was tall and broad shouldered. He wore a crisp gray suit underneath a large gray overcoat that fell nearly to his ankles. On top of his head rested a dark gray fedora with black band. It was pulled low over his face and obscured his features.

He moved swiftly along the sidewalk. The figure kept to the shadow as if it were his own. As he moved he paused briefly, as if testing the air. Halfway down the street he found what he was looking for and he stopped in front of a house.

From its exterior this house was no different than any of the other similar houses that lined the street. The man he sought was inside this one. He could sense it. The figure looked for signs that his quarry was still awake but its large bay window was dark and none of the upstairs lights betrayed any hint of illumination.

First looking to see if he was being observed from the neighboring houses, he stalked up the walk and to the front door.

Reaching into the deep pockets of his overcoat, he pulled out slim, black leather case. Unzipping it, he pulled out several oddly shaped bits of wire and began to jiggle them in the lock. He worked slowly, feeling as

much as listening to the tumblers inside of the lock. After only a few minutes of effort, the bolt slid away and the door was pushed open silently.

Pale moonlight, obscured by the shadow outside, provided barely enough light to see but he didn't need much. He could make out details of the foyer around him and into the darkness of the house on either side of him.

Pulling the door shut behind him, the dark figure crept into the foyer, taking great care not to make a sound on the hard wood floors. He felt the floorboards creak softly as he moved, the sound abnormally amplified by the sepulchral stillness of the house.

Darkness flanked him on either side as he crept toward the large staircase that dominated the foyer. Slowly, he moved up the staircase, pausing when he heard a creak behind him.

Spinning around, he saw a man emerge from the darkness and into the foyer. Yawning, he reached over and flicked on the light switch and stumbled, still half asleep, towards the staircase.

He came to the foot of the stairs, dressed in a bath robe and rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He was below average in height and well past his middle years. There were deep circles under his eyes. The skin around his face was pale and blotchy, and it hung loosely, as if he had been ill recently. He ran his hand through his thin scalp as he looked up the staircase, for the first time seeing the stranger in his home.

His body went rigid. The man's eyes opened wildly and his mouth fell open, his jaw working soundlessly.

The stranger quickly began to descend the staircase while slowly withdrawing a pistol from beneath his overcoat. The blued metal of the weapon gleamed menacingly, the long suppressor screwed on to the muzzle adding an additional five inches to the barrel length.

The man in the bath robe only had time to whimper, "No," before the trigger was pulled.

There was a loud click as the slide cycled backwards and muffled thud as the expanding gasses from the fired bullet were muffled within the suppressor.

A hole, nearly half an inch in diameter, appeared in the middle of the old man's forehead, a sudden fount of blood erupting from it. The back of his skull exploded outward, sending a shower of blood and gray matter splashing against the walls and door.

Blood poured from the corners of his mouth as he jerked, biting down on his tongue. Then the man's face sagged, eyes rolling back into his head.

Critical portions of his brain missing, the man slumped forward onto his knees and then toppled face forward onto the ground with a wet thud. A pool of blood began quickly to form around the corpse as it twitched randomly, arms and legs thudding spasmodically against the blood stained wood.

The figure slowly approached the corpse and rolled it over with the toe of his shoe. He examined his work as he replaced the pistol into its holster. Ignoring the blood that soaked into his pants, he knelt down next to the body. Reaching underneath his overcoat, he produced a five inch, partial serrated blade from beneath his coat. He opened the man's robes and slowly cut through the shirt beneath, exposing the skin of his chest.

With great care, he began to cut a long line into the flesh and pulling it back from the muscle below. There was so much work to be done and there was so very little time left.

Chapter 1

The mid morning sun shown brightly through the windshield of Carter Pearson's Cadillac CTS, almost too bright even for the dark gray tint of his sunglasses. He tried adjusting the sun visor but it didn't do any good.

He was not in a good mood.

He drove slowly along Madison Street, trying not to lose patients with the GPS that was conveniently mounted in the middle of his dash. After all, no matter how lost he got or how many turns he passed by, the sultry voice that chided him never showed a trace of anger or impatience and he'd be damned if he let her get the better of him.

The little arrow that indicated his position slipped past his next turn and he slammed on the brakes, cursing as he slid past the turn off to Greenwich Lane.

The Toyota behind him honked it's horn and veered around him, the driver stared at him and flipped him off as she gunned the engine and sped past. Carter considered returning the gesture but was just to frustrated to care. His first time back in his home town in fifteen years and things were already going badly.

For the most part, drive from Chicago had been almost pleasant and there had been very little traffic to deal with. Unusually, he'd only gotten lost once and that had been because he had pulled off some no name exit looking for gas. The closer he had come to Arkham, Ohio though, the worse things had become.

First, he had almost gotten into an accident when a some damn kid in a Honda Accord, driving at least ninety, had cut him off as it weaved its way through traffic. This had forced him off of the road and onto a narrow shoulder and it was only by some miracle that he had managed to get his vehicle stopped before he had struck the guard rail. After that, he had been too shaky to drive for almost a half an hour.

When He had finally been able pull back onto the road he had then been stuck in stop and go traffic for over an hour and a half around Cleveland before finally making it onto I-77.

Arriving in Arkham had not improved matters any. He repeatedly gotten lost and turned around, despite the patient instructions of his car. He was already almost an hour late for the funeral and he had most likely missed the church service. Because of this, he had decided to give up on trying to get there and was now trying to find

his way to the cemetery before they interred his uncle. His head ached and he gritted his teeth. He had picked a terrible time to sober up.

Finally, he managed a u-turn and drove onto Greenwich Lane. He drove down a block and then took the next right, driving underneath a stylized arch and into the cemetery. The cemetery was located on the east edge of Arkham and was both the oldest and the largest in the city. Carefully manicured lawns and a network of access roads stretched before him.

He drove past rows of neatly trimmed hedges and seas of monuments, he had only a vague idea of where the family plot was. He had visited it once or twice a year with his father when he was growing up but had never driven there himself.

It was where his father was buried had been buried. Ever since they had moved away, his mother had steadfastly refused to be buried there. She had even gone so far as to stipulate it in her will, choosing instead to be buried with a bunch of strangers in Rosehill back in Chicago. He never understood why and she refused to explain it to him, saying only that that part of her life was behind her now. He saw a cars parked along the edge of the road up ahead and sighed with relief as he pulled his car into line with them.

It looked like the funeral procession had only recently arrived there. The hearse had yet to unload it's morbid cargo and only a few mourners were making there way to the chairs that surrounded a freshly dug hole in the earth. He sighed again and leaned back in his seat, pushing up his sunglasses and rubbing his eyes.

It had been a rough couple of weeks, ever since his mother--

He was still having a hard time coming to grips with what had happened. The alcohol, of course, probably hadn't helped any. He still couldn't understand why she would kill herself. She had always seemed so alive to him. She had told him that she would always be there for him after his father had been killed during that robbery fifteen years ago. That was why she had decided to take him away from Arkham so long ago. In retrospect, though, Chicago seemed like an odd place to go to get away from crime, at least when compared to Arkham.

God he needed a drink, just thinking about his mother made his head spin. With the difficulties that he was already having and not two weeks later he received a letter in the mail, informing him out that his uncle had been murdered in his own home.

That letter, at least, had managed to pull him out of his downward spiral. That was when he decided that he need to sober up and make the drive out here. He owed his uncle that much.

Even after they had moved away from Arkham, he had kept in touch. He had Aunt Edith had even come out to visit for a week each summer, though that had become less frequent after his aunt had died back in '99.

Watching his wife waste away from cancer had been hard on Uncle Bill and he had seemed to change after that and Carter, more than most, could understand why. Tragedy took its toll on your soul and now he was just barely hanging together.

He saw that the casket had been unloaded and was now set atop the grave, waiting to be lowered to into its final resting place. The pastor, whom he had never seen before, had taken his place at the head of the casket.

He was surprised that there were not any more people for the service than he had seen earlier. He had always thought that his uncle had been more popular than that. Carter opened the door of his car and, shielding his eyes with his hand, stepped into the chill, autumn air.

He was short, at five foot six inches. It was sort of the family curse. All of the Pearson men had been below average height. His bright red hair, another Pearson birthright, was cut just out of style. This, he felt, was in keeping with his image of an anthropology professor. He didn't consider himself weak and he had worked out occasionally but his recent binge had left him gaunt and pale. He was also normally good humored and polite though he recent troubles had left him with little patience and a new found temper that he had had to learn to control.

He had been, well technically still was, employed by the University of Chicago; he had taken a sabbatical shortly after his mother's death but was unsure that he would, could ever return to his old life.

He walked up to the mostly empty rows of chairs. He took a place near the casket. Of the half a dozen people present he only recognized one face. He looked much older than the last time he had seen him, but he recognized August Fletcher.

He and Carter's father had been colleagues and friends at Miskatonic University, Arkham's center of higher learning and its major employer. His father had been an archaeologist and August Fletcher had been a history professor who was specialized in ancient mythologies. They had worked together on various projects over the years and developed a close friendship. Carter remembered him coming over to visit his father at home on various occasions. He hadn't seen him since his father had died.

August Fletcher had been tall once, but now he was hunched over considerably, a black metal cane with an ornate silver grip rested across his lap. He still retained some of his hair, its former brown had been thoroughly replaced by white. It had thinned considerably, the dark spotted scalp visible through the wisps of hair. The skin about his face was drawn tight and had been given a yellow tinge from too many years of smoking cigarettes. As Carter looked at him, they locked eyes briefly and Carter saw recognition glimmer in the old man's eyes.

Though he knew none of the others, almost all of them, by their dress and age appeared to also be colleagues of his uncle. Only one stood out from this group.

She was young, maybe only twenty-three or twenty-four. To Carter's eye she looked Chinese. She was short, shorter than even himself, and stocky, but pleasantly so. Her black hair was pulled back into a long pony tail. Her eyes were red rimmed and she sat in her chair clutching a Kleenex as she hunched over her purse.

As he sat there, Carter was only vaguely aware of the empty platitudes of the pastor and wondering who the Chinese girl was when he felt the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. Quickly, he looked over and saw a figure standing off in the distance.

He appeared to be tall, judging by the tree he was leaning against, well above six foot, maybe over six and a half. He wore dark pinstripe suit and over that, an enormous gray overcoat that hung nearly to his ankles. He was wearing a fedora that was pulled down low over his face, obscuring his features.

Despite this, Carter felt as though the man was watching him. The man, just standing there and watching him gave Carter the creeps. He began to get up out of his chair when suddenly the man was gone.

Carter blinked rapidly, pulling off his sunglasses. He looked around and suddenly, he realized that everyone else was standing up and that the service was over; his uncles casket was slowly being lowered into his grave.

Wondering if his eyes had been playing tricks on him, he replaced his sunglasses. As he did so, August Fletcher hobbled his way up to him. He took pack of cigarettes from his right breast pocket and he shook one part of the way out of the soft pack and grabbed it with his lips. "Carter. Carter Peterson," he said as he placed the pack back into his pocket. With his other hand he then drew out a silver Zippo lighter, "I thought it was you."

"It's good to see you again, Dr. Fletcher."

Flicking open the lighter, he light his cigarette with a practiced hand and took a long draw, "August, please, you've become quite a grown man since the last time I saw you."

"And... you look well too, Dr-- August, how is the history business these days?"

August Fletcher barked a shrill laugh, "I am history now, but seriously, I have been doing fine, just fine. I'm the Dean of Miskatonic now."

Carter tried to sound impressed, "Glad too hear that, my Dad would have been really happy for you."

August looked at him intently, "You know, you look just like Geoffry, you know that. He was a good friend to me back before he passed, you know that, don't you."

"Uh, thanks, yes, I remember," he said, trying not to sound as awkward as he felt.

"Why I haven't seen you in I don't know how many years," August Fletcher eyes unfocused as if he was looking at some unseen point.

This was not a conversation Carter wanted to be a part of, "Look, Dr-- August, I need to get going, business with settling my Uncle's estate. I'm sure I'll see you around."

The old man started, coming back to the present, "Why of course, Carter. I'm sure that I'll see you around," Carter tried to stifle a sigh of relief as August turned around and tottered off.

Carter walked back toward his car. He had not told a lie. He did need to go to his see Uncle Bill's lawyers about the disposition of his estate but even if he did not, he would have said almost anything to not have that conversation.

August Fletcher had always given him weird feeling when he had come to see his father and even after all these years, he couldn't shake that feeling. He got into his car and by the time he had set the GPS to take him to the lawyers most of the other cars had already left.

The only car that remained was an old Honda CR-X. It's hood was up and the young woman from the funeral was standing next to it and looking under the hood, obviously frustrated.

Carter started his car and pulled up next to the it and rolled down the window.

"Do you need any help?" Carter asked.

She looked up, surprised, "Ya, I think, it won't start again. You don't happen to have any jumper cables, do

you?"

"I've got a set in the trunk, hold on," he said, and he pulled the car around so that they were parked nose to nose.

Carter pressed the release button for both the hood and the trunk and then got out of the car to retrieve the cables.

He handed one end of the jumper cables to her and took the other end his battery. After hooking them up he waved at her and she got back into her car and tried to start it. The Honda gave a faint click but it failed to start.

"Just give it a moment," he said.

They waited for several more minutes before Carter asked her to try again, but they got the same results. The young woman jumped out of her car and cried out in frustration, kicking the side of the car, leaving a small dent. He walked over to her holding up his hands.

"Look," Carter said, trying to calm her, "I don't think we're going to get it to start. Can I give you a ride or anything?"

She whirled to face him and some of the tension in her face drained away, "Yes, thank you, I need to get home, I can call a tow truck from there," she sighed, "Again."

He opened the passenger door for her and she climbed inside. He walked around got into the driver's seat and Carter began to drive slowly toward the entrance to the cemetery.

She looked around at the interior, "This is a really nice car."

"Thanks," he said, "So, what should I call you?"

She blushed, "I'm sorry, I'm not usually this rude, I've had... it's just been a really bad week. My name is Kim, Kim Wong."

"I can understand that."

"Thanks for the ride, I really appreciate it. I mean, I would replace that damned car if I had the money but right now..."

Carter held up his hand, "It's OK, my name is Carter Pearson."

"You're related to Bill-- I mean, Dr. Pearson?"

He glanced over at her and nodded, "He was my uncle."

"Oh, I'm sorry..." she trailed off.

They sat in silence until they came to the entrance of the cemetery. She pointed left. Carter drove down Greenwich and then, at her prodding, onto Mason. The GPS complained and Carter turned her off.

"How did you know my Uncle?"

"From school, he was my doctoral adviser."

"So you're a student at Miskatonic then?"

She nodded, "Did you go to school there?"

"Hey, who says I'm not still in school?"

Kim blushed again, "I'm sorry, I just thought that, uh, you looked like you were a bit old to still be in school."

"Come on, I'm only twenty-eight."

"I didn't mean it like you were old or anything, just not like twenty-two or anything."

Carter grinned at her, "You're forgiven and no, I went to UIC and then on to U of C for my post grad."

"Oh, you have your Master's then?"

"PhD, actually."

"OK, I'll shut up now or I'll never be able to get my foot out of my mouth," she said and they drove on in silence except for the occasional prompting to turn left or right.

After about five minutes, she directed him to turn into the Sherwood Forest apartment complex, "I live over here, the second building."

The complex consisted of several nondescript three story buildings that faced each other in pairs across a large parking lot.

Carter pulled up in front of the building that she had indicated. Kim got out quickly but then popped her head back in.

"Hey, after I call for the tow, what about I take you out for a cup of coffee. It's the least I can do and there's this great place. It's just right up the road. We can walk even."

"Kim, I'd love too, but I have to get over the lawyers today and I'm running late as it is."

She looked disappointed, "Oh, that's OK, I'll see you around then, OK."

Carter gave her a smile and nodded and Kim shut the door.

As she walked into her apartment Carter sighed and, turning the GPS back on, backed out of the parking spot.

Carter pulled back out onto the street, following the directions given to him by his GPS. After about ten minutes of driving, he managed to make his way downtown.

Carter passed by his destination twice, the GPS protesting each time. He could not find any place to park along the street so he had to pull into the public parking garage that was situated about a half a block down from his intended destination, the redundantly named law firm of Banner, Banner, Banner and Kurtz Attys at Law.

Carter took the ticket that spit out of the machine, noting the ridiculously high parking rates. He wondered if attorneys validated parking.

Carter waited impatiently for the yellow and black striped arm to rise and then he began to drive around the nearly full parking deck. He finally managed to find a parking spot on the third floor of the structure. He noted that at least it was near the stairwell. After a quick walk down the stairs he was back down to the street level.

Carter normally didn't care where he parked. He even liked to walk, but he wasn't looking forward to this meeting and he was already late.

Maybe he shouldn't have offered Kim a ride, but it seemed to be the right thing to do, anyway, she was cute. He really should have remembered to have gotten her phone number. After turning her down and then not asking for it, it might be really hard to take her up that offer.

He could try just showing up at her door, but he thought that that might be a bit creepy. Deep in his thoughts, he almost walked right past the building.

It was an impressive building, the marble fluted facade gave it the look of classical architecture, like something the ancient Greeks would have built had they had had office buildings.

He pushed his way into the building through what looked for all the world like a bronze and glass revolving door and was greeted by an equally impressive waiting room.

The floor was dark veined marble. The walls were hung with large portraits of various distinguished looking gentlemen. No doubt they were the eponymous partners. Several expensive looking statues were placed at intervals along the walls and a half dozen leather backed chairs sat off to one side.

The room was accented by various exotic looking plants that Carter could not identify. Across from the waiting area, in front of an impressive set of double doors, stood a large antique looking desk. Behind that desk sat Ms. Leitner.

Carter knew her name because engraved brass plate that stood upon her desk. The desk itself was organized and spotless. There were various trays and in boxes to handle all of her paperwork. A large portion of its surface area was taken up by a large calendar with a variety of notes written neatly under the dates. A large black, flat screened computer monitor stood on one side of the desk and there was a keyboard in front of it.

Ms. Leitner herself looked around her forties, moving from pretty and into handsome. Her auburn hair was pulled back into a severe bun. She was dressed in what was undoubtedly a very expensive white and black striped blouse covered with a navy jacket. She was so intent upon something on her computer screen that she did not look over to him when he walked up. He stood there for several moments, finally clearing his throat to get her attention.

Ms. Leitner jumped. She opened her mouth and looked as though she might swear at him, but then she thought better of it and closed her mouth.

"I'm sorry," he started quickly, handing her the letter that he had received, "I'm here to see Nicholas Banner."

She took the letter but didn't look at it, "And what's your name?"

"Carter Pearson."

She placed the letter onto one of her trays and then turned back to her computer. She clicked the mouse several times with practiced precision. She spent a moment reading the screen and then frowned and picked up the phone.

"Mr. Banner, Carter Pearson is here for your *twelve forty-five*."

Carter looked at his watch, it was almost one fifteen. She hung up the phone and once again turned her attention to him.

"Take the elevator up to the fifth floor, take a right and go all the way down to the end."

Carter murmured a thanks and walked over the set of doors that she had pointed at.

Initially he had thought that the set of ornate wooden doors led to a conference room, but now he saw that the elevator. It was old in style. Instead of it having a digital floor display, there was a semicircle of numbers over the door and a small metal arrow that was now descending towards 'G'.

There was the tone of a high bell and the doors slid open silently. Carter was half expecting to see an elevator operator like he had seen in some old movies. He went inside and pressed the button for the fifth floor and the elevator quietly began its ascent.

After a short ride the doors again silently parted and he exited the elevator into a long, wood paneled hallway. There was dark plush carpeting under his feet and more paintings and sculptures lined the walls.

Carter turned right and walked down the hallway. He saw that at the end of the hall was an open doorway. He stopped when he reached it deciding that he should knock anyway.

"Come in, said a pleasant baritone voice.

As Carter entered he saw that Nicholas Banner's office was just as impressive as the rest of the building. It was a corner office and two entire walls were nothing but windows overlooking downtown Arkham. The back wall was covered with frames holding certificates, awards and pictures. Two comfortable looking leather chairs sat in front of the desk. The desk was even larger than Ms. Leitner's had been. In contrast, it was covered with a variety of papers, folders and miscellaneous office supplies. Behind the desk sat Nicholas Banner.

He was a large, amiable looking man. His dark hair was beginning to grey and it was rapidly retreating from his forehead. He had steel gray eyes that were set in a face that remarkably unlined for a man of his apparent age and weight. His mouth seemed prone to smiling which, Carter thought, was unusual for a lawyer. He wore an immaculate black suit that Carter figured cost more than he made in three months. Nicholas Banner smiled at him.

"Mr. Pearson, close the door, if you'd like, and please take a seat," He gestured to one of the two chairs in front of the desk.

Carter did as he was asked, "Mr. Banner--"

"Please, call me Nicholas."

"Nicholas, isn't there anyone else coming?"

Nicholas shook his head, "You are the sole beneficiary listed in the late Mr. Pearson's will. When you are ready, I will begin?" Carter nodded and he took out a piece of paper from one of the folders lying on his desk and began to read.

It was tedious to listen to and Carter didn't pay attention to all the details. At first he was taken back by his uncle's generosity. He knew that they had been close when Carter was growing up in Arkham. He then thought that since his uncle never had any children of his own then that probably made Carter the closest thing that he had had to an heir.

Carter did not know what he was going to do with the house or any of his uncle's things. He guessed that

he would have to look through them. He had always maintained an expansive collection of books. He would want those, but the rest? Disposing of a loved one's possessions was always awkward. He had had enough trouble with it with his mother's things.

He suddenly realized that Nicholas had stopped reading and had begun to dig something out of his desk. Carter, distracted by his own thoughts hoped that he hadn't been asked to leave.

Presently, Nicholas took out a manilla envelope and a square package wrapped in brown paper and tied in twine. He handed both of them to Carter. Because he had not been paying attention, he had no idea what either of them were.

"Do you have anymore questions?" Nicholas asked him.

"No," Carter lied, he was far too embarrassed to admit that he had not been listening to him, "Thank you for your time."

"My pleasure, it is what I get paid for, after all," Nicholas joked, "Good luck with getting everything sorted out."

Carter left the office and began walking back towards the elevator. He figured that he might as well see what he had been given. He opened the manila envelope. He flipped through the pages inside. It contained a copy of the will as well as the deed to the house. At the bottom were several sets of keys.

One set was obviously car keys. The second set looked like they would be the keys to the house. The last key ring had only a single key on it. It looked like the key to a safe deposit box. He didn't know to where, but it was probably somewhere in the will he would have to look through it later.

He had no idea what the package was. It was five inches wide by eight inches tall and about two inches thick. The way that it was wrapped reminded Carter of those this-might-be-from-a-terrorist posters that he had seen at the post office. It was wrapped tightly with twine and he didn't have a knife with him. He would have to open it later.

He reached the elevator and was soon back in the lobby. He walked through the lobby and was ignored by Ms. Leitner, who had gone back to staring intently at her monitor.

Once outside he walked briskly back towards his car. He had about reached the parking deck when he remember that he had forgotten to ask about validating his ticket. He looked back towards the law office. *Fuck it*, he thought and headed back up the stairs and to his car.

He opened his car door and was about to throw the envelope and the package onto the passenger seat when he saw something sitting on the floor of the passenger side. It looked like Kim's purse. At least that would give him an excuse to see her again and maybe go for that coffee.

Carter got into the driver's seat and closed the door. Maybe today would not be that bad after all.

Chapter 2

Carter decided that he would need to go to the house first. It was close by and that way he'd be able find a phone book to get her number.

For the first time on this trip, he didn't bother to put the address into the GPS. His uncle had lived in the same house for as long as he could remember and he still remembered the area. It was, at least last time he had been there, in one of the nicer neighborhoods in Arkham and it was only a stones throw away from Miskatonic University where two generations of Pearson's had been employed.

When he was growing up, it had always been expected that he too would one day be a Miskatonic professor, as his father and grandfather had been. He had even considered applying there after he had received his Ph.D.

His mother, though, had actively discouraged the idea and when he had received a job offer from his alma mater upon graduation, he couldn't refuse.

Memories of his childhood came rushing back to him as he drove down Spring Hill Road. Not much had changed in the years that he had been away. It could still be 1994.

He saw his uncle's house about half way down the street. He pulled slowly into the driveway of his uncle's house. Except for new windows and some really hideous lawn gnomes, it was just as he remembered.

It was a two story colonial house. It had white siding and there was an attached garage that had been added when he was just a boy. The front lawn was immaculate as was the front of the house. There was a large bay window that looked into the living room and an enormous porch that stretched around the front of the house.

He knew that it had a large kitchen and his uncle had a library off of the living room. There was patio out back as well as a large swimming pool. Carter smiled remembering the summers that he had spent in his uncle's back yard growing up.

He put the car into park and got out. He was looking forward to this. The first time he had been looking forward to anything for a long time. As he walked up to the house, though, he stopped as he felt a chill. Even

from here the house just felt empty and cold.

The bay window, instead of inviting, seemed like a single hollow eye socket staring at him. He smoothed the hairs down on the back of his neck and tried to shrug it off. Knowing that his uncle had been murdered must be giving him the creeps.

He stepped up onto the porch. It creaked softly under his feet. He reached into the manila envelope and pulled out the house keys. He unlocked the front door and walked into the foyer.

The crime scene tape had long been removed along with the chalk outline of the body but he could see clearly where the wood flooring was noticeably lighter where the blood had been cleaned up. There had been a lot of blood, the signs of its presence where everywhere, but then he knew that there would be just like with his mother.

Not quite two weeks ago he had gone to his mother's house. They were going out to dinner that night. It was not anything special, it was just something that they did a couple times a month to keep in touch.

The door had been unlocked and Carter had let himself in and was surprised that she was not there to meet him. His mother had not been the most punctual person, but then neither was he and in the end it usually evened out.

Carter had called out for her, to let him know that he was there but had received no answer. At first he had not been too worried and had gone into the living room. He had turned on the TV and sat down on the couch to wait for her.

After fifteen minutes had past Carter had started to become worried. He got up and started looking through the house for her. She had not been anywhere downstairs and he had gone upstairs to look for her.

Carter had called out a couple more times and had still gotten no response. He walked into her bedroom and he had found a set of clothes laid out on the bed. The door to the bathroom was closed and he again called for her.

At first he had been relieved, figuring that she must have been in the shower and had simply lost track of time.

When he still did not receive an answer, he knocked loudly on the door. Again, he heard nothing, not even the sound of the shower running. Worried, he turned the knob and slowly opened the door and that was when he had found her.

She was laying, naked, in the bath tub. Her once bright green eyes had become dull and unfocused as she stared blankly up at the ceiling.

Her left arm was hanging limply out of the tub, a wide, ugly gash that had exposed the tendon and bone, ran along her wrist. Dried blood ran down her hand and a large pool of blood had formed beneath it.

Her right arm lay awkwardly against the side of the bath tub. Her right wrist had been cut too, but not nearly as deeply.

Laying across her abdomen, covered in blood, was a steak knife. The knife had been part of a set that he had bought her for Christmas three years earlier.

The bath tub's drain had not been stopped but there was still blood all over the tub, all over his mother. Splashes of crimson were on the shower curtain, the walls and even on the ceiling. As he gazed upon this scene the world had begun to spin and his ears had started to ring. He did not remember much of what happened after that.

At some point Carter had managed to call the police. He had been completely hysterical when they had finally arrived. They had tried to talk to him, but he had not been in any kind of shape to talk and they had gone about their investigation without him.

They looked at the doors and windows. They looked at the clothes on the bed. They had examined his mother. Men came in and took pictures of her. They placed the knife into a large zip lock bag.

Then some more men came and then they took his mother's body away. They put her inside one of those black plastic bags and zipped it shut and then his mother was gone.

He had been starting to become coherent but when he saw this, he broke down again. The police had made a token attempt to comfort him. They gave him the card of someone they said he could talk to and then they left. They had not even been there that long.

Even without a note, the police told him that it was obviously a suicide. In a stupor, he had gone out to his car and had driven to Jack's, a bar near where his mother's house. He did not remember how he had gotten home.

When he had woken up the next morning he had called Dr. Harding, his department chair, and requested a sabbatical. It was unusual to grant one with a such short notice but, considering the circumstances, Dr. Harding had told him that an exception would be made.

He had gotten drunk again that night and he had stayed that way until he had received the letter in the mail from his uncle's lawyers, informing him of his uncle's death and the impending funeral.

The letter had stuck him like a blow to the head. He had lost two members of his family in two weeks. After he read the letter he knew that he had to go back to Arkham for his uncle's funeral. He had been too drunk to attend his mother's funeral and he had decided that he would not make that mistake again.

His eyes hurt. Suddenly, Carter realized that he was still staring at the place where his uncle's body had been found. He did not think that he had even blinked. Shaking his head he dropped his suitcase onto the floor and went into the living room, intent upon finding a phone book.

The living room was much as he had remembered it. There was a comfortable looking couch and two deep recliners arranged around the TV. A glass topped coffee table was placed in the middle and upon it were several large books. Several large oriental rugs accented the hard wood floors.

There were some differences of course. The furniture was not the same and the TV was now an impressively large flat screen. On the table was also a large wooden box. It looked like a humidor. He didn't know his uncle had smoked cigars, he must have started after his wife had died.

He did enjoy a good cigar and he would have to check it out later. He then set the manila envelope and the package down upon the coffee table and went into the library.

Some people would call a room like this a den or a study, but not his uncle. He had covered the walls with book shelves and they were all crammed full of books. When he had run out of shelf space he had started stacking books upon the floor.

A simple desk sat in the middle of the room. This piece of furniture had not changed. Much as he had remembered it, it was covered with a variety of papers and even more books. The same old black rotary phone sat on one corner. The phone book should be on the desk or in the one the drawers, if he remembered correctly. He sat down on the chair that was behind the desk and began to look search the desk.

The papers on the desk appeared to be translation notes, strange symbols were scrawled across pages and the books were something that he would have expected to see August Fletcher reading. Maybe his uncle had been working with him on something.

He looked through the drawers, finally finding what he was looking for. He pulled it out and flipped to the back, looking through the w's. The old phone began to ring, startling him.

He set down the phone book and wondered who could be calling. His uncle had been dead for four days. As he picked up the phone he wondered how anyone would know that someone would be here.

"Hello?" he said.

"Carter?" it was a familiar female voice.

"Uh huh." he said, trying to place the voice.

"Oh good," she sounded relieved, "It's Kim Wong, from earlier. I think I left my purse in your car when you gave me a ride."

"Yes, I remember you and don't worry about it, I found your purse."

"Oh, that's good," she sounded relieved, "I called the tow truck but then when they towed in my car I didn't have my wallet to pay them they wouldn't give me my car."

"Well that's bullshit,"

"Carter, I hate to ask you for another favor, but could you please bring me my purse?"

"Of course, just remember you owe me that coffee."

"Thank you so much, I owe you two," he could almost hear her smile.

"I'll be there in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Ok thanks, I'll be waiting."

Carter hung up the phone. Maybe today would not be so terrible after all. He walked back outside, locking the door behind him. He needed something to take his mind off of the emotional train wreck that his life had become. All he had to do now was save the damsel in distress.

Carter got back into his car and drove as fast as was prudent to Kim's apartment building. He made the drive in only thirteen minutes, which he thought was pretty good considering it was getting on to quitting time and there had been quite a bit of traffic. He was surprised at how good of a mood he was when as he pulled into her Sherwood Apartments and drove back up to her building.

He got out of the car, remembering to grab Kim's purse. He walked up to her door and was about to knock when he noticed that the door was ajar. He thought that that was odd but maybe she had left it open for him.

"Kim?" Carter called out as he pushed open the door. As he did so he was assaulted by a foul odor, it was like a cross between rotten meat and a backed up toilet.

The apartment wasn't big but it was not that small either. Cozy would have been a good word to describe it. The carpeting was well worn and so were the few pieces of furniture. A few family pictures hung on the walls. An old, overstuffed couch sat in front of an even older television and in the center of the room stood a small coffee table that held several half melted candles. All together it painted a rather homey picture or it would have if there had not been a corpse in the middle of the room.

Carter recognized the body as Kim's, despite the fact that it was severely mutilated. Her torso had been cut open and it looked as though her organs had been scooped out and then arranged carefully around the body. It looked as though large pieces of flesh had been sliced from her legs. The hands and feet had been removed. He could not see any of these near the body.

Her now pale and lifeless face had remained untouched, except for the eyes which had been removed. Her empty sockets stared at him, accusingly. Blood was everywhere. A large stain had soaked into the surrounding carpeting and blood covered the walls and ceiling.

Carter froze upon seeing this. He tried to turn away but found that he couldn't, he seemed locked in place by Kim's empty eye sockets. The room suddenly began to spin and he fell to his knees. He vomited explosively on to the ground.

Eventually, he emptied the contents of his stomach and the retching subsided. His sides ached and he felt as though his throat was on fire. After several what seemed like an eternity, the room stopped spinning and, unsteadily, he tried to return to his feet. As he stood back up he was suddenly thrown against the wall, a large hand clutched around his throat and lifted him up until he stood upon the tips of his toes.

He clawed frantically at the hand, trying to free himself, desperately trying to breathe. Eyes bulging, he stared up at his attacker. The man was much taller than he was, easily a foot taller. He was dressed in a gray pin striped suit and over top of that was a gray overcoat. A gray fedora with a black band sat atop his head and underneath that...

Carter could not believe his eyes. There was nothing. Where a face should have been was nothing but pale, gray and green mottled skin. The skin was pulled so tightly against the skull that it was clearly outlined. He wanted to scream but the sound was choked off by the hand clutched firmly around his throat. All he could manage were several short gasps that sounded a lot like whimpers. He saw dark spots gathering across his vision and the man, thing or whatever it was began to grow distant and fuzzy.

On the verge of passing out, Carter could feel himself being released. Gasping for breath and unable to support himself he fell to floor, landing in the puddle of his own vomit. He lay there for several minutes, clutching at his bruised throat and gasping for air.

Carter had seen that thing, whatever it was, before. He was sure that was the man he had seen at the funeral

that morning, but how could it have been. It just could not be real. That face or rather the lack of a face. His mind struggled to understand what had just happened to him.

Eventually, Carter felt steady enough to stand up. He was still a bit wobbly but he managed to walk outside and sit down on the curb. He fumbled through his pocket and took out his cell phone. He opened it and, trying to control his shaking fingers, he managed to dial 911.

Carter tried to remain as calm as possible but the operator told him that he was hysterical. The operator told him not to hang up, but Carter started to feel sick again and he turned on the speaker phone.

Carter set the phone down next to him and put his head between his knees. He could hear the operator try to reassure him as he breathed slowly in and out of his mouth and tried not to throw up again. He had no idea how long he waited, his head between his knees and the 911 operator trying to reassure him that everything was going to be just fine, despite the horrors he had just witnessed.

Eventually, Carter hear sirens in the distance and two police cars roared into the parking lot and came to a screeching halt in front of him. Four officers got out of the cars and ran towards him.

Carter looked up as they came up to him. The officer that first approached him looked about his age, but was taller and more athletic. He had black, close cropped hair and a no nonsense look in his eyes. The police man had sergeant stripes on his shoulders and his name plate read McConnell.

"Sir, did you make the 911 call?" he asked.

Carter nodded and winced as the world started tilting again.

"Sir, is this the apartment?" he pointed towards the open door.

Carter nodded again. The vertigo was not so bad this time. Two of the officer then went inside the apartment and one of them came running out almost immediately and began retching onto the curb.

McConnell looked at the vomiting police officer and frowned and then went inside the apartment. He came out a few minutes later. He had taken out a small notebook and was writing in it. Looking surprising unmoved by what he had just seen, he walked back over to Carter and sat down next to him.

"Can you tell me your name?" he asked gently.

"Carter, Carter Pearson." he croaked.

He looked up from writing in his notebook, "Any relation to William Peason?"

"Yes, he was my uncle, why?"

McConnell paused for a moment, "It's just odd, with him being murdered recently and then his nephew being at a murder scene just a few days later."

Carter could not believe what he was hearing, "God, I didn't kill her. I couldn't... couldn't do that to someone. There was this thing here and--"

"I believe you," McConnell interrupted.

Carter looked at him, confused, "Wh--, you do?"

"The only thing you're covered in is vomit, if you had done this, you'd be covered head to toe in blood."

"Oh, ya."

"Then why did you say that. About my uncle and Kim?"

"Just an observation. That's all," he looked back down, how did you know the victim? You said her name was Kim?"

"Yes, Kim Wong. I just met her today, at my uncle's funeral."

"Hell of a place to find a date."

Carter looked at him defensively, "Her car had broken down and I gave her a ride home. After I had dropped her off I found that she had forgotten her purse in my car and I was coming over to bring it to her."

"I didn't mean to offend you," McConnell said. He began to write and then he stopped. He then frowned and made more notes.

"What is it?" Carter asked.

McConnell looked up at him, still frowning, "What do you know about William Pearson's murder?"

"Nothing, just what I read in the obituary his lawyer sent me." Carter paused, confused, "What does my uncle have to do with this?"

"Well, it's just that--"

"Isn't interrogating people my job?" a man's voice interrupted McConnell sharply.

Carter looked up. A man was standing over them. He was looked to be only a few years older than he was. His blond hair was stylish, though a little long for what he would have expected for a police officer. He was dressed in jeans and a button down shirt. Over top of that he wore a brown blazer and had a shiny police badge attached to his belt. He could just see the butt of a black pistol sticking out from the edge of the blazer.

"I wasn't interrogating anyone, Detective, he's not a suspect," McConnell did not look happy to see him.

"I believe determining that is also my job." the detective said, condescendingly.

McConnell stood up quickly, "OK then, I'll just go make sure everything is ready when forensics gets here."

"That won't be necessary," he said dismissively, "the Coroner will be here to collect the body soon. It is *your* job to make sure that everything is wrapped up by then."

"Jesus Christ, Horn, we haven't even taken any pictures yet."

"That won't be necessary, *Sergeant*, just go wrap up the scene so that we can get out of here."

McConnell looked as though he was about to argue some more but then he stalked off.

Horn pulled a notebook out of the inside pocket of his blazer and flipped it open, "What's your name?"

Carter looked up at Horn. He already did not like him, "I already answered that."

"Not for me you didn't"

He sighed, "I'm Carter Pearson."

"And how do you know the deceased?"

"I already," Horn looked up from his notebook and glared at him, "I met her today at my uncle's funeral."

"Alright, tell me, in your own words, what happened when you arrived here."

Reluctantly, Carter began to explain about the purse and how he had found the body. When he got to the attack he stopped, unsure how to continue.

"Did you get a good look at your attacker, can you describe him?" Horn prompted.

Carter described to Horn the attacker's height and clothing.

"Did you get a look at his face, were there any scars or other distinguishing marks?"

Carter hesitated for a moment, "No, I didn't get to see his face."

Horn frowned at him and then scribbled some more notes on his pad.

The tone of Horn's voice was making Carter uncomfortable, "Is that all you need from me?"

Horn sighed and closed the notebook, tucking it back into his inside blazer pocket, "Do you want to get checked out by a paramedic or would you like to go to the hospital?" Horn made this question sound like he didn't care.

Carter rubbed his hands around his throat, it was swollen and there was definitely going to be a bruise, "No, I think I'll be all right."

"OK, then Mr. Pearson, that should be about everything. We'll contact you if we need anything else," with that, Horn turned and walked off.

Carter got to his feet. He watched Horn talk to McConnell briefly before getting back into his unmarked police cruiser and driving off. Talking to the police should have made him feel better but after talking to Horn he just felt uneasy.

He needed to go home and take a shower. He was covered in vomit and definitely smelled like it. He had also pissed himself during the attack, but he was not about to admit to that. Unsteadily, he walked back to his car.

Carter sat in his car until long after the police left the scene. It was all just too much for him. Everyone around him was dying. It seemed like Death was just following him around now. He could not understand what had just happened to him. He had no idea what that thing was or why it had let him go. Obviously he had been unable to defend himself. It could have just as easily killed him.

Carter could not stop thinking about that face, or rather the lack of one. He tried to rationalize it. Maybe it had just been a hallucination, the oxygen to his brain was being cut off and he had just been seeing things. He was being attacked and so his dying mind had just imagined that his attacker was a monster.

Carter eventually managed to pull himself together enough to drive home. He drove slowly, his vision still blurring around the edges. Periodically, he would see phantoms float around the periphery of his sight but when he turned his head, there was nothing there.

Finally, Carter pulled the car into the driveway. When he got out of the car he found found that he was walking more steadily than before but he still had to make his way carefully up to the house. He dug the key out of his pocket and unlocked the door.

Carter had walked in the door intent upon going upstairs and taking a shower but instead he went into the kitchen and flipped on the lights. His uncle's kitchen was large and surprisingly modern.

All the cabinets had been replaced since he was a kid and all the appliance gleamed dully of stainless steel.

A large island stood in the center of the kitchen. Like the rest of the counter space, it was granite topped except where a large electric grill had been inlaid in its surface. A copper fume hood hung directly above it. A wooden frame was connected to it and suspended from that were a myriad of pots.

Carter walked through the kitchen and started opening cabinets until he found what he was looking for.

In the very back of the kitchen, Carter opened a particularly large cabinet. His uncle had always kept a well stocked bar and a wide selection of whiskeys, vodkas, tequilas, rums and schnapps greeted him. He looked at the liquor bottles and saw that they were all top shelf.

Carter selected a bottle and unscrewed the cap. He did not bother looking for a glass but instead he took a long drink from the bottle and felt the alcohol burn its way down his already ravaged throat. He grimaced and screwed the cap back on, taking the bottle upstairs with him.

Carter went into the master bed room. Like the rest of the house it was very well appointed. More oriental rugs covered the hard wood floors. His and hers matching sets of cherry dressers and chests of drawers were placed on each side of the room. Several framed pictures of his aunt and uncle hung from the walls.

A king size bed with a large head board was against the middle of the wall to his right. On his left was a doorway that went into the master bathroom.

It was large for a bathroom. It was tiled with a dark brown ceramic. The toilet that sat off to his right was accented with a toilet seat cover the same color as the tile. A matching bath mat sat in front of the shower.

It was not just a shower. It was a large whirl pool bath tub that dominated the entire left side of the bathroom. He turned on the shower and adjusted the water until it was nice and hot. Carter then unscrewed the bottle and took another drink.

Carter continued to drink as he got undressed. He took the bottle with him into the shower. As the hot water ran over his body, he willed himself to forget. He could not and the memories kept coming back.

Every time that Carter closed his eyes he saw another dead face or that faceless face of his attacker and every time that he did, he tried to drown it out with more alcohol.

By the time that Carter got out of the shower, he was already swaying unsteadily on his feet. He towed off quickly and stumbled, naked back down the staircase and back into the foyer. He opened his suitcase and, scattering clothes everywhere, fumbled his way into a tee shirt and some sweat pants.

Carter walked into the living room, not bothering to turn on the lights. He fell down ungracefully onto the couch and then he rolled over and flipped on the television.

Its soft glow illuminated the room and the sound of late night television filled the air. Carter flipped through the channels idly as he continued to take pulls from the bottle. As he worked his way through the bottle he felt himself getting drowsy.

Carter awoke with a start. His vision was blurry and felt disoriented. He blinked several times rapidly, clearing his vision. He suddenly realized that he was naked, laying splayed out with his wrists and ankles strapped down with what looked like rusted iron bands.

Frantically, he looked around and above him the open sky shined starlight down upon him. The dim light

barely illuminated the figures that surrounded him. They were of various heights and dressed in dark robes. Rising from the ground, a fog writhed about them, obscuring their faces.

As Carter watched in horror, the figure nearest to him began to chant in a language that was altogether alien to him and soon the rest of the figures were joining in.

Images begin to flash before his eyes. He sees his mother alive and happy and then suddenly he sees her as he had last saw her, her eyes glassy and her body covered in blood. His uncle came next, his once jolly face slowly withering and becoming dessicated. The skull visible under his paper thin skin. After that came Kim. Her eyeless sockets bored into him. Blood flowed from her mouth as she screamed for him to save her. Finally he saw his father, looking as he had just before his death, talking to a man that seemed familiar but that he did not recognize. His father turned towards him. He looked at Carter but suddenly it was not his father anymore but that eyeless, faceless creature from Kim's apartment.

The images started coming faster and faster until they were nearly a blur. Carter thought he saw a room filled with bones, the eyeless skulls grinning up at him. A mist moved across them, touching even caressing the bones. He caught glimpses of strange symbols and diagrams, each coming to him and being replaced in turn faster than he could comprehend what he was seeing.

Distantly, Carter still head chanting, it was getting louder now. Soon it reached a fever pitch and Carter felt a strange cold touch his toes. It seemed to penetrate him, working its way down into the very core of his bones. The chill then began to slowly creep up into the feet and then to his legs. Slowly, he could feel the life draining from him as his body grew colder and colder.

Carter found that he could no longer move his limbs. He tried to open his mouth to scream only to find that he no longer had a mouth.

Carter awoke with a start, his body jerking so hard that he fell off of the couch and onto the floor. Dazed, he looked up to see a figure standing over him in the darkness, staring down at him with a face that had no eyes.

He started to scream, but suddenly the creature's body seemed to distort, twisting at impossible angles, both shrinking and growing, writhing and contorting.

By the time Carter had managed to sit up, it was gone. He jumped to his feet and ran toward the light switch. His head swam and he stumbled and fell, striking his head against the wall.

Black spots danced before his vision as he struggled to stand up again. He finally managed to regain his footing but he swayed dangerously on his feet. He flipped on the light switch.

The living room was empty, the television was still on and a man from an infomercial was trying to sell him cutlery. His bottle had rolled underneath the table, most of it's remaining contents had spilled out.

Carter tried to get a grip on himself but he was too panicked and too drunk to think clearly. He ran madly through the house, flipping on lights as he went, falling repeatedly as he did so.

By the time that Carter had checked the entire house he was well bruised but a little more steady on his feet. Memories of the nightmare threatened to overwhelm him and he went back into the kitchen and took

another bottle of liquor from the cabinet.

Fumbling with the lid, Carter finally managed to unscrew the top. He was about to take another drink when he stopped put the lid back on and looked at it.

Was the alcohol finally driving him mad? He couldn't possibly have seen a faceless creature at Kim's apartment and then here.

There was no one here. The doors were still locked. The stress must be getting to him. That was it. He was sure of it now. He had seen his attacker's face but had been too scared to process it.

There had been someone there, someone had killed Kim but he had to have been a man. Just a normal, or rather, psychotic man. Maybe he was drinking too much or maybe just not enough. Carter unscrewed the cap; there was only one way to find out.

Chapter 3

Sunlight streamed in through the large bay window and into the living room. The slowly encroaching beam of light moved over the unconscious form of Carter Pearson.

He lay sprawled out on the rug in front of the television. His eyelids were half way open and his eyes were rolled back in his head. A thin stream of drool leaked out from the corner of his mouth.

As the sunlight moved onto his face, he gradually began to move. As he stirred, the nearly empty bottle that was clutched in his hand rolled onto the floor with a clatter. He groaned.

Instinctively, his hands went to his head. He pressed them against his skull, trying to keep it from fracturing and spilling his brains out all over the rug. He gritted his teeth.

His head felt as though it might explode at any moment. Blinking his bleary eyes, he searched for the liquor bottle. He saw that it had had come to rest at the base of the television stand. He tried crawling for it but his stomach rebelled and he nearly vomited. Thinking better of moving, he let himself lay back down on the floor and stared up at the ceiling.

For several minutes he tried to remember where he was. It wasn't his apartment. He could tell that much. He remembered that he had left Chicago to come to Arkham for his uncle's funeral. Oh yes, he remembered now, he had been left the house in the will and that was where he was. He groaned as he tried to sit up again but pain and nausea forced him back down.

Staring up at the ceiling again he tried to think. His head felt like it was full of sand. What had happened last night? He thought he'd decided to cut back on his drinking when he had come here. His mind was covered in a deep fog and it hurt to concentrate.

He had gone to the funeral, he remembered that. Then to the lawyers, he'd gotten the keys to this place and then he'd gotten a call from Kim. Who was Kim? He thought about it for several moments and then he remembered giving her a ride from the funeral after her car broke down. He wondered how that had gone when it all came rushing back to him.

He whimpered as he remembered finding her mutilated corpse. The memory of her body caused him to vomit. Choking, he rolled over onto his side and dragged himself over to the bottle. He grabbed hold of the bottle and he drained what was left. He lay back gasping and choking. He cried. Carter had no idea how long he lay there. Eventually the sobs subsided and he passed back into sleep.

When he woke again, the pain in his head had grown marginally more tolerable. Carefully, he sat up. He was covered in vomit and from the smell it seemed that he hadn't bothered to find a toilet during the night. Slowly, he stood up and dragged himself up the stairs and into the bathroom. He stripped out his filthy clothes and threw them into the trash. Gratefully, he stood under the hot water. As the water ran down over him, he tried to shake the fog from his head.

He felt like his life was spinning out of control. He had never been reckless growing up and while he drank socially, he had never been a big drinker. In the last two weeks he had drunk more than he had in the previous twelve years.

He was headed for a break down and he did not know how to stop it and after what he had seen last night he did not know if it was not already too late. He punched the ceramic tiled wall of the shower so hard that he yelled out in pain and cradled his fist, hoping that he had not broken it.

He stared down at his hand and flexed his fingers slowly. It hurt like hell but did not seem to be broken. He was bleeding. Two of his knuckles had split open and blood was flowing down his hand, mixing with the water. The pain would have been terrible if it did not have to compete with the pain in his head. As he stared down at his hand and watched the blood swirl down the drain he decided that he needed to get the hell out of Arkham.

He would go to the bank and get whatever was in the safe deposit box. Then he would find a real estate agent and put the house up for sale. After he had tied up all of the loose end here then he would go back to Chicago and start teaching again. If he didn't, if he did not take back his old life soon, he would probably soon be in an insane asylum. Or dead.

Carter stepped out of the shower with just enough resolve to not run downstairs and try to drown out the memories in his head. Dripping wet, he searched around the bathroom for a few moments until he was able to locate some band aids for his bloodied knuckles. He squeezed the edges of his wounds as close together as possible as he applied the bandages. He hoped that they would not scar too badly. Afterwards he toweled off and went back downstairs and put on a gray turtlenecked sweater and a pair of khakis.

He went back into the living room and took the envelope with his uncle's will from off of the coffee table. He flipped through the pages until he found the one dealing with the safe deposit box. His uncle's box was located at the main branch of Arkham National Bank. By the address, it was only a couple of blocks from from the law firm.

Carter cursed. That meant that he would have to pay for that over priced parking garage all over again. He sighed and went outside to his car. He checked to make sure that the key was still in the envelope before

getting into his car. As he drove, he flipped through the radio stations, humming idly when he found a song that he liked.

He pulled into the parking deck and resentfully yanked the ticket that the machine spit out at him. The parking lot was not as full as it had been the day before and he was able to take one of the last spots on the ground level. The bank was about a two block walk from the parking deck but he did not have to go very far before he was able to see the bank.

The Arkham National Bank was an impressive building. It stood five stories tall and took up almost half of the block that it was situated on.

Instead of having a flat roof like the buildings around it, it had a high peak and clad in copper that had turned green with age. It had a limestone facade with tall, narrow windows placed at regular intervals.

It looked almost as though someone had dropped a Gothic castle into the middle down town Arkham. Suitably impressed, he pushed open the large double doors and entered the bank.

The bank's lobby was suitably airy for such an austere building. The lobby ceiling extended a full three stories up into the building. The floors were a dark green marble and was highly polished. Directly across from the entrance the tellers stood behind a wooden counter that looked a lot like teak while off to the left, irregularly arranged desks housed what were probably the loan officer and account managers.

The bank lobby was filled with a few dozen patrons, some filling out slips at the large table in the center of the lobby but most stood in line. Several uniformed security guards stood around the lobby. They looked bored.

Slowly, Carter worked his way through the velvet roped maze towards teller's counter. After almost twenty minutes of waiting he finally managed reached the head of the line and stepped up to talk to a cheerful looking young man who, according to the name plate at his window, was Steve.

"How may I help you today, Sir?"

"I need to open a safe deposit box."

"I can help you with that, what's your name?"

"Carter Pearson."

Steve tapped away at his keyboard for a moment and then frowned, "I don't seem to find you anywhere as being customer."

"The box actually belonged to my uncle, William Pearson."

"Oh, then I'm afraid that your your uncle will have to be present for you to have access to the box."

"But he's dead, he left the box to me in his will."

"Oh, I'm sorry for your loss, but..." Steve looked unsure.

Carter held up the envelope and took out the key, "I have the key right here, as well as a copy of will, if you need it."

That didn't seem to help Steve reach a decision. He hemmed and hawed for a few more moments, "Would

you please wait for one moment, I'll be right back."

Carter sighed as the teller scurried away into one of the back offices. He waited impatiently for a few minutes until Steve returned, accompanied by another man.

He was of average height with brown hair that grayed around the temples. He carried the extra weight that seemed to be standard issue for bankers. His face looked very serious, despite the smile that it wore.

"My name is Frederick Talbot, you can call me Fred. I am the manager here at Arkham National Bank. Now what can I do for you?"

Carter identified himself and explained all over again about how he wanted to get into his uncle's safe deposit box.

Fred nodded throughout the explanation, "Hmmm, Carter Pearson you say. Why yes, I remember Mister Nicholas Banner called yesterday to tell me that the box had been left to you Mr. Pearson's will. If you follow me, I'll be able to assist you."

Since he could not climb over the counter, he had to walk all the way down to the other side of the bank where Fred waited for him.

He guided Carter down a long hallway then down a flight of stairs. The basement presented a labyrinth of hallways. They were dimly lit when compared to floor above. The distance between ceiling lights was enough to create patches of shadow.

Following the bank manager, Carter walked down another hallway where they turned right. At the end of another hallway stood a large metal door. The bank manager removed a card key from his pocket and waved it in front of a large plastic square. There was a soft beep and he pulled the door open, revealing a very large room that contained rows upon rows of shelves of safe deposit boxes of various sizes.

"Your box is number five hundred and thirty. All the way down and turn left. It's on the second row. I'll wait for you here."

Carter walked down the rows of metal boxes and, after a bit of searching, found the one that had belonged to his uncle. He unlocked the drawer and pulled it open. Inside was another manila envelope. He was getting tired of the manila envelopes.

He opened the flap and saw that it contained only two yellowed pages. The pages were worn along the edges and appeared as though they had been torn for a book. The pages looked like they were written in some kind of foreign language that was completely alien to him. On each page was drawn a strange diagram.

At first Carter thought that they were the same, but upon closer examination he saw that they were each slightly different. Both were some kind of circle but the non-euclidean geometry of them very disquieting to look at. A trick of the light or perhaps the ink that had been used, they looked like they wriggled and undulated upon the page.

Feeling uneasy, Carter tucked the papers back down in the envelope and closed the flap. He then placed it, along with the first envelope, underneath his arm. He walked back out to the door and thanked Fred for his time.

Carter followed him back through the maze of the basement and back into the lobby. He shook hands with banker and thanked him again before turning to leave. Carter walked back towards his car lost in thought.

The anthropologist in him was intrigued by the strange language but the diagrams filled him with a sense of unease. He remembered seeing those strange books on his uncle's desk in the library. Maybe this is what he had been working on.

Carter wondered why, then, that they were in a safe deposit box at the bank. If his uncle had been on to something big, why didn't he just take them to the university. The questions gnawed at him. When he got back to the house he would have to see what he if he could find any answers among his uncle's papers.

Carter got back to his car and drove out of the parking garage. When he got to the ticket window tried to resist the urge to complain about the parking rates. Instead he kept his mouth shut and paid the fee.

He drove back to the house, the pages he had found in the safe deposit box weighing on his mind. Something just felt wrong about them. He wondered what his uncle had been working on. He arrived back at the house and pulled into the driveway.

As Carter went into the house towards the library, he saw the package sitting upon the coffee table in the living room, still unopened. He had completely forgotten about since... all that had happened.

Now curious as to what it might be, Carter scooped it up as he walked past. As he picked up the package, he accidentally knocked the humidor off of the table and sent it clattering to the floor. Carter stared at it, surprised.

Instead of seeing cigars rolling about on the floor there was a revolver. It was a medium sized, it looked like what he had seen police officers in old movies or the security guards at the bank wearing. Stray bullets had also fallen from the box and were rolling about on the floor. Carter bent over and picked up the revolver and examined it.

He did not know much about much about guns, but after fiddling with the catch for a moment, the cylinder fell open to reveal that there were six cartridges loaded. He tried to think of a reason that his uncle would have a loaded revolver on the living room coffee table. He thought about what he had been through recently and realized that he could think of a few.

Carter picked the bullets up off of the floor and placed them in his pocket. Finding the gun had made him feel suddenly uneasy, as if he wasn't safe here anymore. He took the revolver with him when he went into the

library, setting it down on the desk. He was defiantly getting paranoid. He sat down at the desk, trying to dispel his uneasiness by working on the problem at hand.

The top of the desk was dominated by two large tomes. The first was a very large and thick leather bound volume. The books pages were made of age brittle vellum and the cover was dry and cracked with age. Embossed upon the leather cover was the title, *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*. It sounded German, a language Carter did not speak but the last word looked suspiciously like cult.

The second books looked far more modern. It, too, was leather bound but the cover was still soft and smooth, its pages made of simple paper. It was smaller than the first but equally as thick. It was titled *The Commentaries Upon the Necronomicon of the Mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred*.

Carter stared at these two strange books for long minutes. He was curious as to what they contained but at the same time, dreading what might be within. He shook his head, trying to dispel the miasma that had suddenly descended upon him. He decided, instead, to focus upon the papers on the desk.

The papers were scattered around the desk in various unorganized piles. Most of the papers on the desk were ordinary. They were bills, lecture notes, correspondence and to do lists.

Several of the pages, though, were of interest. They were translation notes for a language that appeared to be the same one that was on the pages that he had retrieved from his uncle's safe deposit box. He took the manila envelope, opened it and shook its contents out onto the desk. As the papers slid out, two photographs that had previously been stuck near the bottom of the envelope came falling out. Carter picked them up and looked at them.

They were not very good quality pictures. They were blurry and poorly focused, like they had been taken with a cellphone camera. Both pictures showed essentially the same scene, each at a slightly different angle.

They showed two people standing on what looked like the quad at Miskatonic University. One of the figures looked like August Fletcher. He was talking to a large man dressed in a gray overcoat and wearing a gray fedora pulled low.

Carter couldn't see the stranger's face, or lack thereof, in either photograph but it looked like his father's old friend was talking to the man who had killed Kim Wong and had tried to kill him. He stared at the pictures, dumbstruck.

It looked that somehow, August Fletcher was involved in Kim's death and maybe that of his uncle's too. Carter did not have any idea why but he guessed that it must have something to do with what his uncle had been working on. He must have been onto something, something that Fletcher did not want found out.

Wild theories swept through Carter's mind, his paranoia running at full gallop. He suddenly had the overwhelming feeling that he was being watched. Carter gripped the desk and forced himself to calm down. Panicking would get him nowhere.

As Carter breathing returned to normal, he remembered the package his uncle had left him. He was almost afraid to open it, afraid of any further revelations that it might contain.

Slowly, Carter took a pair of scissors from the desk and cut the twine from the package. He tore off the paper wrapping to reveal another book.

Carter looked it over, apprehensively. It was the size of a large paperback and about two inches thick. It had a leather cover but nothing was written on it. The pages had turned yellow with age and he opening the book carefully, turning to the first page. It read:

Journal Property

of

Carter Pearson

Years November 1927 - March 1929

This must be one of his grandfather's journals. Carter turned to the first entry, it was dated November 20, 1927.

Arrived this morning in Riyadh today. Nejd is hot even during the winter. Don't understand how the locals stand it in those long robes and head scarves. The train ride was unbearable.

The windows in all the cars were closed because of the sand. It stunk of sweat and perfume. I was so glad when we finally pulled into the station. After a day in Riyadh to pick up more supplies, I will be headed out to meet with Dr. Simon at the dig site. He proceeds me by nearly a week and should have everything set up to begin by the time that I arrive.

I would wish for a car to transport me out there but I will be going by camel. I cannot say I look forward to the trip but I will be glad to finally get to work. It has been a long trip and I miss Arkham already.

Carter paused, obviously, this details one of his grandfather's archeology digs but he couldn't see how this could be important. He went to the next entry.

November 23, 1927

It has only been two days but Dr. Simon and I are making great progress on the ruins of Ayn Adibiyah.

While digging near the foundations of the temple we located a tunnel that reaches far underground. It appears to be of an older construction than the ruins but it is in surprisingly good condition. The tunnel terminates in a large stone door. It is almost completely smooth and there is no apparent way to open it.

*Across the door is inscribed: **قبر المحرمة معارف**. Roughly translated, this means "Resting Place of Forbidden Knowledge". The door itself seems to predate the surrounding foundations by at least several centuries. I am very anxious to get a look at what lies beyond the doorway, but our digging crew has refused to open the door. They claim that it is cursed. No amount of threats or bribes have been able to sway them. We are going to have to wait until we can find diggers who are less superstitious.*

Carter sat up in the chair, this was more interesting, his father had never mentioned that his grandfather had ever made any big discoveries.

November 26, 1927

After days of fruitless searching, we finally managed to hire the services of diggers who are willing to break open that door. Upon being brought to the dig sight, they attacked the door with much vigor and were able to breach it just after noon.

We had to wait for several more hours until the stale air had been allowed to clear. After this vexing wait, Dr. Simon and I were able to set our sights upon the chamber beyond.

The first sight that greeted our eyes was macabre. At least a half dozen sets of skeletons lay in various positions, encircling a large stone altar.

The altar itself was carved with runes and marks that were altogether alien to my eyes. They caught at the edges of my eyes and they seemed to ripple at the periphery of my vision. I found this to be most disquieting but, despite this, I endeavored to continue our exploration.

Sat upon its surface were four large stone tablets. Upon each of the tablets was made more runes and marks of the type found on the altar itself. When we tried to move the tablets, we found that the tablets are incredibly heavy.

Dr. Simon and myself immediately recognized the magnitude of our discovery and we set about making preparations to remove the tablets to the security of camp. We have posted a guard upon it to keep both the curious and the larcenous at bay. Tomorrow I shall start the task of deciphering the peculiar markings of the tablets.

Carter paused at his grandfather's description of the tablets. It seemed that the strange language that was written on the pages from the safe deposit box was the same as the one found at this dig site.

November 28, 1927

After two long days of studying the tablet, I am only able to conclude that it bears no history or similarity with any language known to Western Man. If not for the manner of their keeping I would give up and assume that it is naught but nonsense and gibberish.

The strongest evidence that it is indeed some unknown language is the regular repetition and grouping of symbols and marks at regular intervals. This leads me to believe that it contains syntax and grammar. If I can but parse this, then I would be on my way to divining its hidden secrets.

If only I had the benefit that Jean-François Champollion had with the Rosetta Stone.

Throughout the entry his grandfather had drawn several examples of the markings found on the tablets. They were definitely some of the same ones from the pages.

Carter picked up the pages again and studied them. These pages must have been copied from the tablets that his grandfather had discovered. He had never heard anything about this from his father or from his time at Miskatonic University.

The fate of the tablets gnawed at Carter he went back to reading the journal. He was about to turn to the next entry in the journal when he heard a loud crash, the sound of breaking glass and splintering wood coming from the foyer.

Carter sprang to his feet and grabbed the revolver from the table. Through the library door he saw a man appear in the living room. He recognized him from the gray overcoat and fedora but now he knew that it was not a man.

In daylight he could see that the the head partially concealed underneath that broad brim held no face at all, just a skull protruding against the tight, mottled skin, as though it were trying to force its way free. Carter screamed at the sight of him and brought up the gun. He fired one shot and then another in rapid succession.

Carter's hand was shaking so badly that both bullets failed to even make it through the doorway, instead putting holes into the library wall. Unprepared for the recoil, he nearly dropped the revolver.

Frantically, he scooped up his possessions from the desk and fled fled out of the library and down the back hallway towards the kitchen..

Carter tried to listen for the sound of pursuit but his ears will still ringing from the gunfire and his pulse was pounded rapidly in his head.

Carter sprinted out into the kitchen and fumbled with the latch on the sliding glass door, swearing repeatedly until he finally managed to push it open.

He burst out into the back yard but as he did so the glass door behind him shattered outward, showering

him with glass. His pursuer came flying through the glass and landed in front him, blocking his path. He frantically tried to change direction but his momentum carried him forward and he collided with the creature.

Carter connected solidly with the creature and it stumbled backwards several feet, to the edge of backyard swimming pool.

The swimming pool had been emptied ahead of the coming winter and it was a good eight feet to the bottom. The creature flailed it's arms, trying to balance itself.

To Carter, it seemed to hang there for several minutes before suddenly disappearing from view. He heard a sickening thud as the creature hit the bottom of the pool.

Carter did not stop to see if the creature was dead or unconscious. Instead he turned and ran towards the back gate and out around the front of the house.

Carter walked across the front lawn towards his Cadillac. He jerked open the driver door and threw everything onto the passenger seat and jumped in, slamming the door after him.

Carter jammed his finger down onto the ignition button and the car roared to life. Suddenly, he saw a blur come at him from the corner of his eye.

There was a loud crunch and the driver side window spider webbed as his pursuer slammed its fist down upon the glass. It reared back for another blow but Carter slammed it into reverse and, tires squealing, shot backwards out of the driveway and onto the street.

Carter turned the steering wheel so sharply that the Cadillac spun in a full circle before sliding to a stop. In the rear view mirror he could see that he was still being pursued.

He yanked the stick down into drive and slammed his foot down onto the gas pedal. The back of the vehicle fish tailed and smoke poured off of the tires as shot off down the street, leaving the creature far behind him.

Chapter 4

Carter was driving fast. Way to fast for the residential street that he was on. The Cadillac slid sharply as it roared around a bend in the road. When he came out of the turn he was fishtailing, barely in control. As he forced the car back under control he saw he saw an intersection up ahead.

A blue Buick was slowly making its way across the road. Carter cursed and he slammed down on the brake pedal as hard as could but he was going too fast. The Cadillac started to slide and felt the car repeatedly jerk as the ABS pulsed the brakes, trying to stop the skid.

Carter plowed into the intersection. The Buick saw him at the last moment. The driver turned their steering wheel sharply and the car veered to the right, just barely avoiding a collision.

The driver of the Buick honked furiously as Carter continued to slide, sideways, through the intersection. He slid into the opposite lane and, with a shudder, the Cadillac jumped onto the curb and came to a rest just short of striking a fire hydrant.

Carter laid his head against against the steering wheel, his body shaking with adrenaline. He wanted to get out and look for damage but he was afraid that that thing might be following him and that it might now be pursuing him in a vehicle of its own.

With his hands shaking on the steering wheel, Carter put the car into reverse and pulled back off of the curb and out into the street. Looking to make sure the road was clear, he started driving again. He was still going fast, but not quite as recklessly fast as before. As he drove, he tried to shake off his terror and think about what his next move should be.

Carter drove aimlessly for a long time as he tried to figure out what he was going to do next and hoping to lose anything that might be following him.

Carter had no refuge now and he was a long way from home. He did not even feel safe going back to Chicago. If that thing had found him at his uncle's house then it undoubtedly knew where he lived.

Carter did not know how that creature could have found him. He began to think that the fact that his uncle and his uncle's grad student had been murdered less than a week apart was more than a coincidence. He remembered that that police sergeant, he thought that he remembered his name was O'Connell, was about to tell him something about his uncle's murder when that detective had stopped him. Maybe there was a connection and the police were trying to cover it up. That thought sent a chill down Carter's spine.

If Carter could not trust the police then how was he going to get help. O'Connell had been willing to help him. If he could just speak to him again then maybe he would be able to find some answers.

Finally making up his mind on a destination, Carter turned at Maple Drive and headed for Center Square. The police department was in the northwest part of town and it would take him at least twenty minutes to get there.

The drive seemed to take much longer than that. Carter found that he could not relax enough to turn on the radio and he kept compulsively looking into the rear view mirror for any sign that he was being followed. He was starting to develop a cramp in his neck when he finally pulled into 1000 Center Square.

1000 Center Square was more than just the police department. It was a large two story building that served as the Arkham Municipal Service Center. Four wings of various sizes jutted off from the main atrium of the building. Each of the wings served a different department of the city.

In addition to the police department, there was also the fire department, water department and the sanitation department. All the departments in one facility made for an ugly and unwieldy building. It looked like some kind of obese, concrete starfish.

He drove around to the north side of the building where the wing that housed the police department was located. He parked his car in the visitor lot, making sure that he would be able to see it from the lobby. He got out of his car and entered the police station lobby through a set of glass double doors.

The floor was tiled in yellow, a color that showed very unappealing in the florescent lighting. A row of interconnected and uncomfortable looking black vinyl chairs flanked each side of the lobby. The walls were covered in notices and plaques of various kinds.

Opposite the door was the receptionist. She looked young, maybe about twenty-five. Her blond hair was pulled back into a pony tail. She had her cellphone out and was texting idly.

The receptionist sat behind a large square window. The glass in the frame looked like it had to be at least an inch thick. In the middle of the window was a small circular speaker that had been embedded into the center of the pane to allow for communication. Off to the right of the window was a sign which read: Press button for service. Below the sign was a small black button. Below the button was another sign which read: Sorry, out of order.

Carter approached the window but the woman behind it, intent upon her cellphone, did not look up. He tapped on the glass, softly at first but then louder when it did not get her attention. Eventually, she looked up at him. She smiled at him and put the cellphone off to the side.

"Sorry about that. What can I help you with?"

Unsure of what he was supposed to do, he put his mouth up close to the speaker, "Uhhh, I'm looking to speak to a Sergeant... I think that his name is O'Connell."

The receptionist giggled, "You don't need to stick your mouth right on the speaker, I can hear you just fine."

Carter jerked his head back, "Sorry," he said, embarrassed.

"That's OK, it happens all the time," she said.

She turned to the computer on the edge of the counter. Through the speaker he could hear her fingernails clicking rapidly on the keys.

"Hmmm, we don't have a Sergeant O'Connell, but we do have a Sergeant McConnell."

"Yes, that must be it, can I speak to him?"

Several more clicks and she pursed her lips, "He's not on duty now and he won't be in until three," she paused briefly, thinking, "But with the shift change you wouldn't be able to talk to him till probably after four."

Carter looked at his watch. It was almost one, "Damn it," he muttered to himself, "Is there anyway I could call him?"

She shook her head, "I'm sorry but I can't give out police officer's phone numbers but if you want to leave a number where he can reach you, I'll make sure that he gets it."

Carter sighed, trying to not show that he was irritated, "Yes, that'll be fine."

She pointed down and Carter saw a wide metal drawer slide out from underneath the window. In it was a piece of plain white paper and a pen.

Carter took them and wrote down his name and cell phone number. He then wrote urgent beneath that and underlined it. He returned the paper and pen to the drawer and pushed it closed.

The receptionist took the paper out and looked at it and then she looked at him oddly, "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes," he lied. He did not sound very convincing but he wasn't sure that he could trust anyone else here, "I just need to get in touch with him, that's all."

She did not look like she believed him, "Anything else you need?"

"No. Thanks," Carter said and turned to leave. He almost jumped. Standing behind him was the unpleasant detective from the night before.

"Mr. Pearson, I did not expect to find you here. Is there anything wrong?" the detective's smile did not reach his eyes.

"No," it still sound any better the second time.

He did not look convinced, "Are you sure, people usually don't stop by the police if there isn't a problem."

"Well, no real problem," Carter said, "I just stopped by to see about a parking ticket, that's all."

Carter tried to edge around him, but the detective put a hand up.

"Well in that case, why don't you just give it to me. After what you've been through I'd be more than happy to take care of it."

"Thanks for the offer," he tried to sound sincere, "but I already paid it," Carter looked at his watch, "I really do need to get going."

The detective gave Carter another insincere smile and stepped out of his way, "Alright, have a good day, Mr. Pearson."

Carter walked past him. The hair stood up on the back of his neck as he did so and Carter had to resist the urge to run out of the station.

When he was finally through the doors, he took a look over his shoulder and, seeing that the detective was no longer watching him, jogged back to his car. When he got back into his car he slammed his hand against the steering wheel repeatedly, cursing.

If the police were a part of this somehow and he was pretty sure that that detective, at least, was in on it. He would probably ask the receptionist what he had been there for. She would probably see no reason not to tell him and then the detective would find out that he had been lied to.

He could not wait around for McConnell to call him. He had to do something before that thing or that detective came looking for him. There was August Fletcher. If he could catch him alone in his office then maybe he would be able to get some useful information out of him. He might finally know what it was the hell was going on.

Carter paused as he went to start the car. Was he really considering going into an old man's office and forcing him to talk. Had things really gone this far. It seemed like everything was turning to madness.

Carter let out a long sigh as he jammed his finger down upon the ignition and the Cadillac roared to life. He decided that he did not care.

Carter backed out of his parking spot and drove away slowly from the Municipal Building. He wanted to drive faster but he did not want to risk being pulled over. They might decide to take him back to the station and, if that happened, he might never be able to leave.

His major concern now was getting back across town without being stopped by the police or found by the creature that, for reason he still did not understand, was stalking him.

He tried to drive as defensively as he could but he was so distracted by looking in his rear view mirror that he nearly ran through two stop signs and a red light. He was getting so jittery from always looking over his shoulder that his stomach was beginning to ache. He then realized that it might be because he had not had a chance to eat that day.

Despite the paranoid voice that was screaming in the back of his skull, he pulled into a McDonald's that he passed and went through the drive through. He was about to hand the money to the cashier when he suddenly went wide eyed and slammed shut the window. Carter whipped his head around, expecting that he was about to be attacked by the faceless man.

There was nothing, though, just a few cars parked in the lot and a line of cars behind him, their driver's

rapidly growing impatient. Then he glanced over at the passenger seat. Among the papers, photos and his grandfather's journal, his uncle's revolver was clearly visible next to him.

Carter began to panic. The cashier must have seen it and that is why he reacted the way he did. He must be calling the police at this very moment. Forsaking his food, Carter sped out of the line and pulled back onto the road, cutting off a truck.

Carter had been so distracted by what had been happening that he had completely forgotten about the gun. It had been in plain sight the whole time that he had been at the police department. As close as he had parked to the door, he was lucky that no one had seen and reported it.

At least it might come in handy when he tried to get information out of Fletcher. Again, Carter could not believe that he was thinking like that but, given the circumstances that he found himself in, he figured that he had little choice. The people behind this had shown their willingness to kill and had tried to do so to him twice.

If he could not trust the police then he was going to have to do things on his own and by any means that he found necessary. Carter found himself looking even more frequently over his shoulder as he drove back across town. By the time that Carter pulled off onto Miskatonic Avenue, his nerves were almost shot.

Miskatonic Avenue, which was still paved with brick, served as the main road through the university campus. The long road was lined with ancient trees whose large canopies would blot out the sun in the summer. Now, though, the partially denuded trees took on a more sinister, skeletal appearance. The cold October sun cast eerie shadows down upon the road.

On either side of the road stood a variety of different buildings. Most were nearly as old as the trees. Along this part of Miskatonic Avenue the buildings that now housed the various administrative departments that saw to the day to day running of the university. In decades past, this row of buildings had served as the universities original academic buildings. Halfway down the road, Carter pulled into the parking lot of the largest and most imposing building on the street.

What was now the Miskatonic Administration Building had been the very first building built for the university when it was founded in 1810. For the first several decades it had served as its sole academic building and, as such, had grown very large.

The main part of the building loomed up three stories over the parking lot. Thick ropes of ivy had climbed over much of the building and obscured the brown brick underneath. Many wide windows were spaced across the front of the building.

In the early 1900's a large clock face had been installed onto the top of the front of the building. Its large bell, which could be heard all over the campus, chimed on every half hour.

Carter had not been to this building very often when he was growing up. His father's office had been much further down the street, closer to the quad.

He parked and got out of his car. He leaned back in and took the pictures off of the seat and stuffed them into his pocket. He then picked the revolver and tucked it into the waist band of his khakis and pulled his shirt

down over it, checking to make sure that it could not be easily seen. He took a deep breath and walked up to the building and entered through its large wooden doors.

Inside, the building had been maintained much as it had been since it was built. Most of the interior woodwork, including the floors was still original. Even the wall fixtures had been left as they had been, with only the candles being changed to gas lamps and then, finally, to electric light bulbs. The overall effect the building was that it had an almost oppressive weight of history.

Directly across from the door was mounted a plaque which listed the locations of the various offices and their occupants. Carter scanned it quickly. He found that Fletcher's office was located up on the third floor. By the number, it would be overlooking the front of the building.

The paranoid voice in his head started up again. Carter began to worry that Fletcher had seen him coming and that he would be ready for him. Carter steeled his courage. Ready for him or not, he need to get answers.

The only elevator was in the back of the building and it was for freight only. Carter walked over to the nearest staircase and began the long climb up to the third floor. When he reached the third floor landing he cracked open the door and peeked into the hallway.

He did not see anyone in the hallway. Carter opened the door slowly as he crept out. He looked both ways and saw that the hallway was indeed deserted. He walked quietly down to Fletcher's office door.

The door, like every other in this building, was made from antique wood. A brass name plate had been fixed to the door that indicated its occupant. Not bothering to knock, Carter pulled open the door and stepped in side. He pulled it shut it quickly after him.

August Fletcher was sitting behind a large wooden desk, looking over some papers. The desk, as well as much of the room, was covered in books and papers. Instead of being a mess though, everything was stacked into neat piles or arranged carefully onto shelves. Two comfortable looking chairs were arranged at angles in front of the desk. On the wall behind him were various diplomas, degrees and certificates that Fletcher had accumulated over the years. There were wide windows set into the two outer walls. The blinds were pulled and the only light in the room came from a lamp on the desk. At the sound of Carter entering the room, Fletcher looked up, startled.

Carter saw that Fletcher relaxed as he recognized him, "Welcome, welcome, my boy, have a seat, won't you?" he said smiling.

The old man's reaction stopped Carter short. This was not the reaction of a person who was trying to kill him. He would surely be expecting that Carter would come after him.

Carter suddenly began to doubt himself, believing that it might just be paranoia after all. Then he shook his head. He had seen those pictures of Fletcher with that faceless thing. Fletcher was just trying to throw him off. He had to be connected to this somehow.

Carter remained standing, "You need to tell me what the fuck is going on here."

Fletcher looked hurt by the sudden outburst, "Excuse me, Carter, but I don't think--"

Carter cut him off and yanked the photographs out of his pocket and threw them down onto the desk, "No

you will tell me! Who is that you're talking to? He killed Kim Wong. He's trying to kill me and he probably killed my uncle so who, or what, is he?"

"Now, son, no one's trying to kill you. Why don't you sit down and we can talk about this," he again gestured towards the seat.

Carter was so angry that he was shaking. He needed answers and this old man was treating him like a fool, "Goddamnit," he screamed, "I'm not stupid! Tell me who he is!"

Fletcher looked remarkably unperturbed. He calmly picked up the pictures and looked at them, "Why, it looks like Dr. Stanley. He was an old colleague of mine. He stopped by for a visit a month or so back," he looked up at Carter curiously, "I wonder why any one would have taken these."

Carter just could not believe that answer. There was no way that the man in the photographs was an old professor. He was being lied to. He just needed to know why. Furious at this deception, Carter pulled the revolver from his waistband and pushed its barrel into Fletcher's face.

For the first time, the old man looked worried. He tried to scoot back in his chair but there was not much room to move with all the piles of books that crowded the room.

He slowly put up his hands. They were shaking, "Look, Carter, why don't you put that down and talk with me. Just talk, like civilized people."

"Before I leave here," there was a loud click as Carter pulled the hammer back on the revolver, "you're going to tell me what the fuck I need to know."

Drops of sweat started to appear on Fletcher's forehead, "Carter, please, I am talking to you. You asked me about the pictures and I told you about them. I don't know what more you want me to tell you."

Carter pushed the barrel of the revolver closer to Fletcher, pressing the muzzle against his forehead. The bastard was lying. He knew it. He just knew it. He put his finger onto the trigger, ready to squeeze.

He glanced down at the photographs and then back up at Fletcher. There were tears streaming down his wrinkled face. He could see genuine fear in the old man's eyes. Carter looked down at the photographs again. They were blurry after all. Maybe this Dr. Stanley just happened to be dressed like that faceless man. What if it was all a coincidence. Or worse, what if he was just going crazy. All the stress and all the liquor had pushed him over the edge and he could not tell what was real and what was not.

He looked into Fletcher's face again and he just could not do it. He could not do this anymore. He felt as though all the energy was draining out of him and he was suddenly very tired. He de-cocked the hammer and collapsed into one of the chairs in front of the desk.

Fletcher breathed a very loud sigh and visibly relaxed. He used the sleeve of his blazer to wipe the tears from his eyes, "Carter," he said slowly, "I believe that it would be better if you gave me the gun. We can still talk, if you'd like."

Carter looked down at the gun in his hand. He did not want to have anything to do with it anymore. He took it gingerly by the barrel and handed it to Fletcher. He took it and sat it in his lap. He could not believe that he had almost shot someone.

"That's better, Carter," he was smiling again, "I know that you have been through a lot lately. What with the deaths of your mother and uncle and that young lady's murder."

Carter looked up sharply. He had never mentioned his mother. The paranoid voice in his head started screaming again.

Fletcher continued, "So, I'm going to be completely honest with you. Dr. Stanley did come to visit me here a while back, but that's not who I'm talking to in those photographs," Carter felt his whole body tense and his hands ached from the force with which they gripped the arm rests.

"The man I'm talking to there is an old friend. Quite old, we go back a long, long way, Carter. Even before I met your father," Carter was about to jump out of his seat and strangle the old bastard when he saw that Fletcher had taken the gun from his lap and laid it on the desk with his hand firmly gripped on it.

"He is a murder too, I'm afraid. He killed your uncle and your mother too. A pity it was necessary, but sometimes these things need to be done."

Carter felt rage boiling up within him, stronger than before. Despite the threat from the revolver he leaped up from the chair, "You mother fucker, why? Why did they have to die?"

Fletcher had taken the revolver off of the desk and was now pointing it at him. The hammer was cocked, "I'm afraid that I can't tell you that, not yet. First I want you to meet someone."

Carter heard the door opening behind him and he spun around. Ducking though the door frame came the faceless monster. Up close he could see its gray green mottled skin was covered with oozing pustules. A foul odor oozed off it, like the stench of rotting meat. Fear warred with revulsion as it walked up to him.

"Carter," Fletcher said, "I'd like you to meet your grandfather."

Carter's mouth fell open as it pulled back its fist and then brought it crashing down across his face. The impact spun him around as the world began to fade to black as he fell to the floor.

Chapter 5

Carter groaned as he slowly faded back to consciousness. The nerves in his body began to slowly send signals back to his brain. It felt like he was lying on a bed.

It was not his bed, he could tell that right away. It was lumpy and it smelled like old urine and body odor. Slowly, he opened his eyes and tried to ignore the raging pain in his head. He saw that he was laying face down on an old mattress. Disgusted, he rolled over.

Carter found that the mattress was not very wide. He let out a startled yell and he went crashing to the floor.

Carter banged his head hard upon the floor. There was a sharp stab of pain in his head and his vision started to fade again. He gritted his teeth and tried not to moan too loudly. When his vision finally cleared, he found himself lying on his back in what looked like some sort of prison cell.

The floor was bare gray concrete. The wall were the same. To one corner was small stainless steel toilet that looked in need of both a cleaning and a flush. Next to it, a small, stainless steel sink jutted out from the wall. A single, wire mesh covered light bulb provided a weak yellow illumination to the room. Mounted onto the wall by the sink was a small bed that was covered with a very thin and grimy mattress. Across from the bed stood a single metal door. There was no handle on his side. There was a wide, three inch tall covered slot about half way up the door. Near the top was what looked like a four inch square window, this was closed.

Carter thought that this must be a prison cell but he was still dressed in the clothes that he had been in earlier. His wallet, and everything else that he had been carrying, was missing though. His head still pounded dully and he rubbed the back of it, trying to think how he had gotten here.

Carter remembered that thing hitting him and then he had blacked out. Fletcher had said that it was his grandfather. Carter did not understand how that thing be his grandfather. His grandfather had died over twenty-eight years ago, the same year that Carter had been born.

Not to mention that that thing had been huge and his grandfather had been short just like the rest of the Pearson family. He did not know what to think about that. He could not bring himself to believe it but why would Fletcher lie to him when he clearly had held every advantage?

If what Fletcher had said about his mother had been true, then this mean that she had not committed suicide. In a strange way he hoped that that monster was his grandfather if it mean that. Why, though, was she

killed? Fletcher had told him that it had been necessary.

Carter could not see how any of these pieces formed to make anything but a vendetta against his family but if they had wanted him dead, they had had the perfect opportunity back at Fletcher's office.

Fletcher may have been afraid to shoot him with the gun for fear of the noise alerting the other occupants of the building, but that thing, and Carter could not bring himself to call it his grandfather, could have easily have killed him with its bare hands and none of this explained how he had ended up in prison.

He suddenly noticed that there was a terrible throbbing pain in his arm. He looked down at it and saw that there was a small blood stain slowly growing on the sleeve of his shirt.

He rolled it up. There was a large gauze bandage wrapped around his forearm. It was stained dark red as the blood had soaked through the bandage.

Carter slowly unwrapped it to find a three inch gash along the inside of his arm. It had been crudely stitched shut with wide and uneven stitches. Rivulets of blood still oozed from the wound.

He did not remember receiving the cut. It must have been done after he had been knocked out. Reasons for the wound, both sinister and macabre, floated through his head. Unfortunately, though, he did not have time to worry about it now. He needed to find out where he was and how he was going to get out.

He walked over to the door and examined it. It was completely featureless on this side save for the little window that was at about head height. He tried pushing it open but found that it would not move.

Not knowing what else to do, he knocked on it. Carter waited for several minutes, but there was no answer. He then tried pounding on the door but still, no one answered. He started pounding again, this time frantically yelling for someone to help him.

Eventually Carter stopped, breathing heavily from the exertion. He slid down the door and onto the ground, trying to figure out what he was going to do next. As he sat there, panting, he began to hear the sound of foot steps coming from the other side of the door. They were getting louder.

Carter got to his feet again and resumed the pounding and yelling. Suddenly, the little window opened and he saw a face peering in from the other side. It did not look to happy.

"Back away from the door," the man said, his voice impatient.

Carter just stared at him, unsure of what to say.

"I said back away from the god damned door!" he shouted. His face was turning red.

Carter complied, taking a few steps backwards.

"Now, Shut the fuck up or we'll find you a worse place then here, OK?"

Carter stared at him dumbstruck and the man started to close the window.

Finding his voice, Carter yelled, "Wait a minute, Where am I?"

The window opened again, "You're fuckin' kidding me right. You're in jail, asshole. What's it look like, the

Ritz?"

"But how did I get here?"

"Beats the hell out of me, you did it. And if you're in here, you must of fucked up something pretty bad."

The window started to close again and Carter said desperately, "Wait, I need to make my phone call, talk to a lawyer, anything!"

"You watch too many movies. I've got better things to do than babysit you while you jerk off on the phone. Now sit down and shut up or you won't be getting any food tonight."

With that the window was slammed shut and Carter could here the footsteps retreat back down the hall. He slumped back to the floor with a whimper.

He was not usually claustrophobic but he could feel the walls closing in on him. He felt trapped. Which, he guessed, was a fairly good assessment of his situation but why was he here?

He guessed that him being here proved that the Arkham police were part of what ever was going on here. He did not think that he was hear because of what happened with Fletcher. He was pretty sure that the police did not just take unconscious people and through them into cells.

A jail cell, though, would be the best place to keep him out of sight until whatever it was they were keeping him alive for. He banged his head against the door in frustration and the pain in his head made him instantly regret it.

He was in jail and cut off from the outside world. He was at the mercy of God knows what and he had absolutely no idea how he was going to get out of this.

Carter did not know how much time had passed as he sat there staring at his feet but it felt like several hours. He was starting to drift off to sleep when he heard more footsteps coming towards his door.

He guessed that they were coming to feed him. Prison food probably was probably as bad as he had heard but he had still not eaten that day. He got to his feet and waited for the little slot to open. Instead, the window opened again and face peeked in. Carter was startled to see that it was McConnell.

"Carter Pearson?" he said

His heart sank as he saw the one person he thought that he could trust, "So you're in on it too?"

"What? No. I'm here to get you out. I don't know what's going on around here but I don't like it."

Carter felt his heart rise again, "What is going on here?"

McConnell looked irritated, "I just said I don't know but things have been weird around here ever since your uncle was murdered. That's what I was trying to tell you the other night."

"What's been weird?"

McConnell looked from side to side quickly, "I can't talk to you here. It'll look suspicious if I'm just standing here talking to a prisoner who's supposed to be in solitary," Carter heard a clank and the door cracked open, "Turn around."

"What? Why?" Carter's paranoid voice was back at work.

"If I put cuffs on you, people will be less likely to ask questions. Now do it, I'm already risking my ass

over you."

"Sorry. OK," he turned around.

"Jesus Christ," McConnell said, "what happened to your arm?"

"Hell if I know, it was like then when I woke up here."

Carter felt McConnell place a set of handcuffs onto his wrists and tighten them.

Together, they walked out of the cell. Carter walked in front with McConnell behind with one hand on the cuffs to guide him.

They walked down a long hallway past several large holding cells that contained maybe a dozen sullen faced prisoners. A few of them summoned up the energy to hurl insults at McConnell as they walked by them.

They walked through a door and down a long hallway that was lined with doors. They turned right and went down another hallway. As they passed a restroom, McConnell hard jerked on the cuffs and pulled Carter inside.

Carter turned to say something to McConnell but he hissed at Carter for silence. McConnell quickly checked the restroom to see if they were alone. When he was satisfied that it was empty, he took out a key and removed the cuffs. Carter started to speak again, but was again silenced.

"No talking until we get outside, I need to get something, I want you to wait in one of these stalls. Don't come out and don't go anywhere, you got it?"

Carter was not sure that he should speak, so he only nodded. McConnell then turned and walked out of the restroom.

Carter walked into one of the stalls and closed the door, locking it for good measure. He thought about sitting down but since the seat was missing, he decided to remain standing. As the minutes ticked by, he started to become anxious. He wondered if something had gone wrong or maybe that he was being set up again. His little paranoid voice was becoming his constant companion.. Suddenly, the door the restroom opened and he had to resist the urge to jump up onto the toilet.

"Carter?" It was McConnell.

He sighed with relief and unlocked the stall door and pushed it open. McConnell was standing there. Slung on his should was a small duffel bag. It had the word *Police* written across it in a reflective material.

"You ready to get out of here?" McConnell asked.

"You have no idea."

McConnell opened the door to the restroom and indicated that Carter should go first, "Take the first left and go straight out the door, I'll be behind you."

Carter walked out into the hallway. He was nervous but was trying desperately not to show it. He turned at the first left and the hallway widened out into a large room. On his right, there were a half dozen desks with uniformed police officers sitting behind them. On the far side stood the reception desk that he had seen earlier that day. Off to his left were several vending machines. Next to them, a long table was set up and on it there was a coffee machine and a large, nearly empty box of doughnuts. Straight ahead of him was the door that

would lead him out into the lobby.

Carter's heart pounded so loudly in his chest as he walked towards the door that he was surprised no in the room could here it. At any moment he expected that someone would leap up and tackle him and drag him back to his cell.

Carter started to walk faster and was thinking about breaking into a run when he finally reached the door. He pushed it open and then he was in the lobby.

Carter kept walking, not looking to either side. He reached the glass doors and pushed it open. He breathed a huge sigh of relief as walked out into the cool night air. He had not realized that he had not stopped walking until he heard McConnell yelling for him to wait.

"You said, you wanted to talk, follow me."

Carter followed him down the rows of parked squad cars until they reached one that McConnell proceeded to unlock. He got in on the driver's side and Carter got in on the passenger side.

"I want to thank you for getting me out of there."

McConnell smiled wryly, "You know, I'm gonna lose my job over this but something is just not right here. Something is messed up and I know you're somehow connected with it."

"How? What is going on here?"

McConnell took in a deep breath "Like I tried to tell you before, about your uncle. I was one of the first officers on the scene that night and it... it was terrible, just like that Wong girl. He was sliced open and there was blood and guts everywhere. Pieces of his flesh had been cut away... and we never did find those."

Carter remembered what Kim Wong had looked like and tried not to be sick.

McConnell continued, "Detective Horn was there that night too. He'd always been an asshole. Just like yesterday, he told us to just fucking leave it. He acted like nothing had happened there. He didn't follow procedure, no evidence collection, nothing. Just treated it like it was dog that had been hit by a car."

"So last night is when you thought that there might be a connection."

"No, I just figured Horn was protecting some sicko, maybe he's got a fucked up brother or something but tonight when I came on shift, I got your message that you were looking to talk to me. Then I find out that you'd been arrested for supposedly attacking an old man and I just couldn't believe that it was a coincidence."

Carter bit his lip and decided against telling him that he did attack an old man, "Do you think the whole department is involved?"

"I don't know, but when I went down to evidence to get your stuff back I found that some of it had been taken."

"What?"

"According to the log, a leather bound journal, two pieces of paper and two photographs."

"Shit. That was the proof that I had that Fletcher was involved in this."

"Wait. What? You didn't actually attack that old man, did you?"

Carter rubbed the back of his neck, "Well, sort of... ya."

"Jesus Christ."

"Wait a second, I was looking through my uncle's safe deposit box when, among other things, I found two photographs showing him talking to the same thing that I saw in Kim's apartment."

"Thing?"

"It, it looks like a man but it doesn't have a face. Not even holes or stitches where a face is supposed to be."

"You've got to be kidding."

"I know it sounds crazy, Hell, it is crazy but look, I've seen it three times and it's attacked me twice. I know what I saw."

"He--"

"It."

"OK, *it*, has attacked you twice?"

"Yes, once after I got back from the bank and then when I went to Fletcher's office. I admit, I was going there to force information from him but he managed to convince me that I was mistaken, that it was just the stress. When he calmed me down, that's when he told me this thing killed my mother, my uncle and Kim. Then it came in and knocked me out cold and when I woke up, I was in that cell."

"You said it killed your mother too?"

"Yes, back in Chicago."

"This is getting too weird. I don't even know where to begin with shit like this."

"I know but I have to see this through. Whatever is going on, it seems to involve me and I don't think that it'll just stop if I go away."

"Not too mention that you're a wanted man now."

"Oh, ya, that too. I should probably get out of here, before someone sees me."

"Ya, they'll be feeding the prisoners soon, so they should find out that you're gone. Unfortunately, your car has been impounded and I can't get that out. There's a bus stop not too far from here though. Where are you going to go?"

"I'm not sure yet."

McConnell pulled out his notebook, wrote something on it and tore off the paper. He handed it to Carter, "This is my cell number. If you need anything or find anything out, give me a call."

He took the paper, "Thanks, I really appreciate this."

"Well, I can't just let some psycho murder run around free in my town. Oh wait," McConnell took the duffel bag and handed it to Carter, "this is all your stuff that was left in evidence. I hope it helps."

He took it and got out of the car. Before closing the door he said, "Thanks again."

McConnell nodded at him. He shut the door and McConnell backed out of the parking space and drove out of the lot.

Carter looked around. There were several people walking to and from their cars but it did not look like

anyone was paying any attention to him.

Carter slung the duffel bag onto his shoulder. Trying to keep his eye on everyone, he began to walk towards the bus stop. He had to plan his next move carefully. He did not think that he would get this lucky next time.

Chapter 6

Carter was eager to be far away from the police station and he walked quickly towards the bus stop. It stood near the entrance to the Municipal Building.

It was a typical grimy bus stop. The advertisements on the walls were faded and scratched. Graffiti of various types had been etched and spray painted onto all of the available surfaces. Wads of used chewing gum were stuck everywhere and cigarette butts littered the ground and even the seat. Carter found this defacement to be pretty brazen for a bus stop that was right next to the police department, but then probably not many police rode the bus.

Not wanting to sit down, Carter crouched down next to the bench. He placed the duffel bag onto the ground and unzipped it. Looking inside, he was grateful to find his wallet, which still contained all his money and credit cards. He took out his watch and put it back on. It was going on seven o'clock. His sunglasses were in there but he did not need those now. He found some loose change was rattling around in the bottom of the bag. Surprisingly, Carter found that his uncle's revolver was in there, along with all the extra bullets that he had been carrying.

McConnell must really trust him then, if he gave him the gun back. He heard the roar of a diesel engine as the bus pulled up and he quickly put the revolver back into the bag and zipped it shut.

Carter stood up as the bus came to a halt with a hiss. The doors slid open but no one got off. He climbed up into the bus. He had dig around inside the duffel bag but eventually he found enough change and paid the seventy-five cent fare. He took one of the route maps from a display attached to the wall of the bus.

Compared to the bus stop, the bus itself was remarkably clean. It was dingy but the seats were fairly clean and though it had the smell of stale body odor, the scent of generic air freshener was layered over top of it.

There were only a handful of people on the bus and they were all grouped towards the front. The other passengers ignored him as he made his way to the last row of seats and sat down. There was another hiss and the engine roared behind him as, with a jerk, the bus pulled away from the bus stop.

Carter opened up the route map and looked it over. It looked like the closest bus stop to his uncle's house was at Miskatonic University. This would leave him with about a fifteen minute walk to the house. Carter did

not like this. He needed to get there as quickly as he could.

Despite what he had told McConnell, he knew exactly where he was going. He did not know how far he could trust him, though after finding the revolver he was beginning to feel pretty sure that he could. Anyway, he figured that it might work out for the best. If they did suspect McConnell, at least there was no way he could tell them where he was going. Carter shuddered to think about what they might do to him to extract that kind of information.

Carter wanted to change clothes and get anything he thought that he might need from the house. After they found out that he had escaped he knew that they would eventually look there. He also wanted to get his uncle's car out of the garage so he would be able to move faster. He was not going to get much accomplished tonight if he had to rely on the bus for transportation.

The bus jerked to a halt at its next stop. Several more people got on the bus. Carter watched them intently but they all ignored him and took seats towards the front.

He thought through his plan. Carter thought it might be a bit optimistic to call it a plan. He hoped that there would be more clues in Fletcher's office. With all those books and papers at least a few of them had to shed some light on this.

How he was going to get into the office, though, was the sticky details. He had no idea how the building was secured at night. The doors would undoubtedly be locked. It also might have alarms or security guards or both. There might have video cameras that he would have to avoid.

Carter did not remember seeing any when he had been there early but he wished that he had paid more attention when he had been there. Of course, he had not planned on going to jail or that he would have to break into there later.

The bus again jolted to a stop and two people got up to leave. He had a moment of panic as he imagined the creature getting onto the bus with him. Instead, an elderly couple boarded the bus and took their seats. With another jerk, the bus started moving again.

Carter had to sit through three more stops. Each time he worried that he would be discovered. Eventually, though, they pulled up to the bus stop in front of the Miskatonic University residence halls. He was only a few blocks from his intended target but Carter was worried that if he did not go back to the house now then he would not get the chance to do so later.

After the bus had come to a stop, Carter got off of the bus, anxious to get back to his uncle's house. No one else got off of the bus and it quickly pulled away towards its next destination. The street was quiet and there were very few lights on in the nearby residence hall. Carter figured that most of the college students were out getting drunk. Carter felt a nearly overwhelming desire to join them but he knew that he had far more pressing concerns.

As Carter walked past the bus stop, a tall figure suddenly loomed out of the shadows. Carter froze as he

was again confronted with the faceless monstrosity that had once been his grandfather. As it came nearer Carter found himself rooted to the spot, his legs refusing to obey his command to run.

His grandfather stretched out a hand towards him. The sudden movement galvanized Carter. He backpedaled as quickly as he could and as soon as he felt that he had put enough distance between them, he turned around and ran.

Carter ran at a full out sprint. His legs pumping furiously. Over the sound of the blood pumping in his ears he could hear the sound of his grandfather's footsteps running behind him.

Through the haze of adrenaline Carter knew that had no chance against it, unarmed. He must find somewhere populated, somewhere that it would not be able to go without his grandfather being seen for what it was.

He was pretty sure that he would not be able to outrun it in a straight line, but that is what he was going to have to try. In the distance he could just make out the lights of the commercial district that was near the university. If he could make it there he knew that he would be safe.

As Carter ran he suddenly felt a strong hand clamp down onto his shoulder. Carter let out a strangled scream as he was suddenly jerked backwards. He fell and landed heavily on his back.

He looked up, terrified as the shadow of his grandfather fell over him. Carter scrambled backwards desperately trying to escape.

He watched as his grandfather slowly reached into its coat and drew out a long black pistol. The end of the barrel was strangely large and Carter thought that it might be a silencer.

With a shout, Carter sprang to his feet and took off running through the grass and towards the university. Carter ran, dodging from side to side, trying to make himself as difficult a target as possible.

Carter heard a loud snap, the sound of metal on metal and suddenly the bark of a nearby tree exploded, showering him with dirt and splinters. Carter heard to more of the suppressed shots and he felt the hot wind as they whizzed by him.

I'm going to die. It's going to shoot me and I'm going to die right here, Carter thought as he raced towards the nearest building.

He sprinted up to the door of the nearest residence hall but it was locked. A small plastic sign on the door informed him that he would need a key to enter. Carter yanked on the door futilely before he took off running again.

Carter ran to the next residence hall. It too was locked. He cried out frustration. Then he stopped. Carter looked around.

He realized that he had heard neither the sounds of pursuit or of gunshots for several minutes. He saw that he was in a cluster of four identical residence halls. A large concrete square served as an outdoor common area for them. In the middle of it was a large fountain that had a large, ungainly piece of modern art perched upon it.

Sitting on the edge of the fountain were three college students. They were all staring at him. One of them

had taken out her cellphone and was beginning to dial, no doubt to summon help against this mad man who was trying to break into their residence halls.

Carter was safe here for the moment but soon campus security or the police or whoever they were calling would be here and he would have a lot of explaining to do. Most likely, Carter thought that he would end up back in that cell at the police station.

Carter examined the shadows for any signs of his pursuer. At the edge of the light coming off of the residence hall, he could just make out a shadowy figure lurking in the shadows. Carter could tell that it was watching him, just waiting for him to be alone again.

Carter had an idea. He dashed around the corner of the building opposite the waiting shadow. Once he was hidden from view, he stood there, waiting.

After a few moments, Carter peaked his head around the corner and looked for any sign of his grandfather. He just barely got a glimpse of the shadow just before it disappeared behind one of the buildings. It was moving to intercept him.

Staying where he could be seen by the nervous college students, he quietly ran in the opposite direction. Just as he disappeared into the shadows, he saw a uniformed security officer ride up to the college students on a bicycle. Carter could not hear what was being said but he could see them pointing in the direction that he had just left in.

He had to get out of there. He started running again, back across the grass and towards his uncle's house. He ran almost thirty yards before he stopped and hid behind a tree. He looked around it and saw that the security officer was riding in his direction.

It did not look like he had been seen as the officer was slowly turning his head, examining the surrounding area. As the security officer rode towards his hiding spot, Carter quietly edged around the tree, trying to keep it between him and the officer.

After the security officer had rode past him, Carter crouched down and looked around. At first he did not see any signs of his grandfather but then, off in the distance, he saw the tall shadow creeping slowly through the darkness.

Carter slowly unzipped the duffel bag. He reached inside and drew out his uncle's revolver. He hoped that he did not have to use this. Carter was not sure that the revolver would kill it and the noise of the gunshot would definitely bring the police looking.

Staying low to the ground, Carter moved slowly across the campus, dodging from tree to tree. Eventually, Carter reached the last road that bordered the university campus. Once he crossed it he would only be about ten minutes from his Uncle's house, at least he would if he if he was walking.

The streetlights overhead orange illumination across the entire street. There were very few cars so Carter could not count on the fear of being seen by traffic to keep his grandfather at bay.

Carter looked behind him. His grandfather had been following him in wide arcing paths, trying to locate him. Because of this, he had been able to put a lot of distance between them. Carter took a deep breath, he

needed to go now before it got any closer.

Making sure that he could cross without being hit, Carter burst from his hiding spot and sprinted across the road. When he reached the shadows he kept running. Up ahead was a six foot tall privacy fence surrounding the backyard of the white house on the corner.

Using his momentum, Carter leapt up and grabbed onto the fence, pulling himself over. He landed with muffled thud on the grass on the other side.

He turned around, the back yard was dark and deserted. He could see faint illumination coming from the back windows of the house.

Pulling himself up onto the fence he peered over it. He saw his grandfather, already crossing the street. Carter cursed and dropped back down.

Trying to be quiet, he dropped back down and quickly crossed the back yard. He had only walked a few feet when suddenly a bright light switched on over the backing door, bathing the back yard in brilliant white illumination.

Carter saw that it was a motion sensor security light but he saw more lights coming on in the house, moving towards the back door. He took off running and heaved himself over the fence and into the neighboring yard.

This yard, too was dark and he sat there quietly as he heard the back door on the previous house open. After a few moments, Carter heard the door shut and the light went out.

Carter did not know what to do. He could wait here and hope that his grandfather passed him by but if it decided to investigate that light it might start checking the back yards.

Carter's paralysis soon answered the question for him. He heard a rattle at the gate to the back yard and it began to slowly creak open.

Carter took aim at the gate with the revolver, pulling back on the hammer. He held his breath as the gate swung open. He was about to fire when he realized that it was not his grandfather.

In the faint light from the street Carter could just barely make out the figure of a man. He was slightly overweight, wearing sweat pants and a t-shirt. In his hands were two trash cans that he was carrying into the backyard. He paused when he saw Carter crouched in the corner of his yard.

"Hello," he said uncertainly, "Is there someone back there?"

Carter lowered the revolver but did not answer. The man was apparently not sure that he had seen Carter.

The man dropped the trash cans, "I'm going to go get my gun so you'd better not be here when I get back."

The man started to walk towards the back door. Carter breathed a sigh of relief. If he had been seen at least he was being given the chance to get the hell out of there. As soon as the man disappeared into the house, Carter sprang to his feet and sprinted out of the yard.

As he cleared the gate, Carter slowed down. He looked both ways but did not see any sign of his grandfather.

Warily watching the shadows, Carter took off at a jog towards his uncle's house. It was only eight thirty

and most of the houses still had lights in the windows. Despite his clothes, he tried his best to look like a jogger. The duffel bag he was carrying probably was not helping him any but he kept going, anxious to get back to the house before his grandfather found him again.

After a good five minute jog, Carter, breathing heavily from the night's exertions, climbed up onto the porch to the house. The lights inside the house were off. The front door was partially open. It hung precariously on its hinges from where his attacker had broken it down. He was about to walk through it when he thought that if his grandfather was waiting for him inside the house that it would probably be expecting that he would come in through the front door.

Carter climbed quietly off of the porch. He decided that it would be best if he went in through the sliding glass door at the back of the house. As quietly as he could manage, Carter sneaked around to the back of the house.

He carefully lifted the latch on the back gate and slid through it. He did not see anything in the back yard.

He crept along the wall to the house and peered into through the shattered glass door. The kitchen appeared to be empty. Broken glass crunched under his feet as he walked into the kitchen. He did not turn on any lights as he crept around to the foyer.

His suitcase was still sitting in the middle of the floor. Apparently spared his attacker's rage. He unzipped it and took out a pair of dark navy sweats. He quickly changed into them and then he zipped the suitcase back up.

His arm was bleeding again. He could feel it trickling down onto his hand. He remembered that his uncle kept a first aid kit in the master bathroom so he climbed up the dark staircase and into the bedroom. Stumbling in the dark, he walked across the room and into the master bathroom.

Carter was still afraid to turn on the lights so he fumbled around in the pitch black bathroom until he came across it. He took it back down the stairs and opened it.

It was pretty basic. Just some bandages, OTC pain medications and several wide rolls of gauze.

Carter took the gauze and wrapped it around and around the gash on his arm. When he reached the end of the roll, he tied the end under the wrappings. He pulled the sleeve of his sweatshirt down over it and hoped that he would not leave blood trail.

With that accomplished, any other supplies that he would probably need would be in the garage. He crept back into the kitchen and opened the side door that led into the garage. He closed the door behind him and once he had, he flipped on the light. Several naked bulbs hung overhead which provided light for the garage.

His uncle had had a very spacious two car garage. After his aunt had passed away, there had not been a need for a second car and the additional space was mostly full of boxes, crates and miscellaneous junk. Along the back wall was a tool bench and above that was a peg board upon which hung a variety of tools.

In the only occupied parking space sat his uncle's car. It was a black late nineties Ford Expedition Limited. It appeared as though his uncle had kept it in good shape and it looked as though it had been washed recently. He walked past the SUV and went over to the tool bench to look for anything that might help him effect a

break in.

The work bench was simple and consisted of a wide, flat piece of bare wood laid across two saw horses. Upon it lay a variety of wood working tools. Carter ignored them as he did not figure he would have the time to whittle the door down.

There was a red EverReady flashlight laying on the table and he took it. He flipped it on and off to make sure that it worked before placing it into the duffel bag.

Up on the peg board were a selection of larger hand tools. From these he selected a large rubberized mallet and a two foot long pry bar. He placed these in the bag and was about to leave when he decided to take a hacksaw. He did not know if it would come in handy but it always seemed to in the movies.

Carter pulled out the key fob and unlocked his uncle's SUV. He then opened the door threw the bag inside and onto the passenger seat.

He walked back over to the door and flipped the garage lights back off. He felt his way back over to the SUV and got inside.

Once inside, he started the Expedition. He then reached up and pressed the open button on the garage door opener. Without turning on the head lights, Carter backed out of the driveway and onto the street.

He closed the garage door and then started driving back toward Miskatonic University. He drove for almost a block before he decided to turn the head lights on. He hoped that anyone looking for him would not also be looking for his uncle's SUV.

He drove down Miskatonic Avenue and past the Administration building. He parked the Ford in a parking lot behind one of the other buildings.

He killed the engine and stepped outside. He slung the duffel bag over his shoulder and crept around to the back of the building.

Because this was where all the administrative buildings were located, the sidewalks were deserted at this time of night. He still wanted to avoid walking near the streets where anyone driving by would be able to see him.

As he crept from building to building he had to occasionally throw himself down on the ground or behind a bush when he saw car head lights out on the street. When he finally reached the Miskatonic Administration Building, he went around to the front.

He peaked around the corner of the building but found that there were two lights over the entrance that illuminated the doors.

Carter did not want to be that exposed if he did not have to be so he walked back around to the rear of the building.

Behind the building, Carter found a loading dock there but it too was well illuminated. He cursed under his breath and started to circle the building, looking for a way to get in.

As he walked back along the side of the building, he spotted several windows down along ground level. They were maybe two and a half feet high and three or so feet long. Carter figured that they must go into the basement.

Thought they were not very large, Carter's small build might finally come in handy. He took the mallet out of the duffel bag and, looking around first, he attempted to quietly smash out the window.

The breaking glass sounded loud in the quiet night. Carter froze, his ears straining for the slightest noise. After several tense minutes had passed, he relaxed. He took the handle of the mallet and used it to clear out any lingering shards of glass from the frame before he squeezed through the opening.

He dropped, head first, down onto the ground. He put his arms up to protect his head as he fell, bruising his elbow.

He let out a curse and a groan and then froze, crouching on the ground. He listened for several long minutes but he did not hear any sound other than the creaking of the settling building.

He rummaged around in the duffel bag and took out the flashlight. He flicked it on and he swung the cone of light around the basement.

It appeared as though he was in some type of utility room. Several tables were placed around the room and upon them was different types of motors, gears and other HVAC parts. Peg boards covered the walls and were lined with an even larger variety of different tools than his uncle had had. On the other side of the room stood a flat gray metal door. He walked open to it and slowly pushed it open.

The door opened onto a dark hallway. Three doors, all similar to the one that he had just opened, were arranged along the left side of the hallway. Another hall went to the right and had two more doors. Carter could see that the hallway turned left again at the end. Part way down the new hallway was the freight elevator. He thought about using it but decided that if there was someone in the building they would hear it operating.

Carter walked down the first hallway. It turned right and he guessed that it continued to the hallway he had seen earlier, forming a square around the freight elevator shaft. He opened the door in front of him and was greeted by another hallway.

This hallway had doors on both sides. From the sounds, it seemed that at least one of these doors led to the boiler room. The hallway extended straight and right from here. If his guess was right, then he should be near the main staircase. He went right and about half way down the hallway he found the door that was marked as leading to the stairwell.

Carter opened the door carefully, listening for sounds that someone else was on the staircase. He clicked off his flashlight as there was emergency lighting for the stairs.

He walked as quietly as he could up the flights of stairs to the third floor. When he finally reached the top landing, he cracked open the door and looked into the hallway.

The hallway was almost completely dark. The only light at all in the hallway was coming from street lamps filtering in through the two windows that were located at either ends.

Even though none of the offices had windows on the doors he was fairly confident that there was no one on the floor otherwise they would have turned on the hall lights. He stepped out into the hallway and walked down to Fletcher's office door. Carter tried turning the knob.

It was locked. Carter figured that it would be but if it was open it would have saved him a lot of trouble

and noise. The door looked very sturdy and was set into a hard wood frame.

He pulled the small pry bar from out of the duffel bag but, looking at it, he was not sure that he could use it to jimmy open such a solid door. He examined the door and he found that it was secured only by a door knob lock.

He put the pry bar back in the duffel bag and retrieved the trusty mallet. He held it up high and brought it crashing down upon the door knob. He missed. Instinctively, he looked around to see if anyone had witnessed his mistake. He then cursed himself for being so stupid and took another swing. This time he swung true and the mallet connected with the door knob with a muffled bang.

In the silence the sound was much louder than Carter had anticipated. He stopped for a moment and he strained to hear if there was anyone else moving about in the building. After letting several more minutes pass, he got his courage back and tried again.

It took him eight swings of the mallet but eventually the door knob snapped off and landed with a clank on the floor. It rolled off down the hallway as Carter slowly opened the door and went into Fletcher's office.

The window blinds were closed and the office was pitch black. He took out the flashlight again and turned it back on.

The office looked just as he had remembered it from earlier that day. He began to worry that Fletcher had not been back here since then. Carter pushed down the fear and began to search the office.

He saw that sitting upon the desk was a very large, leather bound book. Carter thought that it looked familiar. Shining his light upon it, he saw that it was another copy of *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*. He was sure that it was not the same as the one in his uncle's library as this one looked to be far older.

He opened the tome but found that it was written completely in German. He flipped through the brittle, yellowed pages and found that there were many handwritten notes in the margins of some of the pages.

The ink was faded and it looked like they might be nearly as old as the book. These too were written in German but several of the notes repeated the what looked to be a name, Mordiggian. These passages were circled in much fresher ink. He had no idea who Mordiggian was but Carter guessed that, whatever Fletcher was up to, Mordiggian and these passages were important to him.

He tried to tear out some of the pages but found that they were too ancient and brittle and they fell apart in his hands. The book itself was far to large and heavy to carry with him and he slammed the book shut in frustration.

He began to rifle through the desk drawers. He was coming up empty handed when he found that the bottom drawer was locked. He took out the pry bar and, with a little bit of effort, jimmied it open.

Lying at the bottom of the drawer was the proof that Fletcher and the police were working together. He took out the journal and the pages.

It was definitely his grandfather's journal. When he looked at the pages he discovered that there was more than just the two pages. Examining them with the flashlight, it looked like Fletcher had been able to translate the original pages. He was about to read them when he heard the sound of the stair well door opening.

He quickly turned off his flashlight. He put it and everything from the drawer into the duffel bag. He crouched down behind the desk as he saw a flashlight beam fall across the doorway. The beam came to rest on the broken door and he heard a voice.

"U-17 to Base, we have a break in on the third floor of building A-1, over"

A radio crackled, "U-17, 10-4. Be advised that the suspect may still be inside. Do not enter and wait for backup, over."

"Base, 10-4, out."

Carter's mind raced. On the up side, he knew that he had a few minutes to figure out how he was going to get out of here. On the downside, he knew that he had only a few minutes to figure out how he was going to get out of here.

He heard the voice again coming in from the hallway, "If there's anyone in there, might as well give yourself up now. Backup will be here soon."

Carter cursed under his breath. He saw only one way out of here and it was not going to be easy or safe. He crept over to one of the windows. As quietly as he could he opened it. He stuck his head out of the window.

He was looking out at east side of his building, facing towards where he parked the SUV. Looking down, there was a narrow, four inch wide ledge. Below that, it was at least twenty feet to the ground. Putting the duffel bag across his shoulder he began to crawl out of the window.

The night air was cold and, thankfully, there was no wind. He did not even try to stand on the ledge but instead hung off of it by his hands. He looked down. Maybe five feet below him was a similar ledge.

Carter did not think that he could actually manage to land on it but he figured that he did not have much choice. Taking a deep breath, he let go of the ledge.

Amazingly, he managed to land with the balls of his feet on the ledge. Unfortunately, the impact of the drop put him off balance. For what seemed like several minutes Carter felt as though he hung in air before suddenly plunging backwards onto the ground.

He fell to the grass with a thud and he let out a long moan as all of the air was forced from his lungs. He lay there gasping for several moments.

Carter felt bruised and sore but he did not think that anything was broken. He looked up at the ledge. At least hitting it had broken his fall enough that he had not been too badly injured. He stifled a groan as he got to his feet.

He maybe had a minute, two minutes tops, before the police arrived. They would probably guess it was him and the entire place would be surrounded. He ran. It hurt but he pushed on anyway. He was gasping for breath by the time he that reached the Expedition. He yanked open the door and threw the duffel bag inside.

Carter cranked over the engine. Instead of leaving the parking lot. He pulled the Ford over the parking block and onto the grass. He drove straight across and through the opening between the buildings in front of him, driving out into the next street over.

When he had pulled out into the street he saw flashing red and blue lights rushing down Miskatonic Avenue.

They came to a screeching stop in front of the administration building. Carter sighed with relief, it looked like he had made it out just in time. As he drove slowly down the street, he did not feel safe enough to turn on the headlights until he several blocks away.

Carter now needed to find a place where he could examine what he had discovered in Fletcher's office without fear that he would be found.

He knew he could not return to his uncle's house. They had undoubtedly discovered his escape from the jail by now and they would most likely be looking for him there. He also knew that he could not keep driving the SUV much longer. When they reached his uncle's house and found it gone, they would be on the look out for it.

Carter had driven aimlessly for almost twenty minutes when he spotted the Arkham Wal-Mart. Even at this hour the parking lot was full of cars.

Carter figured that this would be a good place as any to get rid of the Expedition without it being found for a while. He pulled into the parking lot and drove around until he found a cluster of cars that he could park among. He pulled into the parking lot and killed the engine.

He got out of the SUV, taking the duffel bag with him. He looked around but none of the few people that were in the parking lot were paying any attention to him. He walked quickly out the parking lot looking around for place that he could hide out for a while.

As Carter walked down the sidewalk he spotted a number of bars and night clubs. Being a Saturday night they were all crowded with college students who were in various states of intoxication.

He would be unlikely to be noticed in any one of them but they would be too crowded, too noisy and too poorly lit to be able to examine his findings.

Carter kept walking. He had walked for well over a mile and, as he got farther away from the university, the bars had begun to thin out. They were replaced by various curios and specialty shops. Nestled among them he saw the perfect place to hide out for a while.

A large sign across the storefront read, *JavaTime*. Through the glass front of the building he could see various tables arrayed spaciouly around a central coffee bar. There were only a few people present and they were all absorbed in either their laptops or books. Several small bells tinkled as Carter opened the door and walked inside.

Carter went over to the barista and ordered himself a latte. When this was prepared he took a seat in the back of the shop. He sat with his back to the wall where he could see the front door. He set the duffel bag on top of the table and began to take out the journal and the papers. He had a lot of work to do before he would be able to sleep tonight.

Chapter 7

As Carter spread out the paperwork in front of him, he finally finally allowed himself to relax a bit. He had not realized how tense he had become. His muscles ached and there was a determined throbbing in his head.

Carter was pretty sure that falling off of the building had not helped either. He was very sore from the fall, but he suspected that it would be much worse in the morning. As he sipped his latte he kept taking repeated glances up at the front door.

Periodically, patrons would come and go but none ever looked over in his direction. Most were there by themselves and, because they had come here seeking privacy, had spread themselves throughout the room.

Carter forced himself to concentrate. He decided to start with the translated pages that he had found in Fletcher's office. He took out the first translated page and began to read.

In the third year of the sixty-sixth Age, when the Seventh Wanderer is in the Third House of Azathoth, our great Lord Mordiggian shall be summoned from His dread slumber in Zul-Bha-Sair.

Once the sacred Ritual of the Return is completed and the blood of the Scion flows in the Great Circle, He will return with an endless vengeance and cast down those who are unworthy to eternal suffering of the darkest Darkness.

The faithful will then be raised up upon high where they will dwell in His Dread Glory until the end of time.

Carter stared at the paper, stunned. Fletcher was involved in starting some kind of crazy cult that was attempting to bring about the return of some elder god that has been forgotten by history.

If it had not been for the events of the last few days, Carter would have dismissed it as sheer madness, the ravings of a particularly deranged lunatic. As he finished reading he found, near the bottom of the page, a foot note that turned his blood cold.

I have checked the star charts time and time again and am sure of the hour. The ritual must be completed tomorrow morning at four thirty-three. I fear that we will not have time to prepare but, at least, the blood of the Scion will soon be in our possession.

If Carter was the Scion that they were referring to then they already had the blood that they needed for the ritual. That must be what they had cut open his arm for.

Carter still found it hard to accept but it must also be true that his grandfather had at least had a hand in this, that he was also the murderous, faceless monster as Fletcher had claimed.

Carter thought about what this meant for his father. It must have been that had he found what his own father had planned for his grandson and that why he had been murdered. His mother must have known this and that why they had left Chicago and she had always dissuaded him from returning here.

His head was spinning. Everything that he thought he knew about his own past were nothing but lies. He was afraid of what might be found out if he kept reading but he knew that he must continue. If the ritual was to be performed in less than seven hours he needed to know more.

He took the second translated page and began to read it. This page was not a verbatim translation. Apparently Fletcher had only decided to summarize it.

The contents of this page are not worthy of my efforts. It seems as though this page was written by a different author than the first, apparently by the enemies of our glorious Lord. It details a method by which the Ritual of Return may be subverted and the door to Zul-Bha-Sair closed. The Scion's blood may be used to alter the Great Circle, thereby channeling the cosmic energy away from our Lord's dread abode and closing shut the portal.

Carter felt relief grow within him as he read this. This ritual could be the answer that he was looking for. If he found out where the ritual was to be taking place then he might be able to stop them from completing their ritual and summoning their god.

The very idea that he was actually contemplating this was making his head hurt. The sheer insanity of what was going on was starting to get to him and he felt drained of energy. Even the caffeine from his latte was doing nothing.

Carter tried to think of the consequences as he summoned up his resolve. He knew that he dared not quit. There was far too much at stake and far too little time for him to do it in.

He picked up the diary. Knowing what it was, now, he hoped that it would contain more clues. He flipped it open to where he had left off before the attack.

November 30, 1927

I have spent nearly an entire week pouring over those blasted tablets. I feel as though they taunt me. At times I could almost swear that they are alive. I am beginning to fear them.

I am alone in my tent but I hear strange whisperings in an alien tongue as though the tablets were speaking to me. Even as I become more convinced of this I remind myself that I have not been sleeping well lately.

I restless sleep has been filled with feverish nightmares. I see great serpent of shadow and smoke. It calls to me as though over a great distance and I am unable to reply though a strange desire to do so burns within me.

Tonight, I have discussed this with Dr. Simon and he assures me that I am simply pushing myself too hard. Talking with my colleague has put me more at ease. I feel that perhaps he is right. I have been working exceedingly hard since our discovery. I been laboring twelve hours a day with the translation effort.

Dr. Simon has recommended to me that I take the next few days off. Though I am loathe to put aside my research at this point, I feel that it is in my best interest if I do as he recommends.

This passage at least explains why Carter had never heard of his grandfather making this discovery. The tablets that he discovered must have been used as the founding texts for this cult of Fletcher's.

As Carter continued to read he found that his grandfather's previously neat script was becoming harder and harder to read. The lines of ink were dug harder into the paper, as if the pen had been pressed to the paper very hard, and in some places the page had even been torn underneath the pen.

December 16, 1927

I have finally returned home to Arkham. It has brought me no relief of my dreams. Mordiggian visits me nightly now.

Yes, I know who He is now. He has revealed himself to me. He has promised to aid my in my translation of the tablets. How they have weighed upon my mind! Dr. Simon was never able to understand the power of the tablets. His continued to interfere with my work. He wanted to separate me from my tabletss and that is why he shall never leave the sands of Nejd.

Once I have translated the tablets. I know that I shall find peace. Mordiggian has promised me that it shall be so! He has promised me many things in my visions. Yes, that is what they are. They are no longer dreams or nightmares but visions of His dread countenance.

He has promised to teach me many things if only I sacrifice to his will. I will bathe the world in blood to make it pure for His return. I endeavor to do so, I have promised my soul to Mordiggian, my Master.

Carter closed the journal with a shudder. The journal had detailed how his grandfather's mind had been totally consumed by this Mordiggian. He found this version of his grandfather hard to reconcile with the respected academic he been told stories about growing up.

His grandfather had managed to be able to keep up a mask of sanity all the while he had poisoned the town, spreading this evil. He pushed the book away. He just could not bring himself to read it any longer. He wanted to throw it away, to burn it, but he figured that that would just draw undue attention to himself.

Carter tried to calm down and collect his thoughts. He knew what he had to do. He knew when the ritual was going to take place. Now he only needed to know where.

Without any idea of where to begin, though, he would never be able to find it in time. Carter figured that the university might be a good place to start but, even if the police were still not there, he would have to break into so many different buildings that there was no way that he would be able to search them all. He needed help.

Of course, Carter suddenly realized, McConnell.

McConnell had said that he would help him out if he could. Carter did not want him to risk himself any more than he already had but he knew that the alternatives were far worse. Carter still had his phone number but his cell phone was still in his Cadillac which was in the impound lot. Looking around, he got up and walked over to the barista who looked over at him, expectantly.

"Can I please use your telephone." Carter asked.

The man behind the counter eyed him suspiciously, "What for? Is it long distance?"

"No, I just need to call a friend," Carter assured him, "It's local," he added.

He looked at him as if trying to gauge whether or not Carter could be trusted, "Well, OK then," he said at last, "Hold on a sec."

The barista walked off and then returned a few moments later with a cordless phone, "Don't tie up the line too long."

Carter took the phone from him, "I won't, thanks."

The barista walked away to give him some privacy and Carter took the phone number out of his pocket and began to dial. The phone rang for quite a while and Carter was afraid that McConnell was not going to answer it. Suddenly he heard a voice on the other end.

"Hello?"

"McConnell, its Carter," he said, trying to keep his voice down.

"Carter? Shit, everyone's looking at you. They got officer's all over Miskatonic University. Did you break into Fletcher's office?"

"Yes," he admitted, "but I found what I was looking for. He had the stuff that was taken out of evidence. It was locked in his desk along with some other things that I think you're going to need to see."

There was a pause before McConnell spoke, "Jesus, so its true," there was another pause, "What else did you find?"

"Its complicated. I know that you've already put your ass on the line for me, but I need your help. Can you meet with me?"

"Where?" he said without hesitation.

"Do you know of a little coffee bar called JavaTime? It's a ways down from the university on Main Street."

"Ya, I think so. Its in one of those little strip malls down there?"

"Yes. I'll meet you there."

"Are you there now?"

"No, Not yet," he lied, "I'm on my way there now."

"OK, I get off work in twenty minutes, so let's just say forty. Stay safe Carter."

"You be careful too, if they think you're helping me...," he trailed off.

"I will, and Carter?"

"Yes?"

"Just call me Marc, OK?"

"Oh, OK."

Carter heard the line go dead and the barista walked back over to him. The look on his face said that Carter had spent too much time on the phone.

To try to make nice with him, he purchased another latte. He would need the caffeine anyway. He took the hot mug back to his corner.

He had lied to Marc again. No matter how hard he tried he could not shake that paranoid voice from the back of his head. No matter how much faith he had shown in Carter it still screamed at him to trust no one. His betrayal by Fletcher had just been too much for him.

He rubbed his eyes. He was tired and he was sober. He was not even sure he could trust himself anymore. He sighed and leaned back in his chair, taking a drink from his latte.

He glanced at his watch. He still had over a half an hour wait until Marc arrived. He pulled out the second page and started to study the second diagram. If he was going to pull this off tonight then he needed to study.

Carter finished his second latte and ordered another one. As he waited for Marc to arrive he began to find it hard to sit still. He began to feel a frantic energy growing inside of him. Part of it was undoubtedly due to the three lattes but it was mostly from anticipation of what was to come and the terror that he felt.

Carter had never been very assertive in his life. He preferred to stay out of trouble. In the last few days though, he had been chased, attacked, witnessed a murder and been held captive by a cult with the insane dream of reviving some dark god from man's distant past. He had held a gun to an old man's head and played hide and seek in the dark with a monster that had once been his grandfather.

It was enough that Carter had to face this dark reality but that tonight he would have to stand against it. That, somehow, he was the only person who could.

The very thought of it made him want to babble like a mad man. He wanted to tear off his clothes and go run screaming through the night.

Carter could feel the energy growing stronger inside him and he could feel his face twitching as he thought about it. Standing at the coffee bar, he noticed that the barista was beginning to look at him very oddly. Carter took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down and to think about something else.

Carter sat back in his chair and tried listening to the music that was playing from speakers that were mounted in the corners of the room but it was not anything that he particularly liked. The only things that he had to read were about the very things he was trying not to think about. He found himself checking his watch every minute or so but he still had ten minutes until Marc was due to arrive. Unable to sit any longer, he got up and ordered a fourth latte.

"You're sure you're all right?" the barista said as he took Carter's money.

"Oh ya, I'm fine, just fine," Carter tried to put on a smile.

The barista looked as though he could tell that Carter was lying, "Well, just so you know, we're closing in an hour and a half."

"That's fine, I have a friend meeting me here in a few minutes and I'll be out of your hair," the barista looked unconvinced as Carter took his latte and went to sit back down.

Carter tried to control the shake to his hand as he sipped the hot coffee. He was just about to start looking back at his watch when he heard the door open. Nervously, his head snapped to the door. Carter felt a sudden surge of relief as he saw Marc enter the coffee bar.

He had obviously stopped to change out of his uniform. He was dressed in a black t-shirt. The word police was written across it in broad, reflective white lettering. He wore dark blue track pants with dual reflective white stripe running down each side.

Marc spotted Carter as he walked in the door and waved. He stopped off at the coffee bar and ordered himself a drink before joining Carter.

When Marc walked over to the table he got a better look at Carter, "Jesus Christ, are you all right?"

Carter gave him a weak smile, "Ya, I'm just fine, why?"

"Because you look like hell, even worse than when I saw you earlier."

Carter chuckled wryly, "Ya, its been a rough couple of hours. How about you take a seat."

Marc slid into the chair across from Carter, "What have you got for me?" Marc lowered his voice even though there was no one else for several tables.

"Here take a look at these," Carter pushed the photographs of Fletcher talking with his grandfather toward Marc.

Marc picked them up and looked over them, "Well, this definitely matches the description of the man that you gave to me last night."

"Oh, its him alright," Carter picked up his grandfather's journal and handed it to Marc, "Now, take a look at this."

Marc took the journal opened it up and jerked his head up when he read the first page.

"I'm named after my grandfather," Carter said.

"Oh, that makes more sense."

He continued reading quietly for several minutes. Suddenly he closed the book and set it down, "You've got to be kidding me, right. You don't expect me to buy any of this?"

Carter did not say a word, he just slid the translated pages over to him. Marc picked them up and read them.

"This is fucked up. It's obvious that Fletcher believes this and that he has some kind of cult going here in Arkham but this can't be real. No way," he had started to go pale.

Carter looked at him seriously, "Look, I wouldn't have believed it either if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"Seen what? Some psycho in a Halloween mask? Christ, Carter, people just don't go running around town

without faces."

"Believe it or not, we are going to have to deal with it, you and me. It's going to happen and it's going to happen tonight. In less than five hours."

Marc shook his head vigorously, "No, we don't. We just go to the state police. They'll come in here and sort this shit out."

Carter gave him an incredulous look, "You really believe that? You think that if they can cover up two brutal murders that they state police will find anything. If anything you'll end up like me, a wanted man or dead, maybe even worse than that. They're going to resurrect a *god* tonight, for fuck's sake!"

"You can't believe that. I don't believe that. This cult, they may be real but they're just like any other bat shit insane psychos."

"I do believe that. I've seen things that I don't want to believe but if I want to live through tonight I'm going to have to and you're the only one I can trust," Carter threw up his hands in frustration at the look of disbelief in Marc's face, "Now either you help me or just leave me alone."

Marc was silent for a long time, "Fine, they do need to be stopped. So what do you suggest that we do."

"That's going to be the hard part. If we are going to stop them then we need to find out where they are performing the ritual. I think that it is one of the buildings at the university. As dean, Fletcher would have a lot of access."

"You might be right," Marc said nodding, "Hey, what's that?" he pointed at one of the untranslated pages.

Carter picked it up and handed it to him, "It's the one of the original pages that I showed you the translated copies of."

Marc looked at it closely, "I recognize this symbol," he pointed to one of the largest runes, "I've seen it spray painted in the old part of town. Whenever I've asked I was always told that it was just a gang sign."

"Do you remember where, exactly?"

"Ya, most of them are out by the old asylum, down on Stone Wall Row."

Carter got up from his seat, "We should get going then."

"I have one suggestion first," Marc said, getting up.

"What's that?"

"If we're going to do this, then we should be better prepared."

Chapter 8

They quickly finished their coffees and, together, they walked out of the coffee bar and went over to Marc's truck.

It was dark green 2006 GMC Sierra. Large, deep tread tires stuck out from the sides of the wheel wells. There was a thick, black brush guard covering the grill. Several large, circular lights were mounted to it.

The truck had been lifted several inches and Carter had to reach up to open the door. There was no step and he had a difficult time climbing up into the passenger seat. Once inside, Marc started the truck.

The engine roared to life. Carter thought that it was not the most subtle of vehicles to be sneaking around town in. Marc put the truck into reverse and backed out of the parking lot.

"So where are we headed?" Carter asked.

"To my house. We need to make sure we are well supplied if we are going to take on this cult of yours, besides, I'm not exactly dressed for sneaking around."

"It's not my cult," Carter said defensively, "and yes, you don't exactly blend into the shadows with all that reflective fabric."

"I didn't mean it like that," Marc said apologetically, "When I got changed after work I wasn't expecting to breaking in anywhere tonight."

"Being a cop," Carter said, "I don't suppose that it comes up that often."

"No, not really."

They had driven for about fifteen minutes when Marc pulled the truck into the driveway of his house.

It small ranch home. It had white siding that was accented by green shutters on the windows. The front lawn was small but well tended. It was green and leaf free despite it being the early part of Autumn. There was a small, windowless garage, painted to match the house, set a bit back from the house. After Marc had parked the truck, Carter got out and followed him across to the walk and up to the front door. He unlocked it and let them both inside, flipping on the light.

The front door opened directly into the living room. There was a small square area tiled in brown for

removing shoes before the carpeting started. The carpet was off white looked like it had been recently cleaned.

In the far corner stood a very cozy looking fireplace. The screen was open and a neat stack of firewood sat there expectantly.

A long, dark red leather couch faced away from the door. Across from it stood a modestly sized flat screen TV. It was flanked by two very large free standing speakers. Two more smaller speakers, mounted on stands stood behind each end of the couch.

Off to the left was a long hallway that undoubtedly led to the houses bedrooms. Off to the right Carter could see the dining room. A large rectangular cherry stained wooden table stood in the middle of it, surrounded by six matching chairs.

Marc turned to him, "If you want, you can wait here while I get changed."

Carter nodded Marc headed off down the hallway, leaving him standing the entryway. Despite the fact that no one could possibly know that he was here, he still felt exposed.

Carter thought about turning off the light but figured that might make him look paranoid. He was paranoid but it did not mean he wanted to advertise it.

After a few minutes, Marc walked back into the living room. He was dressed similarly to Carter, all in black. While he wore sweats though, Marc had on pants that had many pockets along the legs. The jacket he wore over his t-shirt had pockets not only on the chest but also along the sleeves. His sneakers had been replaced by tall, black combat boots. The pant leg cuffs were tucked into the tops of the boots. He looked like one of those survivalists from out west.

"You ready?" Marc asked.

Carter tried not to stare at him, "Is that all we came here for?"

"Hell no, the rest is out in the garage. Follow me."

Carter followed him back out of the house and around the back, towards the garage. As they approached it, he saw that there was a large padlock on the garage door.

Marc took out a key and unlocked it. He then pulled up the door. It was dark inside and Marc reached in and pulled on a chain that lit a single, naked light bulb.

It was immediately obvious to Carter that Marc never parked his truck in here. There were boxes and crates scattered all over the floor. Miscellaneous military looking gear poked out of them.

There was a long work bench along the back wall. On it contained a variety of machines that Carter was unsure of their function. Bins full of empty brass shells of various sizes were lined up near them. Above the table Carter saw that were peg boards suspended from every wall. Upon them rested a large array of weaponry.

Most of them were various types of pistols, rifles and shotguns but there were also several crossbows and even a sword or two. Carter was simultaneously impressed by the collection and worried about the stability of his companion.

Marc stepped into the garage and started pulling equipment out of boxes. He took out a couple of flashlight and handed one to Carter. It was about six inches long and black, it felt surprisingly heavy. It looked a lot

more expensive than the EverReady that he had been using earlier.

Meanwhile Marc had continued to rummage around in another box. He finally found what he was looking for and stood up and threw something at Carter, "Here try this on, it should adjust enough to fit."

Carter looked at it. It was a vest made of nylon webbing. Along its length were various pouches of different sizes. It took him a while to untangle it but eventually he was able to put it on. He then pulled on the straps until it was a snug fit. Marc watched, amused while he fought with it and when Carter was done Marc tossed him some black electrician's tape.

"Roll up those loose ends and then tape them. We don't want you to get caught up on anything."

Carter did as he was instructed. It was awkward to do while wearing the vest but eventually he managed to get all the loose ends taped up. While Carter was doing this, Marc was over at the work bench.

He was using a long plastic tool to push strips of long, small diameter bullets into magazines. As he filled each one, he would slide the newly filled magazine into one of his many pockets.

After Marc had finished filling all of the magazines he selected a black, military looking rifle from the wall. He checked the safety on it to make sure it was engaged. He then pushed one of the full magazines into it and then pulled back on a handle near the end of the rifle.

Marc placed it down on the table and then took down one of the shotguns on the wall. It too was all black and had an adjustable stock and a pistol style grip.

"I don't suppose you have much experience with firearms?"

"No," Carter admitted.

"Didn't think so, that's why you get this," he handed the shotgun to Carter, "This is the Benelli M4 Super 90 shotgun. Just point this in their general direction and squeeze the trigger. It's semi-automatic so you don't even have to worry about cycling the action between shots."

Carter nodded. He wasn't quite sure what "cycling the action meant" but he guessed that it was a good thing that he did not have to do it.

Marc then handed Carter several boxes of shotgun shells and told him to fill the pouches of his vest with them. He showed him how to load and charge the shotgun, how to work the safety and what to do if it malfunctioned.

"You feel comfortable with it?" Marc asked.

Carter gave him a noncommittal shrug, "I guess so."

Marc sighed, "I wish I had the time to train you properly but as you said, we are on a deadline. You ready to go?"

"Not yet, I need a knife."

"Jesus, if you're worried about running out of ammo...," Marc trailed off and turned back to the wall.

"No," Carter said, "that's now what I need it for."

Marc placed the pistol he had just taken down back on the wall, "Then what the hell do you need one for?"

"To change the diagram and stop the ritual. I'm going to need to use my blood."

Marc made a disgusted face and then dug around in another box, "Here, this should work."

He handed Carter a small folding knife. He took it and stuck it into his pocket, "Now I'm ready."

Together, they walked back towards the truck. Carter was surprised by how much he was loaded down. The vest helped even out the weight across his shoulders but he still felt like he was weighted down with lead. Which, he supposed that he was. Despite the extra weight, he felt better than he had all night.

Carter was much more confident now than he had been. Despite all that had happened and how screwed up the world had become he could finally do something about it. Armed as they were he felt that there was no way the anything could stand in their way.

"What are you smiling about?" Marc asked as they got back to the truck.

"Well, I have a good feeling about this."

"Shit, well at least one of us does," Marc said, "Now be careful getting in and don't point that thing at me while you're doing it."

Trying to be careful about the direction of the muzzle, Carter struggled back up into the passenger seat. As soon as he had shut the door, Marc backed the truck out of the driveway and headed off for Arkham Asylum.

The drive across town to the asylum was a long one and, for the most part, they drove in silence. Each one of them was lost in their own thoughts.

Carter was hoping that he looked as calm as Marc did. As they drove along his new found confidence had waned considerably and on the inside he was beginning to feel terrified. He knew what he had to do but he would have given anything to be somewhere else, to be anyone else. He was going up against something that he did not understand and he was afraid of what he might have to face once they got there.

Carter kept looking over at Marc, wondering how he could be so calm. He was driving into danger and possibly to his death against something he would not have imagined in his wildest nightmares. Maybe it was because he did not really believe there was something truly evil going on. Maybe it was the police training. Carter just wished that feel that way.

As they drove along, the road became rougher and potholes more frequent. The houses that they passed were in increasingly poor states of repair.

The Arkham Asylum for the Insane was located in the oldest part of the city. Originally it had been located on the outskirts of the city but eventually urban growth had swallowed it whole. Carter knew that it had been abandoned sometime in the late seventies and when he was growing up it was the place all of the kids were telling ghost stories about and daring each other to try to break into.

They were within a few blocks of the asylum when Marc suddenly pulled the truck over to the side of the road and parked it.

"Something wrong? Why are we stopping here?" Carter asked.

"Probably better to walk the rest of the way. If anyone is waiting for us, they'll hear us coming in this thing."

"Good thinking," Carter said. Marc was definitely better at this whole tactical thing than he was.

Carter opened the passenger door and more or less jumped out. He landed badly on the curb and almost dropped the shotgun. He fumbled with it, trying desperately not to drop it. He quickly looked around, embarrassed and hoping that Marc had not seen him, he quickly straightened himself out.

Marc was already on the sidewalk waiting for him, "Ready for this?"

"Not really," Carter admitted.

"We can still go back," Marc told him.

"I know but it won't do any good if we do," Carter joined him and they began the walk down to the asylum.

Having an abandoned insane asylum on your street did not do good things for the local property values. Most of the street lamps were broken or burned out. The houses that they past were all rundown. Many appeared to be completely abandoned and several even had their roofs collapsed.

By the time that they reached the asylum gates, the houses had completely thinned out and the last few lots on either side of it were completely vacant except for the remnants of old foundations. None of the street lights along this block were lit. As he looked at it, Carter could understand why no one would want to live anywhere near this place.

The asylum was a sprawling complex located behind a crumbling six foot tall concrete wall. The wall was broken and cracked and the reinforcing re-bars were visible in many places.

The rune that Marc had recognized earlier had been spray painted in yellow onto the wall in several places. Strung across the top were two rows of barbed wire. The wire had obviously not been replaced since the asylum closed. It was completely rusted and the wire was broken in many places.

A large wrought iron gate was set in the middle of the wall. The black enamel paint was flaking off and it was rusted in places. The remains of call box lay smashed just outside the entrance. Through the gate, the imposing edifice of the asylum could be seen rising up into the night.

The main building of the Arkham Asylum loomed over them, its broken windows and crumbling facade making it look gaunt and skeletal, a cathedral for the damned.

A flight of concrete steps led up to a set of large wooden double doors. The wood was weather stained and scarred. Standing guard on either side were a set of fluted pillars that supported a large peaked portico. The ground floor contained many wide, multi-paned windows. The windows were covered in thick, rusted bars and most of the panes of glass had been broken out, leaving sharp edged holes into the blackness within.

The second and third floor windows were much narrower and the farther they were up on the building, they more intact they remained. The fourth floor of the building was large open cupola. The vane on top had long ago broken off and the plaster had broken away in many places, revealing the underlying brick. Inside the cupola, Carter could just make out the silhouette of a large bell swaying slightly in the darkness.

Two long wings were visible jutting off of the main building. They each stood two stories tall. The ground

floor did not have any windows at all. The windows on the second floor of the wings were much narrower than those of the main building and they were oddly intact. The asylum was perhaps the most frightening building that Carter had ever beheld.

All the childhood stories that he had ever heard about this place rose up in his mind. He wanted to run. He probably would have if the steady pace that Marc set towards that gate had not impelled him onwards.

Once they reached the gate, Carter could see that they would have to find another way inside. A thick chain snaked around through the bars of the gate. The chain had been looped through twice and it was padlocked in the middle. Unlike everything else, they appeared to be nearly brand new. Marc reached out and gave the gate a rattle.

"Over the wall?" Carter suggested.

"Over the wall," Marc agreed. He walked over to the wall and got down on one knee and indicated that Carter should use it to climb up.

Carter leaned the shotgun against the wall and then, stepping upon the proffered knee, grabbed onto the top of the wall. Grunting with effort, he pulled himself up on top of the wall. It was easily over a foot thick and he was easily able to sit on top of it.

Marc stood up and first handed Carter the shotgun and then the rifle. He then grabbed onto the top of the wall and pulled himself up and over the wall. Once on the other side Carter handed him the rifle and shotgun and then jumped down himself.

The grass on the inside of the wall had not been mowed in several decades and was several feet tall. Carter found that it at least made for a soft landing when he hit the ground.

Marc gave him the shotgun back and, keeping low, they made their way to the front door. They climbed up the front steps and Carter gave a pull on the front door. It was locked. Oddly enough, the lock on the door was also new.

"You don't happen to have any lock picks on your?" Carter whispered.

"Nope, don't own any. Looks like we'll have to try for another way in," Marc replied.

Carter nodded his agreement and then went back down the steps and started to walk around the building.

As they walked around the building, Carter could not shake the feeling that he was being watched. He imagined that the deranged red rimmed eyes of the asylums former occupants were leering out at him as they passed each window.

Whenever Carter would walk past a broken window, he would skirt wide around it, afraid that something would reach out of the window to grab him and drag him into the darkness. Marc seemed to find this behavior humorous. He did not seem perturbed at all by the asylum while Carter could not keep the hairs on the back of his neck down.

Eventually they reached end of the wing and turned the corner to go around the back of the asylum. When Carter rounded the corner he saw that there was another wing protruding from the back of the main building. Unlike all the others, this one had no windows.

"That's the maximum security wing, where they kept the most dangerous nut jobs," Marc said. Carter thought he could hear a note of fear in his voice.

"How do you know?"

"I grew up in this town too."

"Oh ya. I remember, isn't that where they supposedly kept the King?"

Marc nodded, "Ya, they said that he used to cut off people's faces and then make wax masks from them."

"I always heard that he still lived in there somewhere and he came out in the night to looking for more victims and killing the people who trespassed here," they both looked at each other and then decided to end that line of conversation.

They continued along the back of the building. Periodically, Marc would grab at the bars on the windows and pull on them, to see if any were loose. None of them were.

They picked up the pace as they walked along the maximum security wing. Carter tried to tell himself that there was no way that there was anything in here that would get in him but he knew better.

Eventually, they came around to the other side the wing and were once again walking towards the back of the main building. As they walked along, Marc spotted it first.

Up against the main building and almost hidden in the waist high grass was a large metal door leading down into the ground. It looked as though it provided access into the asylum's basement.

The metal door was pitted with rust. It had been secured with a padlock. This padlock was definitely part of the original asylum and looked as though it was made out of more rust than metal. Carter tried pulling on it but it still held fast.

"Maybe if we had a hammer or something, we could break it off," Carter said.

Marc did not answer. Instead, he raised his rifle and brought its butt down upon the lock. There was a loud clank and the door vibrated. Rust flew off the lock but it held. Carter jumped at the sudden sound.

Marc raised his rifle again and struck the lock several more times until the shank finally snapped off.

"Jesus Christ, you think they heard all that?" Carter asked.

"I hope not."

Marc reached down and removed the broken lock from the door. Grasping the handle he pulled the door open. The long unused hinges screamed in protest as the door opened. Underneath the door was a set of concrete steps leading down into the darkness.

Marc pulled out his flashlight and clicked it on, "Into the belly of the beast, huh?"

Carter chuckled nervously, "Maybe not the best choice of words."

Marc smiled at him, "Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Carter looked at him in disbelief, "And how about you shut up now."

Marc looked hurt, "Just trying to lighten the mood a bit."

"Sorry," Carter apologized, "My nerves are just shot."

"It's OK. Ready to go down?"

Carter nodded as he stared into the blackness. He stood there for a moment, dreading the descent. Eventually, he pulled out his own flashlight. He turned it on and they both descended the staircase down into the darkness.

Chapter 9

The steps led quite a ways underground before they finally found themselves at the bottom. Shining his flashlight around the room, Carter thought that it looked as though they were in some sort of maintenance workshop. There were benches and tables scattered about the large room and upon them were a variety of rusted tools, machine parts, and other odds and ends. A thick layer of dust coved everything and as they walked clouds of it billowed up around them, motes dancing in the flashlight beams.

As they walked, Carter suddenly found himself wanting to sneeze. He tried to stop himself but was unable to. He shoved his nose into his sleeve and tried to muffle the sound as best as he could. When he had finished sneezing, Marc tapped him on the shoulder. Carter looked over at him and saw that Marc had pulled his t-shirt collar up over his nose to block out the dust.

"Good idea," Carter whispered, as he followed suit.

Across the room was an old metal door. At the bottom and around the door jam, cracks of light leaked into the room. As quietly as they could, they hurried across to the door. The grey paint had flaked off of large portions of it and it rusted badly. A spider web hung from the door knob.

"Look at the rust on this hinge," Marc whispered, "they'll hear us from a mile a way if we try to open this."

"Oh, not like before?"

Marc just looked at him.

"So what do you suggest then?" Carter asked.

"This is a workshop right? Look at all the junk that got left, there's bound to be some oil around here somewhere."

"OK," Carer agreed, "We'll split up and look around then."

Marc nodded and they went off in different directions in search of oil for the door.

As Carter walked across the room, he searched around and underneath the tables. He found quite a few old wrenches, sockets and screwdrivers. He even found a couple of hammers but no oil. As he went to the other side of the room he saw that it was lined with wire racks. Upon the racks were miscellaneous supplies that

were in various states of rust and decay.

Small plastic bins contained a variety of sizes of bolts and screws. In another bin that was full of nails, most of them had rusted together into a giant, spiked pile. Carter thought about taking it, thinking that it would make an interesting weapon but he was not sure how he would even carry it without stabbing himself.

Other racks contained rows of paper towel rolls. Most of them had either rotted away or had been torn to shreds by vermin.

Yet another rack contained stacks of severely corroded batteries and boxes full of different lengths of wire.

Upon the very end of the shelving, Carter finally found what he was looking for. There was a line of rounded metal containers. Upon each one was a faded label that read *Light Weight Mineral Oil*.

Carter tried to pick one up but found that he could not juggle the container and the shotgun at the same time. Instead, he waved his flashlight rapidly in the direction Marc went, trying to signal him. It worked and after a few moments, he heard footsteps and Marc trotted out of the darkness.

"This should work," Carter said, indicating the row of mineral oil.

"That'll be perfect," Marc agreed. He grabbed a couple of containers and jammed them into the large cargo pockets of his pants.

"Wish I had pants like that," Carter muttered.

"What was that?" Marc whispered.

"Nothing," Carter replied, "Nothing at all."

They walked back over to the door. Marc pulled one of the containers out and opened it. He dumped it over the door hinges. When it was empty, he tossed it aside. He then repeated the process with the second container and then took a step back.

"No we wait while the oil works its magic," Marc said.

Carter shined his light on his wrist watch. It was almost twelve thirty. Only four hours remained before the ritual. It was hard for him to believe that the future of humanity would depend upon their actions over the next four hours. Of course, he was a hard time believing that any of this was real. Part of him still hoped that he would wake up soon and find himself back in his bed in Chicago and that all of this was just a dream.

Carter sighed, just wishful thinking.

Marc brushed the dust off of a nearby table and sat down to wait. Carter thought about joining him but he had too much nervous energy to sit down. His stomach was doing flip flops and he worried that if he had to wait here to long and keep thinking about what he was doing that he would be sick.

They had turned off their flashlights to conserve battery power and they waited silently in blackness. He wanted to talk, to try to ease the tension that he at least felt but in quiet darkness of the room he was afraid to talk unnecessarily, lest his voice should carry.

The shotgun had grown heavy in his arms and the stresses of the day were beginning to catch up with him. He needed to get moving. As long as he kept moving, he felt that sheer forward momentum would keep him from collapsing, both physically and emotionally.

When he did not think that he could stand there any longer, Marc suddenly got up from the table and flicked his flashlight back on.

"Should be ready now, I think," he whispered.

Carter let out a sigh of relief and refocused himself on the task at hand, getting out of this room. He went over to the door and put his hand on the knob. He tried to pull open the door but it would not open. He pulled again, harder, but it would not budge. Marc shined his flashlight down upon the door handle.

It was locked.

Carter laughed nervously as he flipped open the bolt. He again tried opening the door.

The door opening slowly, brushing aside a swath of dirt as it did so. Despite the oil that they had applied to the hinges, they still let out a shriek of protest. In the stillness the sound seemed preternaturally loud, as if the door itself was protesting their intrusion.

They waited there anxiously for several anxious minutes to see if their presence had been detected. When they saw that no rabid cultists were forthcoming, they stepped out into the corridor.

The hallway outside of the door was sparsely lit. Every ten feet or so a metal lamp fixture hung from the bare concrete ceiling. A single light bulb, protected by a wire screen, provided dim pools of light in the darkness. The hallway they were in dead ended at their door.

The floor of the hallway, like the workshop, was also bare concrete. The walls were brick that had been painted, where it had not peeled away, in that off yellow color that was supposed to be soothing.

The corridor continued straight ahead as far as they could see. Another hallway branched off to the right about five feet further down. When they reached it, they saw that this hallway extended down the width of the building before turning to parallel the hallway that they were on. Walking past it, they came to a door on the right hand side. A plastic sign on the door read *Electrical Room*.

They opened it and inside they found that it contained the various fuse boxes for the electrical systems of the asylum. Each box was labeled with the portion of the building that it controlled. Carter examined the boxes and found that electricity was shut off to most of the asylum. Power was only running in the maximum security wing.

"That would make sense," Marc said when Carter pointed this out, "that way they could keep the lights on without anyone seeing them."

As they continued down the hallway, they found that most of the doors were locked. It seemed, though, they were in the maintenance part of the basement.

All of the doorways that they walked past were for various parts and machine storage or were the different utility rooms for the asylum. When they passed the room labeled *Backup Generator* they could hear the sound of a large diesel engine running on the other side of the door. This door was unlocked.

As they opened the door, the sound from the motor became nearly unbearable. The room was poorly ventilated and was filled with thick blue haze. The largest diesel engine that Carter had ever seen sat in the middle of the room. Two large fuel tanks sat on either side of it.

"Maybe we could use these," Carter said, yelling over the roar of the engine, "blow the whole place up."

"No," Marc yelled back, "It only works that way in the movies, the best we could do here is turn off the juice or start a fire with the fuel but with all the concrete and probably asbestos, I'm not sure that that would do any good."

"I guess I believe too much of what I see in movies," Carter yelled, chagrined.

"Lot of people do," Marc agreed, "Let's get the hell out of here before we go deaf."

They left the generator room and continued down the hallway until it finally dead ended in another metal door.

"Hopefully this is a way up and not another damn workshop," Carter said.

He opened the door and found that it did lead into a stairwell.

The stairwell lights were off and they had to turn their flashlights back on. The inside of the stairwell was gray and featureless. A concrete staircase followed gray painted brick walls up into the darkness. As Carter swept his flashlight beam around the room he spotted something underneath the staircase. It was a skull.

"Look at that," he said, pointing.

Marc swung his flashlight beam around. As they looked around, they saw that there were more bones littering the floor.

"Is this place going to be full of their victims?"

"Doesn't look like it," Marc said, "Look."

Carter looked and saw a plain paper sack just under the staircase. There were shards of broken glass around it. He picked it up and found that there was even more glass inside.

"Liquor bottle," Carter said, "maybe he was a bum that got lost in here."

"Or got so drunk he fell off the steps."

"Still creepy," Carter shivered, he did not think that he would ever get used to seeing bodies, even if they had not been brutally murdered by a crazy cult.

They climbed up the stair case until they reached the first floor. A faded sign next to the door indicated that it was the ground level. They pushed open the door and found themselves at the end of a very short hallway. As they walked its length they soon found themselves in the atrium of the asylum.

The atrium took up the majority of the first floor of the main building. The floor had once been covered with a white faux marble laminate. It was now peeling up in many places, exposing the bare concrete. The floor was covered in old papers, debris and a thick layer of dust.

The walls were covered in crumbling plaster. The plaster had been painted the same off yellow color as the basement.

Near to where they stood, a large, almost ornate staircase led up to the next floor. The very high ceiling was bare except for a large chandelier that hung from the center.

In the middle of the room stood a large square counter that served as the asylum's reception area. A line of rusted bars extended up from the counter top, supporting its own wood paneled ceiling.

As they walked around the atrium they found a trail through the dust on the floor. It looked as though many people had walked from the front door towards the back of the atrium where there was a closed metal door. A sign above it read *Maximum Security Authorized Personnel Only*.

"Of course, they just had to be in there," Carter said.

Marc looked at him, "We already knew that."

"But I still don't want to go in there."

"Those stories were probably just urban legends."

"Ya, and what's really in there is a lot worse."

"Guess I can't argue with that."

Marc pulled on the door and found it to be unlocked.

The door swung open heavily, as it was significantly thicker than any of the other doors that had opened. Also, unlike the other doors, it swung open on nearly silent hinges. They stepped through it.

The maximum security wing was better lit than the basement had been. The light fixtures were closer together, leaving less of the hallway in shadow. Slightly to the left as they entered, a narrow hallway ran down the length of the building. On either side were metal doors, each with a small observation window, leading into patient cells. Near the doorway, a metal spiral staircase led up to the second floor. A wall in front of them had signs indicated with an arrow that this was *Patient Block A*. Another sign pointing right indicated that that hallway led to the administrative offices for this wing.

"Well, they're probably not hanging out in the cells," Carter said.

They crept slowly down the hallway. After about ten feet, the hallway took a sharp left and opened out into a much wider corridor.

There was another spiral staircase here, leading up. They were about to walk into the hallway when there was a creak of rusty hinges and the hallway door nearest to them began to open.

Quickly, they ducked back around the corner. Careful not to be seen, Carter peeked around the corner.

As the doorway opened, he saw August Fletcher walking through the doorway. He was no longer nearly as bent over and he now walked without the aid of his cane.

He was dressed in what looked like a catholic priest's cassock but it was dark red in color and the collar was a sickly green color. Upon his brow rested a golden crown. It was shaped in such a way to look as though there was a conflagration on his head.

Fletcher closed the door behind him and then walked to the spiral staircase. He then began to ascend to the next level.

After he had disappeared from sight, Carter waited several moments before creeping back into the hallway. He looked up the staircase to make sure that Fletcher was gone before hurrying over to the office that Fletcher had just left. The plaque on the door read "Doctor S. Herman Administrator" He tried the door and found that it was unlocked and, followed by Marc, he ducked inside.

The room had no overhead light and was lit solely by an old, tarnished brass lamp standing in one corner and another on the desk in the middle of the room. The walls were brick and the bare concrete floor was covered by a large, dirty square area rug. There were several book shelves but the books they contained were moldy and covered with a layer of dust. On the desk sat an enormous stone tablet.

The tablet was a reddish brown and roughly square, with the corners having been rounded off. The writing on the tablet was more of that alien language that Carter had seen earlier.

Carter thought that this must be one of the tablets that was described in his grandfather's journal. He tried looking at it but runes seemed to shift underneath his gaze, making it unsettling to look at. Despite this, he felt a strange urge to keep looking at the tablet and he had to force himself to look away.

Carter suddenly realized he was sweating and that he was breathing rapidly.

"Are you OK?" Marc asked staring at him.

Carter shook his head, trying to clear it, "Ya, I'm fine."

"Are you sure," Marc said, sounding unconvinced, "You were staring at that tablet for almost ten minutes. You wouldn't move or say anything."

"Really? It didn't feel like more than a couple of seconds."

"No, it was definitely more like ten minutes," Marc looked at his watch, "Could we hurry this up, I really don't want to hang around here any longer than necessary."

"OK. OK, just hold on a minute."

Carter, doing his best to ignore the tablet, went over to the desk and began to rifle through it. The drawers were mostly empty except for the occasional rusted paper clip, stapler or yellowed sheet of paper, the writing nearly faded into illegibility. Frustrated, Carter slammed shut the last drawer.

"Dammit," Carter said, "I can't believe that there's nothing in here."

"Except that giant tablet."

"I meant something useful, I don't know about you but I can't read it," Carter said, exasperated, "I was hoping to something more useful like maybe a hint of where they are holding the ritual," Carter looked down at his watch. It was after one o'clock. He swore again.

"Hey calm down there. No use snapping at me. Shit, what were you expecting, a map?"

Carter glared at him, "That would be nice, yes."

"Good fucking luck finding one of those. Now, how 'bout we stop wasting time and get out of here."

Carter sighed, "Ya."

Carter began to follow Marc out of the office when he spotted something hanging on the back of the door.

"Hey, hold up," he said.

"What is it?" Marc said, sounding annoyed.

"A map."

"No way. You've got to be shitting me."

Marc walked back into the office and Carter shut the door. On the back was square piece of plastic and

printed, in faded ink, on it was the floor plan for the maximum security wing. A little red dot indicated their current position in the section marked "Administration".

The second floor showed Patient Blocks "B" and "C". Blocks "B" and "C" were much smaller than Block "A", taking up only half of the length of the wing. The rest of the second floor was taken up by a section marked "Treatment Rooms". This section was subdivided into several rooms of various sizes. The largest, by far, was at the far end of the second floor. This room had been circled in a thick black line with what looked like a permanent marker.

"That's gotta be it," Carter said.

"Seems likely." Marc agreed, "Well, then let's get up there so we can get this over with and get the hell out of here."

As they walked back out of the office they heard the sound of voices coming from the first floor hallway. Afraid that they might be headed for the office they were in, they quickly ducked into the office next door. The lights were off inside and Marc shut the door as quietly as he could.

They could hear the voices growing louder, muffled by the door. The voices came to a stop outside and then they heard metal groaning. It sounded like they were climbing the spiral staircase. Carter waited in the darkness, practically holding his breath, until he could no longer hear the voices.

Carter slowly cracked open the door and looked outside. After he saw that the hall was empty he opened the door the rest of the way.

"We're going to have to be careful," Marc said, "the rest of the cult is probably going to be showing up soon for the ritual."

"Shit." Carter said, "Well if worse comes to worse, we can shoot our way out, I guess."

"Only if they don't have guns too, otherwise we're fucked."

"So, what say we try not to be noticed, then."

Marc nodded and as quietly as they could they started to climb the spiral staircase. It was a tight spiral and Carter found it difficult to navigate with the shotgun.

When they got near the top, Carter stopped and poked his head up to see if there was anyone in the second floor hallway. He did not see anyone and he continued up to the second floor.

This patient block looked much like the one on the first floor, brick and concrete lined with nondescript metal doors with small, square observation windows. It was much shorter and there was a door at the end that led to the treatment rooms. A short hallway to the left led to Block "B".

They walked down the corridor when they suddenly heard the sound of more cultists preparing to climb the staircase.

Carter yanked open the nearest patient cell and a desiccated corpse fell onto the floor in front of him with a clatter. Marc clamped his hand over Carter's mouth, stifling a scream. He then kicked the body back into the room and pushed Carter in after it. Marc then jumped into the room, pulling the door shut behind him.

Carter sat there on the floor, trying to calm himself down. In the beam of light from the observation room

he could see corpse looking sideways at him with its dry, shriveled eyes.

It was dressed what looked like ragged white pajamas. The skin was dry and brittle and one of the arms had broken off when it had fallen and was sticking out at an odd angle in the sleeve. The fingernails on the hand were either broken or missing entirely.

"Jesus Christ," Carter breathed, "they just left him in here to die."

"Look at that," Marc said, his finger shaking.

Carter looked where Marc pointed. Laying next to the door was mask made of pale yellow wax.

"Holy God," Carter said, scooting rapidly away from the corpse, "Of all the cells we could have ended up in."

"We've got bigger problems than that."

"Ya the cult, at least he's dead."

"No, there's not handle on this side," Marc said, trying not to sound alarmed.

Carter tore his eyes away from the corpse and looked at the door.

This side of the door had been covered with a layer of thick, quilted padding. The fabric was shredded and stained with blood were the trapped patient had tried to claw his way out. Carter also noted, with increasing panic, that there was also no door handle.

Marc push against it, "The door must latch automatically when it is shut."

"There's got to be a way out," Carter's voice was starting to sound shrill.

Marc looked at the corpse, "Well, by the look of him it doesn't look to promising."

"What about the window. We could break it out and then reach through it to open the door."

Marc shook his head, "If we broke the glass its still got that chicken wire in it. Besides, even if we did break it out it's too far up for either of us to reach the handle."

Marc examined the door, "Hey, I can see the bolt through the jam here, we could cut through it with hacksaw."

"Great!"

"Do you have a hacksaw?" Marc asked.

"Yes, well sort of..." Carter trailed off.

"What do you mean, sort of? Where the hell is it?"

"In your duffel bag. Back in the truck," Carter said sheepishly.

"God damn lot of good that does us in here," Marc yelled.

"Hey, I didn't think--"

Suddenly the door swung open and a shadow fell across them. A cultist dressed in a mottled gray robe was standing in the door frame.

"What the fu--," he started to say when Marc punched him across the jaw.

The cultist fell backward onto the ground, his head bouncing on the floor with a crack. Marc quickly grabbed his legs and dragged him into the cell.

"Come on," Marc hissed.

Carter jumped over the body and ran out of the cell. Marc slammed it shut behind him, "I can't believe it. That was fuckin' lucky."

"Ya, son of bitch must of heard us arguing," Carter said.

"Shall we get going, before anyone else arrives or we get stuck somewhere else?"

"OK, how about you go first this time."

Following Marc down the hallway, Carter hurried down to the end of the patient block. There was no window on the door. Marc cracked it open to check if the hallway beyond was empty. He nodded and opened the door the rest of the way.

The hallway on the other side extended for at least two hundred feet. At regular intervals, more hallways branched off of it to the left and to the right. At the very end of the corridor was the door the must lead into the large treatment room. Carter closed the door behind them and they quietly crept down the long hallway.

As they crept down the hallway, Carter noticed that this area of the asylum was unnaturally quiet. The creaking and groaning of the old building setting was completely absent here. None of the pipes over head rattled or hissed. Even the quiet sounds of the vermin skittering around inside the walls was absent here.

A cold chill hung in the air and by the time they were half way down the corridor he could see his breath forming wispy clouds in front of him.

Carter felt a growing sense of unease which then turned into fear and which then bloomed into a barely contained panic. They closer they got to that door, the more he wanted to run. If it he had not been able to look over at Marc's calm progress he would have.

Finally, they reached the door. A cruel miasma emanated from it like rancid oil, greasy and sickly sweet. Carter steeled himself himself and looked over at Marc.

"Ready?" Carter asked him.

Marc nodded, "Remember, don't get crazy in there. We don't have to shoot anyone."

Carter nodded, "OK."

"After you."

Carter took in a deep breath and inhaled slowly. He put his hand upon the ice cold door knob and turned it, just cracking the door open. He then brought his foot back, striking out at the door and sending it flying open. With weapons held high, they rushed, one after the other, into the room.

As Carter kicked open the door, they rushed headlong into a room that was surprisingly brightly lit. Several large overhead light fixtures combined with large portable lights, tall freestanding yellow ones like those found at construction sites, bathed the room in bright white light.

The room was huge. It was easily one hundred feet long and ran the width of the entire wing. Like most of the asylum, the floor was bare concrete. At intervals across the floor were round drains covered with thin, rusted bars.

The ceiling was a dirty, white plaster ceiling. The brick walls were covered with a mold stained plaster. As

evidenced by the shadows on the walls and the outlines on the floor, all of the room's original furniture had been removed.

In their place, were rows upon rows of benches all facing in towards the center of the room. In the middle of the room, a large concrete dais had been laid. It stood almost four feet in height. A dozen fat candles were set around its edge and six large candelabras were arranged around it.

Upon that dais was a diagram. It appeared to have been engraved into the concrete. The sinuous lines were stained a dark brown, as if they had then been painted with blood. Standing next to the dais were several robed cultists.

Carter did not recognize most of them but he had seen some of them at his uncle's funeral. The only one of the robed men that he did recognize was Detective Horn. Standing among the group, in his dark red cassock was August Fletcher. They were all deep in conversation.

As Carter and Marc rushed into the room they all turned to stare at them. There was a look of shock upon all of their faces.

"Get down. Get down! Get the fuck down!" Marc yelled as he crossed the room, his rifle pointed at them.

Carter, unsure of what he was supposed to say, just screamed as he ran.

The assembled cultist through up their hands but did not immediately respond. Instead they just looked among themselves, confused.

"Get down now! Lie down on the ground and put your hands behind your head!"

"Get down or I'll blow your fuckin' heads off. All of you!" Carter added.

Slowly, the cultist got down on their knees and then lay down upon the floor. The last to do so was Fletcher. He locked eyes with Carter and stared at him intently as he finally complied.

Marc looked over Carter, "You ready to do this so we can get the hell out of here."

"Past ready," Carter said. He then turned to the prostrate cultists, "Sorry, guys, I'm going to have to piss on your parade."

Carter set the shotgun down on one of the benches where it would be well out of the reach of any of the cultists. He then walked over to the dais.

Carter studied the diagram. It was over eight feet across and it was definitely the diagram from the first page. The lines had been carved with precision and, into each line, a small amount of what was undoubtedly his blood had been allowed to stain the concrete. All Carter had to do now was add a couple of extra symbols, recite a few lines and the doorway to Zul-Bha-Sair would be closed forever.

"Would you stop staring at the damn thing and get on with it?" Marc asked impatiently.

Carter ignored him. He needed to make sure that he did everything just right. The symbols need to be inscribed in the right places and then he needed to stand in the center of the diagram when he recited the incantation. Satisfied that he knew where to place the runes he took the knife from his pocket.

He opened the knife. The blade had a matte black finish and looked razor sharp. He pressed the blade up against his right index finger, trying to work up the courage to cut himself.

With a sharp intake of breath, Carter pulled back on the knife, cutting a vertical line into his finger. Crimson blood slowly oozed from the wound. He knelt down on the dais and, gritting his teeth against the pain, began to painstakingly draw out the runes with his cut finger.

The task seemed to take forever as every line that Carter drew drew more and more energy out of him. He found himself having to take breaks between drawing runes. By the time he finished the last rune he was dizzy, the room slowly spinning around him. He struggled to stand but collapsed and fell off of the dais, landing heavily on the ground.

"You OK over there?" Marc asked him.

Carter pressed his eyes shut against the vertigo, "I think so, give me a minute."

"Try to hurry it up, it's after two and I don't know when more of these guys' friends will be showing up."

"OK, OK," Carter said. He groaned and tried to slow down his breathing.

He took long deep breaths and after a few minutes the dizziness began to fade. He slowly opened his eyes and found that the room was no longer spinning. His legs and arms still felt weak but he was able to roll over and push himself up to his knees. Even with the dais for support, he wobbled as he staggered to his feet.

Concentrating on his movements, he climbed back up onto the dais and stood in the center of the diagram. Once there, following the directions on the paper, he raised up his arms and repeated the transliterated incantation.

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Mordiggian Zul-Bha-Sair wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Carter repeated that single sentence six more times, growing louder with each repetition. With each repetition, he felt even more energy being drained out of him. He again began to feel dizzy and an icy coldness began to spread up from his legs.

When Carter finally spoke the last syllable, he fell down onto his knees with a triumphant smile upon his face. He had never felt more exhausted in his life but he had done it.

Slowly, the dizziness left him and his eyes began to refocus. He saw that the cult members were getting to their feet. August Fletcher was again staring at him. Upon his face was a look of great satisfaction. Confused, Carter looked over at Marc.

Marc was still standing there. He, too, had a big smile on his face. He was now pointing his rifle, not at the cult members, but at him.

"What, What's going on?" Carter asked weakly.

"I think it should be obvious at this point." Marc said.

"May I enlighten the boy, Brother McConnell?" Fletcher asked.

"Of course, Master." McConnell said and gave a slight bow.

"Carter...", he stopped, "would someone help him to his feet," Fletcher glared at the robed cultists.

Horn and one of the other cultists ran over and, putting their hands under his arms, jerked him roughly to his feet.

"Ahhh, that's better," Fletcher began, "Carter, you belong to a blessed lineage. It was your grandfather and

namesake who discovered the most holy texts and taught us the power of the great Charnel God."

"Then why have you been killing off my family then?" Carter demanded.

"Some branches must be pruned for any tree to remain healthy," Fletcher replied.

"Was that all my father was to you, dead wood?"

"We were not responsible for that. Indeed, before I became the Master of our order he held that exalted position, as had his father before he became the most blessed servant of Mordiggian," Fletcher said and then his eyes narrowed, "No, it was your bitch of a mother who murdered him."

"No, you're a liar!" Carter screamed. He struggled against those who held him but was too weak break their grip.

Fletcher continued as if Carter had said nothing, "She discovered your father's plans, our plans for you. She shot him down with the very pistol you threatened me with and then spirited you away before we could take you."

Carter shook his head slowly, not wanting to believe what he was hearing.

"The truth does not care if you believe in it, boy. With the date of our Lord's coming we knew that she would never allow you to return here and so she had to be... disposed of," Fletcher said, a broad smile on his face.

"And my uncle?"

Fletcher spat, "He betrayed us, betrayed the holy family. He stole several critical documents and hid them in his safe deposit box. He played right into our hands, though. His death brought you to us and then you retrieved those texts for us."

"This has all been a ruse? You killed my mom, my uncle and Kim just to get some papers out of a box in the bank?" Carter said in disbelief.

"That is a rough assessment yes," Fletcher agreed, "Your mother was killed to bring you here. Your uncle was killed for that reason as well as to retrieve the sacred texts that he had stolen from us. The girl was killed simply so that we could plant the seeds of trust in you for our Brother McConnell."

"But why all this, dragging me up here. Having that bastard break me out of jail..."

"Those translations that we *allowed* you to find were fakes. The Ritual of Return calls for the Scion to complete the Great Circle willingly. Since you weren't amenable to doing it on your own, we arranged some guidance."

Carter sagged in the cultists' grip. He had thought that he had won, that he had managed to elude them at every step but he had been playing into their hands the entire time.

In Carter's state of exhaustion, the shock of these revelations was making it difficult for him to remain conscious. As he fought back the darkness he heard heavy footsteps approaching.

He looked up and saw the thing, his grandfather, approaching. Instead of the usual suit and fedora he wore dark crimson robes similar to those worn by Fletcher. As he, it, walked up to the cultists they all turned and bowed.

"Ahhh, good," Fletcher said, "your grandfather has arrived."

"That thing is not my grandfather!" Carter croaked.

It turned its faceless head towards him. Carter felt a voice in his mind, cutting into his brain like a razor, *"Indeed, I am Dr. Carter Julius Pearson. Born in the year 1899, I was transfigured by Holy Mordiggian's great power in 1981, on the day of your birth."*

"Chosen Pearson is living proof of His great power," Fletcher said reverently.

Carter's mind, under the weight of all of this, was nearing collapse, "What are you going to do with me now?" he said weakly.

"The Seventh Wanderer is nearing the nearing the Third House of Azathoth and soon, Blood of my Blood we shall pour you out upon the Great Circle. You shall serve as the catalyst for our Lord's return."

Carter struggled weakly in his captors' grips, "No!" he shouted, "This isn't real. This can't be happening!" he began to laugh hysterically.

His grandfather stepped up to him and bent low until his hideous skull was level with Carter's own, *"Oh yes, Scion, it is all very real and, very soon, you shall die so that this world may be reborn."*

Carter continued to giggle as his grandfather gathered him up in its inhumanly strong arms. He lay there, curled in its arms, still laughing. It took its putrid hand and placed it gently over Carter's face and he felt himself become limp. Blackness edged in around his vision. No matter how hard he tried to fight it, the darkness kept edging in closer and closer and soon he knew no more.

Chapter 10

Carter regained consciousness fitfully. He had just had the most terrible nightmare. It had been so vivid but at the same time it had been so very surreal. His body ached all over from thrashing around. Slowly he opened his eyes.

Carter sat bolt upright and a lance of pain shot through his head. He muffled a curse with his hand. He stared wide eyed around at the room that he was in. He gasped in horror. It had not just been a nightmare. He was in the asylum. He looked at his watch. It was almost four a.m. Soon they would be coming for him.

Carter blinked his eyes several times, willing for his bedroom to materialize around him. He then tried pinching himself, going so far as to strike himself across the face.

Carter rubbed his sore cheek as the irrefutable reality set in. He began to cry. Huge and hopeless sobs wracked his body. He was going to die here and there was nothing that he could do about it.

He sat there for many uncounted minutes until the sobs finally subsided. His earlier exertions had left him with almost no energy left to move. He thought about lying back down and waiting for them to come and take him away.

They had played him like a fool from the very moment he had arrived in Arkham. Not even that, since before he left Chicago, when they had convinced him that his mother had committed suicide. He had no family left, no human family anyway.

The only family he had left was going to sacrifice him to its dark god. Carter's entire life had been shattered in the space of a few short weeks. Everything that he thought that he knew about himself and those closest to him had been nothing but lies. He lay back down on the floor and tried to wait out his final minutes in peace but found that he could not.

Carter began to feel angry about his situation. About how he had been lied to his entire life. He was even angry at how his mother, in her attempt to protect him for this, had led him to this fate.

In this anger, Carter began to find a new resolve. He knew that he was going to die. There was no way that he was going to be able to leave this asylum alive but that did not mean he would have to make it easy for them.

Carter sat up again. The pain that lanced through his head was less sharp this time. He looked around, taking better stock of his surroundings.

The room that Carter found himself in seemed to be one of the smaller treatment rooms. It had the standard bare cement floor and ceiling. The brick walls had been painted that off yellow color that was present in much of the rest of the asylum. Several wire covered light fixtures provided a harsh white illumination. It was only about fifteen feet long and maybe half of that wide. A large, stainless steel examination table was bolted to the floor at the far end. Dry and cracked leather straps were attached to it where the feet, wrists and head would lay. A rolling instrument cart sat near the table. A steel counter top ran the length of one side of the room and a series of steel cabinets ran along the other.

Carter stood up on shaky legs and went over the the cart. The top surface of the cart was devoid of instruments. He pulled open each of its several drawers.

Most of the drawers were empty or contained old junk, rotting rubber tubing, a brittle tourniquet or shattered glass. In the very bottom drawer he finally found something of interest. A scalpel.

The scalpel was very old. The stainless steel handle had held up well but the carbon steel blade was another matter. It was pitted and stained with rust. Though it had lost much of its edge the point was still sharp. Carter decided that it was worth hanging onto. It would make a weapon in a pinch, a pathetic weapon, but better than no weapon.

Carter began searching through the cabinets and found more of the same type of medical detritus that he had found in the instrument cart. He was about to give up when he noticed something underneath a brittle pile of old surgical gloves. He moved the gloves aside and pulled out a pair of forceps.

They were small and very slender. They were also quite bent. They would no longer close and would be useless to try and pick anything up with. Carter looked over at the door and he got an idea. He took the forceps over to the door and sat down.

He took hold of one of the ends of the forceps. It was narrow and very slender. It looked as though it would fit into the lock. If he could just manage to pick the lock with this, well then it would be a miracle, he admitted to himself. Not having any better options, he decided to try anyway.

Carter gently inserted to forceps into the lock and began to jiggle it around. He had no idea what he was doing exactly. He had only a basic idea of how a lock worked. He knew that the groves the key would move pins within the lock that would then allow the bolt to turn, unlocking the door. He was not quite sure how a relatively strait rod would accomplish this but it seemed to work on TV.

After several minutes of fruitless effort Carter decided that a new approach was called for. Since he was trying to manipulate the pins inside the lock, he tried pressing his ear up against it as he moved the forceps. Carter could now faintly hear the pins clicking up and down as he worked. No matter how he tried to maneuver the forceps, though, he could not get any of the pins to stay in the up position. Every time he heard a pin click in the up position he would then hear it fall back down.

Carter began to grow frustrated. He was running out of time. He glanced quickly at his watch and found

that he had only about ten minutes they would be coming to get him. He shoved the forceps back into the lock. He tried being more aggressive with them, thinking that if he applied enough pressure then he could get the pins to unlock.

As the minutes ticked by he grew more and more frantic. He tried pushing up the pins harder and at more extreme angles. His ear began to hurt for pressing it to the door as he desperately listened for the faintest sound of success. Suddenly he felt the forceps give and they snapped off in his hand.

Carter stared at the broken forceps dumbly and then at the lock. He could barely see the jagged piece of metal sticking out of the lock.

With the other side of the the forceps, Carter frantically tried to remove the broken piece from the lock. He began to panic, looking at his watch again. They would come for him in less than five minutes. He had to get out of there.

Screaming in frustration, Carter threw the forceps. He then stood up and began to pound repeatedly upon the door, yelling for help. He kicked the door and continued to yell until he became hoarse.

After several minutes Carter stopped his pounding and leaned against the door, exhausted and breathing heavily. As he stood there and tried not to cry again, he heard the lock on the door begin to turn.

Carter began to panic. They were coming for him.

Quickly he reached down and picked up the rusty scalpel. He hid as much of it as he could up his sleeve, knowing that he would only get one chance at this.

Carter did not know how many they would send for him but if he was quick enough maybe he could overpower them or at least knock them down long enough for him to get away.

The lock clicked as it was fully disengaged and Carter saw the door knob begin to turn. As he watched it, time seemed to slow down and seconds ticked by like hours. He could feel the adrenaline flowing through his body. He had never felt so alive as he did at this moment. If he was going to stay alive he would need every ounce of his remaining strength.

The door slowly opened up. On the other side of the door stood his grandfather and McConnell. McConnell had an evil grin on his face. Seeing him standing there the grin faltered slightly but quickly returned.

"It is time," he said.

Carter said nothing as his grandfather reached out to take hold of him. He steeled himself to attack as the fetid hand came nearer and nearer. He felt his pulse quicken and everything seemed to slow down.

Just before his grandfather took hold of him, Carter dodged to the side. He let the scalpel slide out of his sleeve and took a firm grip on it with his hand. Pushing up with all his strength, he plunged the scalpel into his grandfather's faceless skull, embedding it where its right eye socket should have been.

A fountain of black ichor spurted from the wound. Carter clamped his hands over his ears as a high pitched scream filled his head. The thing that had once been his grandfather flailed its arms around. McConnell was in the process of drawing his pistol when, as it stumbled backwards, it crashed into him. The creature then struck

the wall and slide down onto the ground.

The force of the impact threw McConnell back against the wall with a sickening crunch. His pistol was sent flying from his hand and went skidding across the concrete floor.

Carter saw the pistol and then dived after it, trying to reach it before any of his captors had a chance to recover. He was just about to close his hand around the pistol when he felt a hand grip on to his ankle like a vice. He was yanked backwards and fell crashing to the floor.

Carter fell and stars exploded in front of his eyes as his head bounced off of the floor. There was a sharp pain as he bit down on his tongue and the taste of blood filled his mouth.

Carter looked back and saw that his grandfather had grabbed a hold of his ankle. The scalpel was still sticking out of the mottled flesh of its head, the wound flowing with black ichor.

His grandfather then began to pull him backwards. Carter clawed at the floor trying to resist but the pull was very strong. He began to flail his legs and try to kick it in the face.

As Carter struggled, he began to inch his way back towards the gun. It lay almost within his reach, merely six inches away from his grasp.

Carter struggled closer and closer when he suddenly felt a sharp, stabbing pain in his leg. He let out a scream and looked back towards his grandfather.

The creature had pulled the scalpel from out of its head and then had plunged it deep into his left calf. His grandfather pulled and twisted upon the scalpel sending excruciating pain lancing up his leg.

Carter writhed in agony as the blade was snapped off inside of his calf. His grandfather then raised the broken scalpel and prepared to plunge the jagged edge into his leg again.

Screaming in pain, Carter brought up his wounded leg and kicked it out, striking his grandfather in the head. For a moment, he felt the vice like grip upon his other leg slacken. He took the opportunity and lunged forward, his fingers reaching out for the pistol grip.

As he felt his grandfather take hold of his leg again he felt his fingers touch the textured grip of the pistol but, before he could get a firm grip, he was again being dragged backwards.

Carter cried out in despair. He was so close. Desperately he fumbled the pistol towards him. With a cry of triumph, he felt his hand close fully around the pistol.

Carter twisted over onto his back and pointed the muzzle directly at the center of his grandfather's skull. The putrid face of the skull betrayed no emotion but inside his head he heard a scream of fear cut across his psyche like razor sharp claws.

Carter squeezed the trigger and the pistol bucked in his hand. The report was deafeningly loud it echoed off of the concrete and brick.

A hole suddenly appeared in his grandfather's head. Black ichor spurted from it, covering Carter with the foul smelling liquid.

Carter squeezed the trigger again and again and again in rapid succession. At such close range, he did not miss and three more holes joined the first. The ichor now poured from the thing that had once been his

grandfather's head, forming a large pool on the concrete.

The thing's body shuddered violently and began to spasm. It collapsed onto the floor, its limbs thudding dully. The creature's dying screams began to fade from his brain.

The wild flailing of its limbs was slowly fading away, leaving the corpse twitching on the ground. He kicked his leg free of its grasp and slid himself backwards. Trying to get away from it.

Carter tried to calm his breathing, which was coming in short rapid gasps. Involuntary groans escaped his lips as intense pain radiated up from his wounded leg. He looked down at it and saw that the leg of his sweat pants was soaked in blood and that it was beginning to pool on the concrete floor.

Carter tried to stand but found that his injured leg could barely support his weight. Every time he flexed his wounded calf, the embedded scalpel blade sent waves of fresh agony over him. He would have to find a way to remove it if he was going to be able to walk out of here.

As the adrenaline began to drain from his system, Carter began to look around. He wondered why no one had come to aid these cultists. He did not think that it was possible that the struggle had not been heard, especially with the four gunshots.

Carter did not have time to worry about that right now. He just needed to take the reprieve as a blessing and worry about how he was going to remove the scalpel blade from his leg and staunch the flow of blood before he passed out.

On one leg, Carter hopped over the still corpse of his grandfather and back into the treatment room. He figured that broken forceps could be used to pry the metal piece from his leg. He sat down on the floor and took up the forceps. He rolled up the leg of his sweat pants and looked at the wound.

Blood was leaking from the wound at an alarming rate and was already starting to form a puddle where he sat. The way that his grandfather had twisted the scalpel around had left an almost circular, funnel shaped wound that was over an inch in diameter in his calf. Through the blood he could just barely make out the broken end of the scalpel blade sticking in his flesh.

Carter gritted his teeth as he dug the broken forceps into the wound and attempted to pry out the broken blade. Waves of pain and nausea buffeted him as he worked and a strangled scream escaped him. Just as he felt as though he would pass out he managed to work the scalpel blade out of the wound. He picked up the rusted piece of jagged metal and threw it away from him. Now he just needed to find some way to stop the bleeding.

Carter took off his sweatshirt. He shivered in the chill air as he used the shirt to fill the wound as much as possible. He then took the sleeves and wrapped them around his calf, grunting as he pulled them tight and tied them together. He hoped that would hold, at least until he was able to find some real medical attention.

Carter struggled to his feet. There was less pain this time. Though it was still excruciating, he at least felt that he could limp his way out. As he started to make his way out of the treatment room he heard a groaning in the hallway. It was McConnell.

McConnell still lay where he had fallen, slumped against the wall. He was now dressed in the same mottled green gray robes of the cult. There was a slight trail of blood that streaked down the wall where he had cracked

his head upon impact. He was moaning softly and gingerly probing his wound with his hands.

McConnell looked up when he saw Carter's shadow fall over him. When he saw Carter standing over him with the pistol in his hand, all of the color drained from his face.

His eyes grew wide as he began to sputter incoherently. Carter did not bother to listen to him. Instead he pointed the pistol at McConnell's head and squeezed the trigger.

There was another deafening report and McConnell's whole body jerked. His head slammed into wall with a sickening crack, leaving behind a large splatter of blood. His head then slumped forward, leaving the blood to pool into his lap.

Carter grimaced as he looked down at the corpse of the person that he had once thought was his friend. He wanted to throw the pistol away from him but he knew that he would need it if he was to make his escape. Coming back to Arkham had been the worst mistake of his life. He needed to get the hell out of there.

Painfully, Carter limped down the hallway. When he reached the main branch he found that he was about halfway down the treatment section of the maximum security wing. As he walked into the corridor he discovered why none of the other cultists had come after him. A loud, rhythmic chanting was coming down the hall from the direction of the large treatment room.

Despite the distance, Carter could discern that the chant was in that strange alien language. The sound was unnaturally low pitched and the floors and walls seemed to vibrate in resonance with it. As Carter listened to the chanting, it began to grow louder and louder. He began to worry.

Carter feared that they might be able to finish the ritual without him. They had already used his blood and tricked him into completing the Great Circle. He looked down at the pistol in his hand. He needed to be sure. He was going to put an end to this once and for all.

Limping as fast as he could, Carter struggled down the hallway. The air had gotten even colder now and there was a thick layer of frost forming on the walls and the floors. He nearly slipped upon the frost and tried to suppress a scream as his leg protested the sudden shift of his weight. He was forced to slow his progress to a crawl. He began to shiver as the cold grew more and more intense as he neared the door.

When Carter finally reached the door he reached out his hand to turn the door knob. He jerked back his hand in surprise. The door knob was hot. It was not burning hot but it was uncomfortably so. Reaching out his hand again he turned the door knob and pulled open the door.

The temperature difference from inside of the room caused a great gust of hot wind to blast him in the face. The temperature inside the treatment room was sweltering. A thick foul smelling mist hung just about the ground. The room inside was almost completely dark. All the lights from earlier had been turned off and the only light emanated from the candles and the large candelabras that had been arranged around the dais.

Instead of yellow light, all of the candles emitted an eerie green flame that flickered violently of its own accord.

The room was now full of cultists. They appeared to number in the hundreds, their shadowy, robed figures

barely visible as the stood around the dais.

They stood in front of the benches chanting in unison. They had their arms raised high over their heads as they swayed back and forth rhythmically.

Near the dais stood August Fletcher. He stood with his arms outstretched. In one hand he held a long bladed dagger. The blade was thick and it seemed to undulated as if it was trying to wriggle free from the hilt. Fletcher moved his arms around in such a manner that it appeared as if he was a conductor leading an orchestra.

The chanting continued to grow louder. The floor beneath Carter was quivering in time with it. The cultist swaying became more and more frantic and the chant appeared to be nearing its crescendo. He knew that he did not have much more time.

Carter raised the pistol and pointed it at Fletcher. He again squeezed the trigger.

The gun again bucked in his hand but the sound of the gunfire was lost in the volume of the chanting. He looked at Fletcher but the old man continued on unperturbed. Carter had missed.

Carter noticed that his hand was shaking. He tried to control it but was unable to and he brought up his left hand to steady his aim. He fired again and continued to fire until the slide of the pistol locked back.

Fletcher suddenly looked stricken. Several spots of dampness began to form on his crimson robes. He saw Carter for the first time and their eyes locked briefly before they rolled back into his head and he slumped over the dais.

Suddenly the chanting stopped as the cultist saw their master fall dead in front of them. Almost as one they turned to look at him. Carter pointed the now empty pistol at them uselessly.

Before any of them could act, there was a loud crack and a sudden intake of air. The robes of the cultists fluttered in the wind as it seemed as though all the air in the room was being drawn in towards the dais.

The flames of the candles began to burn low as all the heat of the room was suddenly gone, leaving a thin layer of ice over everything. The cultist all turned back towards the dais.

The body of August Fletcher was now hovering several feet above the dais, the blood from his wounds still flowing out.

The assembled cultists gasped as the Fletcher's body began twist and writhe. It stretched and bent, seemingly boneless, in impossible ways. The corpse then began to collapse in on itself until it had completely vanished.

A tearing sound echoed throughout the room. A long silver rift suddenly appeared above the dais. A hush fell over the assembled cultists, as one, held their collective breathe.

Then Carter saw it. A terrible shape appeared and began to ooze out of the tear. It looked like a black fog pouring out of the hole in reality. It seemed to be both solid and insubstantial at the same time. A liquid shadow coalescing upon the dais.

The cultists began to let out ecstatic cries.

"Hail Mordiggian!"

"Behold the Charnel God!"

"Glory to the Lord of Zul-Bha-Sair!"

As Carter heard the exultant chorus from the cultists, he fell upon his knees in shocked disbelief. The pistol slipped slowly from his hand and clattered upon the floor.

He had failed. He had been defeated at every turn and now, in his final attempt to stop them, he had been the cause of their elder god being reborn into this world.

Carter did not understand it. His grandfather had said that his blood would be required for the ritual but Fletcher's blood had had the same effect. Defeated and utterly without hope, Carter sat there, waiting for the end to come.

The living darkness upon the dais began to rise up. The blackness seemed to writhe and boil as it took shape. A vague outline became apparent. The elder god slowly reared back its head.

It had the general form of a giant serpent. Its outline shifted and undulated making it altogether unsettling to behold. Its great head had deep eyeless sockets and, below that, its long maw hung open revealing rows of needle like teeth.

Three sets of crab like arms extended from its torso. Each arm had too many joints and ended in six long, skeletal fingers. From its back sprung a pair of great wings. They were folded back, giving Mordiggian the appearance of having a great, shadowy cloak.

A long serpentine tail extended from its torso. It coiled many times around the dais flexing and pulsing against it.

Several of the robed cultists broke from the seething throng and rushed up to the dais and prostrated themselves before their god.

Carter pressed shut his eyes against the unholy sight he was witnessing. He knew that he was about to die. At any moment the cultists would again notice his presence. They would drag him forward to the dais and sacrifice him to their dark god.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion. It sounded as if a roll of thunder was crashing through the room. Carter opened his eyes and immediately wished that he had not.

The unholy beast reared up until its head brushed the ceiling and then let off a bellow of rage. The plaster on the walls split and chunks of plaster crumbled from the ceiling. The floor shook with such violence that Carter believed it was a miracle that the asylum continued to stand.

The cultists began to cower before it, their calls of exultation turning to cries of confusion and fear.

Mordiggian lashed out with one of its skeletal claws and dragged one of the nearby cultists up into the air. The doomed man let out a shriek and struggled against the grip that held him fast. Suddenly, the struggle stopped.

Before Carter's horrified eyes the man began to melt. A stream of foul smelling liquid began to flow out from beneath his robes. In a few moments the cultist had completely dissolved and the elder god threw the now empty robes to the side.

The remaining cultists in front of it tried to retreat but it was already too late. With powerful strokes of its arms it lashed out at its worshippers. They screamed as its claws tore through them. With brutal strikes, it ripped them in half, pulling limbs from bodies, and severing heads.

The horrified cultists tried to press themselves as far back away from the unholy being that they had summoned as possible. Most cried out in fear but some were still calling out its praises. A few more rushed forward to the dais, eager for the opportunity to be ripped to shreds by their god.

Carter had been too horrified to move but as the cultists nearest to the door began to struggle to escape he snapped back to reality. The first cultist that ran out of the door crashed into him, knocking him to the ground.

Carter screamed in agony as another tripped over his wounded leg. He knew that if he did not move soon that he would be trampled under the panicked feet of those who were now trying to flee.

Another cultist ran past him and he grabbed at their ankle. Carter heard her scream in fear as she came crashing down. She struggled to her feet but he had already got a grip on her robes, using them to pull himself up. She tried to kick him away but, once he had reached his feet he yanked her robes and tossed her into the oncoming path of more fleeing cultists.

Carter began to run as fast as his throbbing leg would allow him to and limped as slow as his fear would allow.

The cultists running past him would try to knock him down or push him into the way of the others who were struggling to escape. He fought them off as best as he could, struggling to stay as far ahead as was possible. The terrified screams were still coming from behind him and he could hear the sound of blood as it splashed against the walls.

Carter clawed his way through the door and out into the second floor cell block. As he rushed one of the cell doors he could hear the pounding of the cultist that was still trapped in there.

When he finally reached the spiral staircase he found it to be almost impassable. Trampled bodies were clogging up the narrow stairs and it jerked and swayed as the sheer weight of those trying to use it was beginning to tear it loose from the wall.

Carter remembered that there was another staircase in the next cell block. He limped down the hallway and found that it was completely deserted. Carter leaned heavily on the railing as he painfully limped down the stairs.

Upon reaching the ground, Carter once again found himself caught up in the press of escaping cultists. They tore at him, leaving long, painful scratches against his bare back and chest. He tripped and fell and was buffeted by the running legs of those rushing to get by him.

Desperately, Carter reached out and grabbed the arm of the passing cultist. He attempted to shake him off but Carter was able to use his momentum to regain his feet.

Carter soon found himself in the atrium of the asylum. A mob of frantic cultists were clawing and pounding at the locked front door. Others had broken out the windows and were trying to pull the rusted iron bars loose.

As Carter headed towards the basement steps, he heard renewed screams from the terrified cultists. He

looked back and saw Mordiggian flow down through the doorway and into the atrium.

The air temperature in the atrium dropped rapidly as Mordiggian entered. Throwing aside all in its path, the profane god swept into the middle of the atrium. It grew up to the full height of the ceiling as it bellowed again.

Carter nearly fell again as the ground shook. Chunks of the ceiling fell all around him. He threw up his arms to prevent them from striking him on the head. The remaining glass shattered, the razor sharp pieces cutting into to the cultists nearest the windows.

Mordiggian then lunged down and began to tear into them. The high pitched screams cutting off in strangled gurgling noises. A wash of blood flowed across the atrium floor towards Carter.

Carter turned away from the grisly scene and tried not to vomit. He flung himself into the stairwell and slammed the door shut and braced himself against it, wishing that there was a way to lock it.

When there were no immediate attempts to breach the door, Carter half limped, half fell down the staircase. His momentum was so great that he slammed into the wall when he reached the bottom.

Carter's head bounced off of the wall and he nearly passed out while the sharp stab of agony from his leg sent him to the floor. He dragged himself over to the basement door and used its handle to pull himself up right.

Carter flung open the door and went through it. He slammed shut the door and found himself standing in the basement hallway. He was alone for the first time since it all began.

Carter took a moment to breathe. It had become ragged and strained and he felt light headed. He knew that he could not stop for long and after only a few seconds of rest he began down the hallway.

Even through the concrete ceiling, Carter could hear the screams of those trapped above. The asylum began to shake more violently and more frequently. He was sure that the old building would collapse upon him at any moment.

The hallway was only about one hundred feet long but Carter felt that it was taking him forever to cross it. As the building continued to quake, he struggled to go faster trying to ignore the stabbing pain in his leg.

Carter fell several times. Each time he dragged himself along for several feet before he struggled to stand again. By the time that he reached the workshop that he had entered the asylum through, he felt as though he was going to pass out. Black, flashing spots floated across his vision and he felt as though he could no longer breathe.

Carter flung open the door and propelled himself into the workshop. He stumbled through the dark room, looking for the hatch to the surface. The building was shaking so hard now that the concrete ceiling was splitting and pieces of it were crashing down around him.

Finally he found the staircase and, on hands and knees, crawled up it. When he finally reached the metal hatch to the surface he tried to push it open, only to find that he did not have the strength to push it open.

With a strength borne of absolute desperation, Carter placed his back against the hatch and pushed up as hard as he could with his legs. His injured leg screamed in pain. As he pushed, he felt the door begin to give

way.

With a primal scream, Carter gave the door another blow and the rusted metal door squealed with protest as it flung open.

Dazed, Carter dragged himself onto the grass and began to crawl away from the asylum. He continued to crawl until he could no longer drag himself forward. Finally, He rolled over onto his back, gasping for breath.

The dark spots flashing in front of his eyes were growing more numerous and were beginning to block out his vision.

Through the black haze he could just make out the asylum in its final death throes. The cupola had collapsed into the atrium and several of the walls had collapsed, sending debris flying in all directions. Even the asylum wings were beginning to fall apart. Their roofs collapsing as they shook back and forth. It was as if some great force had grabbed them by the end and was shaking them apart.

The roar of the collapsing structure filled his ears as consciousness slowly began to fade from him. In his last thoughts, Carter hoped that he would awaken before the police arrived, otherwise he would have a lot of explaining to do.

Epilogue

Carter woke up to the sounds of sirens in the distance. He shivered as he lay in the cold wet grass. His leg was still throbbing and he felt dizzy. As he opened his eyes he saw that the steadily lightening sky overhead was spinning in lazy circles.

Carter groaned and sat up, looking at the crumbling ruin. The asylum had completely collapsed. No part of it stood more than a few feet high. Fires burned sporadically throughout the rubble where the building's gas lines had ruptured. There was no sign of any of the cultists or their profane elder god.

Carter was having trouble concentrating. He knew that he had lost a lot of blood. He was still losing blood. The makeshift bandage on his leg had soaked through.

In the distance, Carter saw several fire trucks scream up to the street, pulling to a stop in front of the asylum. Firefighters leapt from the trucks and began their work to try to contain the fire and search for survivors.

Carter thought about walking over to them to see if they could patch up his leg but on the heels of the fire trucks, two police cars sped onto the scene.

He struggled to his feet and, hoping that he was not being observed, began limping back down the street and towards McConnell's truck.

Even the wall surrounding the asylum had collapsed but with his bad leg it proved too treacherous for Carter to walk across. He was forced to crawl upon his hands and knees. The sharp edges of the ruined concrete and remains of the barbed wire cut into his palms and knees, painfully.

Eventually, Carter crossed the ruined wall and stood up on the other side. He tried to limp as nonchalantly as possible along the sidewalk. He knew that he must stick out like a sore thumb since he was not wearing a shirt in the cold, pre-dawn October air. Carter was lucky. Intent upon their tasks, he was able to escape the scene unnoticed by both the police and the firefighters.

Carter limped down the street towards McConnell's truck. He had no idea if it was open or if he would even be able to start it but at this point he had no better ideas.

After what seemed like twice the distance that it had been before, Carter reached the truck. He limped up to the driver's door and tried to open it. It was locked. Desperate for a way to get out of there, Carter looked around for anything that he could use to get into the truck.

Most of the houses around him had been abandoned and were in various stages of decay. Carter looked through the nearby yards and eventually found a nearby house that the bricks of its foundation was coming loose.

Carter carefully pried out one of the bricks. As he did so he imagined the entire structure collapsing down on top of him, such was his luck. He eventually freed the brick. He walked back over to the truck and, hefting it, he threw it through the passenger window.

The window spider webbed and bent inwards but remained intact. The brick fell down onto the sidewalk and broke into two pieces.

Carter cursed and picked up the largest of the two pieces. Throwing it with what little strength that he had left, he managed to break out the window. He carefully brushed any remaining glass from the window.

The truck had no visible door lock knob and Carter had to pull himself up on the truck to reach inside to pull on the door latch to open it.

Once open, he was able to use to power door locks to unlock the driver door. He shut the passenger door and walked around to the driver door.

The height of the truck had proved to be a challenge before his leg had been injured and now Carter found it to be a real struggle. He fell down several times but was eventually able to climb up into the seat. He was not surprised but was extremely disappointed when there were no keys in the ignition.

Unwilling to give up hope, Carter looked around the trucks interior, searching through the center console and glove box. He hoped that McConnell had left a spare key somewhere inside. With a cry of triumph, he found a small key box mounted under the dashboard by the steering column. He opened it and found that was indeed an spare key for the truck.

Carter put the key in the ignition and the truck roared to life. He began to drive back to his uncle's house. He did not figure that since he had been captured and none of the other cult members had appeared to have survived the night that they would not be looking for him.

Carter drove back across town slowly. Whether it was the numerous blows to the head, physical exhaustion, blood loss or all three, he find it very difficult to concentrate on the road.

As Carter drove, he found himself repeatedly drifting out of his lane. He took drunkenly long and slow turns and skidded through traffic signals.

Luckily, the streets of Arkham were nearly abandoned at six o'clock on Sunday mornings and he was able to make the drive back without getting into an accident or being pulled over.

When Carter finally reached the house he walked up to the house and carefully pushed open the front door had been broken in from when his grandfather had attacked him. It hung loosely on its hinges and he tried his best to push it shut.

Carter struggled up the staircase and back into the master bathroom. This time he turned on the lights.

Carter retrieved the first aid kit and opened it. He took out more supplies kit and carefully started to unwrap his blood soaked shirt from around the wound in his leg.

It was still bleeding but more slowly than before. The skin around the wound was turning purple and it had swelled greatly. Carter thought that it was becoming infected. He would have to see a doctor soon.

Carter twisted open the bottle of hydrogen peroxide and gritted his teeth as he poured it into the wound. He hissed with pain as the liquid bubbled and popped. He then carefully packed the wound with bandages and secured them in place with more wrappings of gauze.

After he had finished bandaging his leg another wave of exhaustion crashed over him. He wanted to leave Arkham but he found it impossible to concentrate. He stumbled back into the bedroom and collapsed onto the bed. Upon hitting the mattress, he passed out.

Carter slept fitfully, plagued by dreams of nameless terrors. When he finally awoke he discovered that he had been asleep for almost eighteen hours. His body still ached but he felt clear headed enough to drive. He slowly stood up and set about the task of getting ready to leave Arkham forever.

Carter changed his clothing, dressing in yet more sweats. He quickly packed up his belongings and threw them into the truck. He had no intention of driving the truck all the way back to Chicago, what with him having stolen it. The broken window would also be a police magnet.

Carter drove back to Wal-Mart. His uncle's SUV was still where he had left it. He transferred his luggage to it. He got into the Expedition and started driving towards the city limits of Arkham.

Considering all that had happened to him, he should consider himself lucky to be alive. Carter tried not to think about what had transpired and what he had seen. He had seen so much horror that he was not sure that he would ever be able to live a normal life again.

Approaching the edge of town, Carter smiled for the first time in a long time as he drove past the sign informing him that he was leaving the Arkham city limits. It invited him to return soon but that would be a damn cold day in hell.

Gritting his teeth against the pain in his leg, Carter leaned back in his seat and tried to relax for the long drive back to Chicago.

* * * * *

Carter was thankful that the drive back to Chicago had been uneventful. He had stopped a few times as necessary, only when his bladder or the Expedition's gas tank required it.

On the long drive, Carter found that he had time to think. He had wondered why Mordiggian had stopped his rampage at the asylum walls and had not gone on to slaughter the entire town and probably the world. He had decided that it must have been Fletcher's blood. It had opened the doorway, but because it had not been a

proper sacrifice, it was incapable of bringing it permanently into this world. This had evidently pissed the elder god off a great deal.

Carter had had no idea what to do about the police. He could just stay in Chicago and hope that they never bothered actually looking for him but they still had his car and he was not going to be that hard to find. He sighed. He would just have to cross that bridge when he got to it.

When Carter had finally arrived back in Chicago he went to find a doctor for his leg. He had been afraid of going to his regular doctor. There was nothing wrong with Dr. Nguyen, he had been more afraid of the questions he would ask.

Instead, he had gone to find one of the many storefront doctor's that the city had to offer. The kind who would patch you up without asking too many questions.

The doctor had been competent enough. Carter told him that he had injured himself while doing some home improvement. He had nodded absently while he worked and afterward he had given Carter a prescription for antibiotics.

After the visit to the doctor, Carter had gone back to his apartment. He went into his bedroom and collapsed into a long, dreamless sleep. When he had finally woken up again he found that it was already late afternoon. The first thing he did was call Dr. Harding and not quite beg for his job back. The second thing he did was collect the liquor bottles that were left in the house and dump them all down the sink.

Carter turned on the TV and flipped over to CNN. The major story was the explosion at the Arkham Asylum. The anchor man said that there was not yet an official cause for the blast and that the State Fire Marshall was investigating.

In related news, he went on to say that Arkham was also reporting the mass disappearance of several hundred citizens, some of them who were very prominent. Due to the extremely odd nature of the disappearances and the police department's poor response, the Governor had requested that the FBI come in to take over the investigation.

As he watched the news, Carter felt a sense of peace come over him. The first time he had felt that things just might be alright after since his mother had died. Even though he had only been up for a few hours, his exertions around the apartment had made him tired again.

He turned the TV back off and, actually looking forward to going to work the next day, slid back into bed and fell into a deep sleep.

His dreams that night were disturbed by terrible nightmares. Carter relived the events of the previous days in vivid detail except that in his nightmares he never escaped.

Carter felt the cold stone of the dais underneath him. August Fletcher loomed overhead, smiling in the flickering candle light.

Fletcher gripped the dagger with both hands and plunged it down towards Carter's chest. He felt a great stabbing pain.

Carter screamed, jerking awake. Pre-dawn light filtered in through the blinds of his bedroom. He looked

around. He was definitely still in his apartment.

As his breathing slowed, Carter reminded himself that it had only been a nightmare. It was to be expected after all that he had been through.

The wound in his leg ached furiously and he decided that it was probably time to change the dressing. He limped into the bathroom and flipped on the light. The face that greeted him in the mirror was barely recognizable.

There were deep black circles underneath his eyes. His face was covered in mottled patches of bruises. Cuts in various sized criss crossed his face. Despite the fact that he had only been gone a few days, he looked like he had lost quite a bit of weight.

Carter sighed, he would be quite the sight when he went to work in a few hours. He sat down on the edge of the tub and began to remove the gauze. Blood had seeped through the dressing and stained the gauze black. When he finally removed the soaked dressing, he was horrified by what he saw.

A large patch of flesh around the wound had turned a sickly gray-green color. The smell coming off it was putrid. Black ichor seeped slowly from the wound.

Before his eyes Carter watched the putrid flesh inching outwards taking in more of his leg. He screamed and slipped off of the edge of the tub, banging his head.

Dizzy, Carter struggled to his feet, pulling himself up on the sink. As he stood up his eyes once again fell upon the mirror. He tried to scream again but found that he could not as the skin of his mouth began to seal shut, leaving nothing but featureless, decaying skin pulling tight over his skull.