

**THE
MESSAGE**

Agents of Cosmic Intelligence
An Alternate View of History

**THE
MESSAGE**

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The Human Effectiveness Institute
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for F. Scott Fitzgerald

1

Martin Williams' father was a career soldier, like his grandfather and his great grandfather, and the men in his family they talked about from long before his time. So, it was natural for him to assume that he too was going to be a soldier. But something about it bothered him from his earliest memories. As he grew older, he'd go back and ponder the source of these doubts—doubts he never expressed openly. Eventually he concluded that some very deep part of him, intrinsic to his being, felt that the job he had to do was even larger than fighting to protect free people. But that deep part of him never revealed what that big job was. He waited and hoped that someday he would understand himself at least that much, meanwhile setting about on a military career.

His parents once took him to a museum when he was very young. It was one of his earliest memories. The museum was hosting an exhibition on Venus Aphrodite, replete with statues and paintings of her throughout the ages. He imagined he knew Venus long ago, though he had no idea what that meant. When he reached puberty, he began to dream of making love with Venus. When he began dating, he picked the girls who looked like the Venus of his dreams, blonde, colorfully made up, a graceful neck, inviting, mischievously yet innocently flaunting her lush body.

Growing up, Martin noticed how often he made mistakes of one kind or another, which led him to become introspective and very observant of his own behavior, internally as well as externally. He told himself that mistakes could turn his whole life into a waste. He saw that before he acted, a flurry of conflicting impulses in his mind would present a range of possible actions, then he would *apparently choose one path and take it*. The word "apparently" appeared in his mind often, because he was well aware that reality could differ from appearances. He had become an avid reader of books on science, and science fiction novels from the age of five. He became an agnostic the more he felt drawn to science. (Nevertheless, one Christmas he was touched by the meaning of the holiday and sang baby Jesus to sleep in his mind.) To him, science meant certainty, and the avoidance of surety until the evidence was inescapable. So, he regarded whatever he thought in his mind with a grain of salt.

He noticed that right before he took any particular action, the voices or thoughts in his head intimating which action he should take could be identified as the internalized voices of his father and mother. He formed an impression of the advice each one would give him, and became given to predicting how they would advise him in whatever the current situation happened to be. He kept track of the outcomes and could tell that sometimes the advice of either parent could lead him to take an action that was regrettable. One time in self-defense he really hurt a boy more than necessary, which had been sanctioned by his mind's predicted father's advice. Another time he was so civilized with his young friends that they embarrassed him about it, his behavior having been advocated by his mind's predicted mother's advice. By the time he was ten years old, he realized he had an advisor in his mind whose track record was flawless in giving action recommendations that satisfied him in retrospect. Often that "voice" didn't even use words—it was more like a hunch he understood without having used words to explain it to himself. By age twelve, he had figured out something strange was going on. He had many, many hunches each

day, and they always turned out to be right. He also noticed that his mind made up things *like* hunches, which almost always gave bad advice. He very gradually learned to tell the difference between his real intuitions and the mock intuitions that apparently some part of his mind made up to make itself feel smart.

Once, at around age twelve, the point of view in his mind that gave him the real hunches used words for a change—words accompanied by a strong feeling of realizing a deep truth. The words were, “I am God... and so is everybody else.” That felt truly weird because he was agnostic, and totally committed to science. He tried to figure out what those words meant, and why it felt so true—like it had to be true for some scientific reason that his mind could not yet explain to him. For the rest of his life, he would work to unravel this mystery.

Ω

Captain Martin Williams, rangy and sandy-haired, was being briefed by his superior officer in a dark cave in Afghanistan. Both men used small flashlights to illuminate the map. The Major pointed to a rocky pass. “Intel says take your men through here.”

Martin had a hunch. He pointed at the next pass to the west. “What about this one?” he asked.

“Why that one?”

“Just a hunch.”

The Major looked exasperated. “Marty, don’t start that crap.”

Martin shrugged.

He gathered and moved his men relatively soundlessly through the moonless night. As they approached the pass they had been ordered to take, Martin, leading the way, held up his hand and the company halted. He picked a fireteam and pointed up to the ridge on the left. “Make a deep recon just the other side of the ridge line. If you meet resistance, dig in and protect our flank, then scramble down and rejoin us,” he ordered. “No radios unless there’s a firefight.” All their helmets

had radios. The enemy had learned how to listen in, however. The enemy was a branch of ISIL that had recently taken over the country by crushing the Taliban.

The rest of the company was surprised to be waiting in place as the four soldiers disappeared into the night. Martin kept them waiting five minutes. They heard and saw a firefight erupt just over the ridge to the west. Martin motioned his men forward at a fast trot. The 140 men ran through the pass. Noting craters in the ground, Martin figured out that the unit his fireteam had engaged had been working on zeroing in mortars on the pass they were running through, and he sprinted forward at the fastest speed he could manage. His men took the hint.

Ω

His superior apologized. “Good work, Marty. You’d have lost fewer men if I’d listened to your hunch.”

“Sir, I have a hunch you should check the source of the intel,” Martin said, and his boss nodded sensibly.

Ω

“Sir, you want to give me my own command because of my hunches?” Martin laughed out loud. Was he dreaming? This was ridiculous. Wearing dress uniform as ordered, he was meeting with a bunch of Generals in the Pentagon.

“This comes straight from the top. The president has given top secret orders. Intel confirms the existence of a psychic unit within the Russian army. We’ve got to have our own, and we’ve got a lot of catching up to do. We’ve got to assign it to somebody who we can trust, one of our own, not some civilian, although you are free to recruit civilians to work under your command. This is a mental arms race. The president feels that it could be the most important arms race we’re in,” a five-star said. “He wants this Theta Force to report to him personally.”

Martin checked in with himself, and found that this made him very excited and happy. But he had a hunch.

“Sir, may I speak plainly?” Martin asked, looking around although addressing the five-star, who was senior in the room. The general grunted and others nodded. “Sir, I could cock this up. I can train people to use their minds the way I do, I’ll need help finding people who have the raw talents both within and beyond the Army, and I can use my hunches to help protect Theta. What I can’t do while doing all that is to handle the politics of running a command that reports so high.”

“What are you asking for?” the five-star queried.

“I would like to be the executive officer of Theta, in charge of training and security. I don’t want to be the commanding officer. I’m not ready.”

The group looked at each other. They had all, including Williams, graduated from West Point, where they had been trained to want to move up the ladder as fast as possible. *This guy is weird, maybe he’s right to say he isn’t ready for command of what is probably going to be a battalion-size unit.*

“Anyone in mind?” the five-star asked.

Williams nodded. He had done his homework. “Colonel Tim Shannon,” he said. He had observed Shannon, who commanded the brigade of elite troops from all branches of service in which Williams had been just a cog. Shannon always got nearly all of his people out. Williams had a hunch that Shannon could also be trained to have hunches, and he was glad nobody asked him to explain this particular hunch, which had come to him in a dream. In the dream—set in a brightly lit place, almost too bright to see, with beautiful white ornate temples everywhere—Martin was a teacher, and Shannon was his star pupil, wearing the same bushy mustache that Shannon now sported.

The five-star looked around. Shannon’s current boss looked irritated, but in the spirit of cooperation, allowed reluctantly, “We can make do without him in Afghanistan.”

“One more request, please, sir?” Martin boldly surprised them all. He could hear the common thought in the room: *cheeky*. The senior officer nodded cautiously.

“Please don’t ever tell Colonel Shannon that you offered me his command,” Martin enjoined, and they all signaled agreement.

Ω

Seana Moon’s earliest memory was of being in a baby seat in the back of a car. Her parents, whom she loved above all else, were in the front, laughing and talking to each other. Her heart was full of happiness and everything was perfect in her life, being off on some adventure with her parents. She suddenly sensed something bad and began shrieking a wordless warning a moment before a bullet came through the driver’s side windshield.

As she grew older, she always sought out more information about the tragedy in which her parents both perished, her father killed by the bullet and her mother killed in the crash. The authorities could only surmise that it was the kind of test gangs used to decide whether to take in a newcomer.

Seana’s perfect life disappeared in an instant. First there was the horrible sound of things smashing and the unforgettably awful sounds her parents made as they died. Then the smell and smoke that made her cough and unable to breathe, none of which mattered because she only wanted to go wherever they were going. She was surrounded by frantic strangers, who manhandled her in their panic to free her from the car, and then the memories blurred as she was taken from place to place, examined, talked about as if she wasn’t there. Then some nice person would try to comfort her but she was inconsolable, crying all the time, crying herself to sleep, crying herself awake, realizing that she would never see her Mummy and Daddy again—though some part of her somehow doubted that.

When the tears finally subsided and she was able to think about what had happened, though still just a toddler, Seana had the strange idea that she herself had been the target. *Where did that terrible idea come from?* Wherever it came from, it made her hate herself. She forced herself to give up that idea and convinced herself it had not been her fault. She

took this precocious act of will before she learned to talk, never realizing how unusual that was.

Seana was taken in and brought up by her Aunt Anna and Uncle Jim. Anna made her living as a professional psychic. Jim was a car salesman and though not psychic he had seen enough to convince him that Anna's talents were real. Anna worked for wealthy people, reading tarot cards for them, and advising them accordingly. On occasion the police also called her in for help on an unsolved case.

Seana thought she saw lights in the air around Anna sometimes, and when she took a picture of Anna with her first cell phone, the photo picked up the lights around Anna's head.

Anna explained that the lights were her protectors. She pointed to one of the lights. "This is Jocko," she said. "Jocko is very big and carries a long, pointed weapon."

"A spear?" Seana asked.

"No, a directed-energy weapon," Anna disclosed.

All her young life, Seana was open to the existence of "magic"—as she thought of it—in all its forms. Nothing was impossible if you didn't rule it out in your mind, Anna had taught her. Anna taught in many ways, often dressing up the three of them (with Jim) in costumes and carrying out strange rituals. She demonstrated the use of the I Ching, Ouija board and the pendulum. She guided Seana through concentration, contemplation, and meditation exercises. She taught her how to read tarot cards, and Seana started to give readings for money so she could go to college without saddling herself with debt.

In college Seana studied philosophy and psychology. Her friends at school partied with psychedelics, from mescaline, psilocybin, and Molly, to LSD, 25i-NBOMe, and ayahuasca. Seana tried them all but always left the party early and went off alone when tripping, to do serious self-investigation and to pray for contact with God. She had no set religion but had always sensed the presence of an intelligence far greater than human.

Ω

When Tim Shannon was given command of Theta and introduced to Martin Williams as his second-in-command, the two hit it off from the start. Tim knew of Martin as one of his Company commanders, and when being briefed about plans for Theta, he was told that Williams was the only blooded combat officer in the U.S. Army who had shown any promise of having psychic abilities. Martin had learned to have great respect for Shannon, having observed him make the right strategic decisions in tough combat situations, and having seen how fraternally and protectively he treated all the men and women under his command.

Martin felt that if reincarnation happened to be true, Shannon might have long ago been his star pupil, just like in the dream.

In the early days of Theta, the two spent their time training Tim to not block his innate psychic powers, which Martin now claimed that everyone has, causing Tim to regard some of Martin's ideas with a modicum of skepticism. But there was no denying the effects: Tim soon found that he could tell his own real hunches from wishful thinking, and was amazed at the accuracy of true hunches. He also started to be able to read thoughts that Martin communicated to him.

Shannon started to recruit people and bring them into Theta, some from the U.S. armed services and some who were civilians, all now given officer status in the U.S. Army. American intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies, whose top officials had received secret orders from the president to aid in the hunt for America's psychics, tested thousands of claimed or suspected psychics, finding only a small percentage able to pass the usual tests such as the Rhine cards. Those who made the cut were presented to Tim, who then made his own assessment and decided which people to take, largely based on his own hunches.

Theta had offices in the Pentagon but its main base hid in plain view in a suburban neighborhood in Virginia. It had been

a Howard Johnson motel a long time ago. Now it masqueraded as a no-name motel that was mysteriously always sold out. Within a few months the base housed more than a hundred recruits along with Tim and Martin.

Seana was one of the first recruits. More than one intelligence agency knew that she made her living as a psychic and her clients included some of the wealthiest people in New York City. Tim was surprised by her beauty, intelligence, and upbeat nature. *This is the one woman in the world made just for me*, he thought at first blush. He didn't take the thought seriously at the time; their professional relationship strongly discouraged his paying any attention to that line of thought—besides which she was just barely an adult at twenty-one, and he was thirty-seven. Still, he found it extremely easy to talk to her and when he asked her to read his mind she did so with amazing accuracy.

“You are attracted to me, but that line of thinking is forbidden to you,” she said without embarrassment.

Now getting used to being an Army officer, she addressed him with decorum. “Sir, I can attest that I'm not the one woman in the world that was made just for you. You're a gallant hero to millions of women who watched you winning a war on television. I'm sure more than one of them would like to meet you.”

They shared an easy laugh. *It might always have to be platonic*, he thought, but he loved her already. He gave himself permission to love her as long as he didn't express his feelings in any way. He hoped she was not reading his mind right now.

“Incidentally,” he shared, “Martin and I agreed at the start of Theta that among ourselves, we would not read each other's minds except by invitation and in any emergencies.”

Seana concurred, adding, “That's what all true psychics believe too.” She had met quite a few.

Tim drove them from the Pentagon to Theta's base outside Arlington to meet Martin. When they arrived at the base, Tim inquired and was told that Martin could be found in the hot tub by the pool. The sun was just going down. Tim and Seana

dropped off their things in their respective rooms, put on their bathing suits and joined him.

Minutes later, watching from the hot tub and sipping vodka tonic from a plastic cup, Martin was galvanized seeing the two of them approach. He got it that Tim was bringing in a recruit to meet him. His mind immediately compared Seana to Venus and decided that this was not the real Venus coming back to him from his dreams or his imagination. Seana was petite whereas Venus was Junoesque. They both had wonderful curves and playful expressions, but Venus in his dreams was flirtatious while Seana projected a demure vulnerability. As she came closer, he could see that Seana had larger eyes and higher cheekbones. They were different women, though he quite appreciated Seana's appearance.

Ω

Templegard's body was sleeping in a cave in Afghanistan with his finger on a trigger. His consciousness was off in an enjoyable dream. In the dream he was on a cleaner mission in a spaceship with his comrades in arms. He recognized two of them easily, one being his former boss, Colonel Shannon, who had left the theater recently on a classified mission. Templegard was happy to see them back together.

The second one, a woman with black hair and pillowy lips, he recognized as the woman in half his dreams, so no surprise there. As always, she was alluring to him. Now she was dressed in some kind of tight-fitting black coverall. He liked the way it fit her. She smiled impishly at him.

Another woman he didn't recognize reminded him of somebody he must have once known. She was a curvy blonde with high cheekbones. He liked her right away.

And there was a man who seemed to be the leader. Templegard had never seen him before but he looked familiar somehow. Sandy hair, tall and muscular, eyes that took in everything.

They were all looking out through the huge transparent nose of the spaceship. From above the plane of the ecliptic

near Saturn, Templegard saw the ringed planet below forming a sort of line with Jupiter and Earth. He had a clear sense this was as prophesied: his partners down on Earth, who had forgotten their identities, were about to be jarred by a miracle. Templegard sent them a prayer. Then he wondered who and what he had been thinking about. After all, his partners were right here on the ship.

Ω

Just east of New York City in a brick professional building, most of his partners—who other than Shannon did not know he existed, and didn't know who they really were themselves either—were additionally unaware of the major events, mandated high in the multiverse governance, which were about to befall them.

As if all that ignorance were not enough, they had plenty of trouble already.

In the conference room with the large mirror on one wall, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Williams held up Rhine cards only he could see, and Major Jason Page tried to psychically detect the symbol on each card held up.

Behind the one-way mirror in the next room, their boss, Brigadier General Tim Shannon, sat with Congressman Warren Baynes, hearing the piped-in voices of Williams and Page, and able to see the cards over Williams' shoulder. Page was getting almost nothing right. Baynes' bejeweled face radiated disgust as he mumbled to himself. Shannon maintained an impassive exterior while noting his political stock value dropping by the second.

Williams said sympathetically to Jason, "Something distracted you during meditation."

"What was that?" Jason asked.

"Probably worrying about your score," Williams said and smiled. Neither of them looked at the one-way mirror but they knew they were both thinking of the source of pressure.

Shannon tapped the Bluetooth in his ear and said, "Try the other one." Williams flinched at the word "try", looking let

down. *Sorry... I mean run the other one*, Shannon said telepathically to Williams, hoping the other would get his message. *Williams is better than the rest of them at ESP, so maybe he will*, Shannon thought.

Williams' smile returned.

Shannon signaled Baynes to turn his chair to face another one-way mirror in the room. As they rolled their swivel chairs in that direction, the lights came on in the exercise room. Jason had shed his outer clothes as he entered the room and flipped on the lights. Behind him came Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Khan, wearing judo *gi*, followed by Williams and a pretty young woman, Seana Moon. Williams and Seana tied blindfolds over the eyes of Jason and Khan, adding high-tech "earmuffs" to block out all sound. Baynes peered hopefully at the proceedings through the one-way glass while Shannon maintained his poker face.

Stripped to the waist and barefoot, wearing only his U.S. Army fatigue pants, Jason looked like a young Black Adonis, exuding confidence. Khan looked much older and comparatively out of shape, although he obviously worked out daily.

"This fight seems kind of unequal," Baynes commented to Shannon in their dark observation room.

"Khan has been practicing blindfold fighting since he was four," Shannon disclosed.

Khan and Page began to circle. Page attacked Khan with a surprisingly well-aimed flying kick, Khan deflected it, Page rolled to his feet and continued circling.

"Wow!" Baynes said. Shannon looked grimly satisfied.

Baynes watched more attentively now. Page attacked Khan with a flying leg trip and they both went down, scuffled briefly, and came up circling.

"Why didn't you show me this first?" Baynes asked.

"That's the problem," Shannon replied. "You never know what's going to work, when."

"Sounds like all our other advanced weapons systems," Baynes muttered.

“Yeah. But we’re finding out the things that block psychic power. We’re going to discover all the blocks and learn how to keep them out of the way, someday—“

“Maybe someday—if you can show some results soon, so we can get this program put back in the budget—“ Baynes dropped the other shoe.

“Put back?” Shannon felt the bottom fall out as Baynes nodded somberly. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Why do you think I came to see you here in New York?”

Shannon turned from him and stared through the one-way mirror, bringing his sudden anger and angst under control. Page and Khan were exchanging a volley of Kung Fu attacks and parries.

“Williams sensed this coming...” Shannon mused. “You don’t know how complicated... Seana is going to turn her head and look at me.”

Baynes turned to watch Seana, thinking to himself how pretty he found her. She turned to look at the one-way mirror to where she knew Shannon was sitting, then turned back to her tablet, which showed the brainwaves of Jason and Khan.

“I knew I could make her do it just then,” Shannon said. “If I’d waited a second, the confidence would have gone, and I couldn’t have done it.”

Baynes looked interested.

“Page is looking pretty good, huh?” Shannon went on, and Baynes nodded. “He’s still embarrassed from the card test, trying to redeem himself,” Shannon continued. “Think I can make him fail in there?”

Baynes shrugged.

“We’ve got to know how to make enemy psychics fail, you know, Mr. Baynes. You don’t put our budget back in, this country is wide open to enemy psychics.”

“It’s not just up to me,” Baynes objected.

“Watch this,” Shannon said, reaching for the stars as he flicked his Bluetooth. “Seana, don’t turn your head. Encourage Page—*don’t* turn your head!”

Seana looked confused. Page at that moment body-blocked Khan, knocking the wind out of him. Khan recovered and they began to circle again.

“Hey, not bad, Jase!” Seana said. Page stopped, grinned, and started circling again.

“Can the side comments,” Williams admonished her.

“Williams heard you order her to do it—“ Baynes started questioning.

“He doesn’t want Page to guess that,” Shannon explained.

Page made a series of attacks on Khan, who fell back fending them all off, until one of his defenses unintentionally hit Page on the chin. Jason went down clutching his jaw in pain. Khan ripped off his blindfold and he, Williams and Seana reflexively went to Page’s side. Page got up, took off his blindfold, and rubbed his jaw, looking suspiciously at Seana and sheepish at the same time.

Baynes eyed his watch. “You have someone to take me to LaGuardia, Colonel?” he asked, hoping it would be Seana.

“I’ll take you,” Shannon said, sensing Baynes’ interest in Seana and sparing her Baynes’ lechery.

In the car, Shannon asked, “How much time do I have to come up with results I can show you?”

“I don’t know,” Baynes admitted. “What I also don’t know is why the hell you’re in New York. I’d think you’d be able to demonstrate results faster by keeping all Theta personnel together in your very expensively equipped main base in Virginia—“

“That was our recommendation too,” Shannon surprised him by saying.

“So why are you in New York?”

“Orders.”

“I know,” Baynes said caustically. “Orders from the president. Secret orders.” He suddenly turned to Shannon. “Did you vote for him?”

Shannon flicked a glance at him, answering, “No.”

Baynes slapped his thigh. “I haven’t found anybody that will admit having voted for him.”

“We’ve had a lot of presidents like that,” Shannon said calmly.

“We used to have great men—historic giants,” Baynes said reprovingly and passionately. Shannon glanced at him again and decided the man was deeper than he had realized.

Baynes muttered as if to himself, “The prerogative of the Executive Branch. For all I know he could be using you to spy on his political enemies and covering it with a blanket of ‘national security’.” He looked at Shannon. “You know you wouldn’t have gotten your original funding if it wasn’t for me. Now I don’t even know what you’re working on.”

This was a bluff on Baynes’ part. The president wanted Theta, and it was the president’s influence that made Theta happen, not Baynes’, but almost no one knew that. Williams had been sworn to secrecy on that very point.

“I said we couldn’t do fieldwork and demonstrate results at the same time—”

“Why New York,” Baynes pressed. “You want me to roll pork barrels with you, son, you roll pork barrels with me. Why New York?”

Shannon owed this guy. Theta couldn’t afford to lose him as their champion in Congress. He’d have to break a rule, which meant Baynes would have something on him. He had to trust Baynes. What a dumb thing to do. He did it anyway.

“That’s where... the subject is.”

“What subject?”

“The subject of surveillance.”

“Who is he?”

“Can’t... I’ve told you too much already.”

“What’s his importance?”

“He’s demonstrated... some unusual effects... he could be a very powerful psychic.”

“What are you going to do, recruit him?”

“Maybe... we don’t know where his loyalties lie... he’s a citizen now but wasn’t born here...”

“All of the top Theta people had to be sent to New York to observe one guy you *might* recruit? What does he do, part the Red Sea?”

“Mr. Congressman, you’re a pretty good agent yourself. I’ll get you your results.”

2

It is permanent night in the nuclear-proof main base of the Russian psychic force called Psychotronic Division One. It's a bustling underground city peopled by men and women clad in military-cut leatherlike black coveralls. There are brainwave, fMRI, and PET scanner laboratories, offices, weapons rooms, communications center, meeting hall and meeting rooms, dining area, a pool and gymnasium, and of course the barracks section.

In one particular room in the female officers' quarters, on one of the two beds, on top of the covers in a nightshirt, lay Nastassia Slayevsky, a stunning dark-haired fifteen-year-old girl of Chinese-Russian-Cuban descent, who happened to be one of Psychotronics' most promising new psychics in training. She lied back and closed her eyes, focusing on her breath going in and out.

She didn't really like working for Psychotronics. Inside she knew that her psychic gifts were reflections of her deep spiritual nature. Yet talk of anything spiritual was strictly forbidden in Psycho, as everyone called the unit. She had to live a lie every day because they had her parents in custody to coerce her cooperation.

And now, she was having these erotic sensations she had never experienced before.

She had orgasms in her sleep, while dreaming of the same man over and over. They had apparently spent many lives together, and she felt sure she would find him again in this lifetime.

Nastassia's erotic dreams had come to the attention of her roommate, who was a few years older than her and very understanding. Yet it was still embarrassing, so she sought to sublimate her libido into daydreams instead. Having a powerful imagination, her daydreams felt almost as good as the real thing.

She daydreamed about her dream man, and then one of the guards caught her eye and she started splitting her daydreams to include the guard, whose very common name was Ivan.

As she lay focusing on her breath, in a few moments the fog cleared in her inner vision and she could see a dark smoky room in which soldiers were playing cards and drinking vodka. She could see Ivan's rugged now stubbly face.

Ivan, she called out to him, and she could see that he had heard. He had in fact seen her eyes. *Ivan, I need you.* He tossed in his cards and stood up abruptly. The other soldiers laughed sympathetically as he had lost some money.

Soon he silently slid into her room. This had happened before. He hoped this would be the time she would go all the way. Ivan whispered, "Were you really calling me—?"

Nastassia signaled him to be silent and to come closer. He approached unsurely. She reached up and pulled his head down to whisper into his ear.

"Sergeant," she whispered.

He tried to stand up but she restrained him with surprising strength.

"Lieutenant? Can I bring you something?" he whispered, afraid to cross the line with an officer, but sorely tempted to try.

"I saw you looking at me today," she whispered.

He looked at her, trying to figure her out, then moved to kiss her. She coyly avoided the kiss.

“Sergeant,” she whispered again. He tried straightening up again but she still restrained him.

“I need...” He looked at her, barely daring to hope. “My feet are killing me...”

As she released him, he reluctantly moved to the foot of the bed and began to massage her feet.

“Oh, yes...” she whispered, making occasional hushed moans. In her imagination this was just the prelude so she was able to enjoy sex without having it, and she assumed he was doing the same. She was correct.

Ω

Williams and Seana had left the Theta offices soon after Shannon and Baynes departed, taking the elevator upstairs to his room. Her room hadn't been used since they got to New York. Recently the two had realized that they knew each other from earlier lives. They didn't remember what their relationship had been except that it had been friendly and close. They tried it on for size as lovers, which was convenient as they both had libidos and no time off. Still, neither felt sure that they were destined to be lovers forever. This transparency with each other created an ambiguity both just lived with for the time being.

First, they made love standing up in the shower and then dried off a bit and laid towels over the bedspread; he sat cross-legged on the bed and she straddled him. As she had taught him (although it somehow seemed familiar), this was called the Yab-yum position in Tantric yoga. They looked into each other's eyes and did not move. They each began to touch the other ever so lightly. He felt how soft, warm, and taut her skin was. She felt how muscular and hairy he was, and yet how gentle and caring. They had become the best of friends. She idolized him, and he adored her. Though their relationship seemed more mental than passionate, it made them both happy.

Later they dined in the room. After the waiter had come back and cleared the room, they got into bed and cuddled. He could see that something was bothering her. He kissed her ear.

“Worrying, are you?” he asked her.

“No,” she replied, “I can get along without Theta—they close it down, I go back to reading tarot cards for a living. Maybe I’d even pursue an advanced degree in psychology and see where that leads.”

“We have other even better options, you know,” Williams gently pleaded.

“We? You wouldn’t leave the Army.”

“Perhaps. But I wouldn’t let you go.”

“Marty, the Army’s your whole life.”

“Now *you* are,” he said, suddenly realizing it was true.

Ω

Williams and Seana were in Tim’s office at the close of the business day. Seana, dressed in low-cut low-back clubwear, was just about to leave.

“You look great,” Shannon said admiringly, recalling how taken he’d been with Seana when they first met. He’d played it cool for too long, however, and she and Marty had come together first. He regretted his cautious inaction more than he let show.

“I don’t feel great about this,” Seana said levelly, “I warned you it’s a waste of time. Now it’s putting us out of business. Why do I still have to go through with it?”

“Orders,” Shannon said simply.

“Orders, yeah—orders. You Army guys love that word,” she said, and went on her way.

Ω

In the back of a helicopter, his exhausted body exfiltrated, Templegard dreamed he was back with the team on the spaceship, happy to see them all. Through the transparent dome, they could now see that Earth, Jupiter, Saturn, and Uranus were nearly in a perfect line. Again, Templegard sensed something big was about to happen, something rare.

Ω

Seana took a robot taxi from Penn Station and arrived late at the upper Park Avenue address. The doorman came to help her out of the cab, admiring her legs then looking proper as he straightened up to help her over the curb. He of course wore a sidearm—all doormen in New York City did nowadays. His backup stood just inside the lobby, with an automatic rifle. The better buildings all had security backups.

“You must be Ms. Moon,” he said. “Please go right up to the penthouse. Mr. Mann’s private elevator is the one all the way on the right.” He pointed, then turned to open the door of the next arriving car.

“Thanks.” She shot friendly glances to all the security cameras she could spot as she crossed the lobby, then smiled sweetly at the one she could see in the elevator. A Hieronymus Bosch painting full of weird creatures hung in the elevator, covered with armored glass, and very securely fastened to the elevator wall.

She stepped off the elevator right into the fabulous suite and could appreciate the skyline in two directions. The butler greeted her.

“Good evening, Miss.”

“Good evening, Chumley,” she said, and left him to wonder how she knew his name and its correct pronunciation.

“Ah yes, Miss, I recall we were introduced at the party Mrs. McKenzie gave. Mr. Mann is waiting for you in the exercise room... right this way, Miss.”

He led her past spectacular art and statuary into the exercise room, outfitted with padded floors and floor-to-ceiling mirrored walls—and one wall of windows looking out at Manhattan. Nautilus equipment sat in one corner and free weights in another. Ari Mann, a handsome young man with a wiry, muscular body—showing it off by wearing only scant black underwear—sparring with his trainer Doctor Chi, dressed in judo *gi*.

Exuding a manic energy, Ari reacted to her entry by stepping up his attack. A flurry of attacks and counterattacks culminated in Ari knocking Chi to the mat with a rather cruel

blow. Chi leapt to his feet, apparently unharmed, bowed, and smilingly applauded his student and boss. Mann bowed to him briefly and stepped to Seana, moving to kiss her on the mouth. She turned her head slightly and took his kiss on the cheek.

“Delightful to see you again,” Ari said in his Israeli-Russian accent. He had been born in Russia and lived in Israel before coming to the United States.

“Same here.”

“Dr. Chi, Seana Moon,” Ari introduced them. Chi bowed.

“Pleasure,” Seana said.

Mann looked down at himself and up at her. “My apologies for greeting you like this, but when I looked out and saw the traffic I didn’t know when you’d be arriving—”

“I’m glad you could enjoy yourself while waiting,” she said.

“Let me just walk through the shower,” he said, heading for a door as Seana nodded. Chi bowed and exited.

“Would you like a drink, Miss?” the butler Cholmondeley, pronounced Chumley, asked.

“A glass of champagne, please.” The butler bowed out. Seana straightened herself in mirrors to her right and left, and looked systematically at everything in the room.

The butler returned with a champagne flute on a silver tray and served it to her. She took it gratefully and sipped. The butler bowed out. Mann entered, naked and wet, drying himself with a towel. She turned away demurely, amused. She kept her eyes on the Nautilus equipment and couldn’t see him in the mirrors until she saw his hand lifting her glass of champagne. She spun around and was amazed to see him in a tuxedo, with perfectly made bow tie, taking a sip of her drink.

“How—how did you get all those clothes on so quickly?”

“Oh, I have my little ways,” Ari said, gloating.

He escorted her to the huge sunken living room overlooking Park Avenue, where traffic was still stalled. The butler reappeared with two fresh glasses of champagne, bowing out as they clinked.

“To us,” Mann said.

“Us,” Seana said.

They sipped.

He looked down at the traffic. Two gunshots rang out but since gunfire happened every day nowadays, no one made mention of it. "Still Friday rush hour... care to see the rest of the place?"

"Sure."

He escorted her into the next room, an electronic office with computer screens everywhere. On the largest screen, a muted business news channel displayed acronyms and prices scrolling across the bottom.

"This is where I continue to redouble my self-made fortune," he said with surprising ego, stating it as a fact with a wry smile at himself.

He led her to an adjacent room, which contained a large Jacuzzi, massage table, and sensory deprivation tank, with New Age music complementing the scene.

"I shouldn't say 'self-made'... this is the room where I go to receive the fabulous tips someone has been giving me all my life." Mann said, now seeming authentic. "I call it my Receiving Room.

"When I read the TIME article about you taking over Wall Street, a little voice in my head said you were a psychic," Seana said.

"You hear little voices too!" he exclaimed with pleasure, and she nodded.

He took her into the next room, a huge library, and the next one, containing dart board and arcade videogames including some with light guns.

"The fun room," he said. Putting down his glass, he switched on a nearby videogame. Enemy spacecraft appeared and began to attack the player's spacecraft. Mann dispatched them all in a flash and switched on the next game. He played both games at the same time brilliantly then turned to a third one. Playing three games at the same time, he won them all, and finished up by whirling and throwing a dart he palmed into the triples ring. The dart whizzed by not far in front of Seana's face and she hopped back, spilling a single drop of champagne on the carpet.

“Sorry—didn’t mean to scare you,” he said.

“You didn’t,” she said honestly, thinking him infantile but giving no hint.

The butler appeared with fresh glasses and as he made his exit, he sprayed spot remover on the one drop of champagne on the carpet.

Mann took her into the next room, a ballroom, in the corner of which was a bandstand set up with instruments. They saw the brilliant lights of New York through the dominant south-facing window as dusk approached. Ari sat down at the piano and she stood a few feet away. He began to play and sing. He was superb.

“*You go to my head...*” She smiled at him appreciatively. A moment later she saw a gauzy image he must have projected of the two of them in bed making love, her body undulating powerfully. Her eyes widened. “*...and you linger like a haunting refrain...*” Seana felt ghostly fingers moving up and down her body. She stepped back uncomfortably. “*...and I find you going round in my brain like the bubbles in a glass of champagne...*” He stood up and finished his glass in a single move, picked up and began playing the sax, moving over to her so that she could feel the sound vibrations hitting her body. He played a few bars then resumed singing.

“*...You intoxicate my soul with your thighs...*” inserting his hand, he touched both of her white thighs at once and she pulled away, half-smiling. Mann put down the sax and gestured toward the French doors. “Traffic still sucks. But *they’ve* just given me a great idea,” he said, texting something.

He led her out the French doors onto the giant terrace—the entire roof of the building not taken up by his suite. A lighted mosaic-tiled pool dominated half the terrace, surrounded by several chaise lounges, deck chairs and umbrella-covered tables. The other half of the terrace featured a large tiled area inlaid with strange markings. As they emerged onto the terrace, they saw the helicopter already approaching then landing precisely onto the inlaid markings. Mann helped Seana aboard and the helicopter took off again.

Fascinated but unafraid as the helicopter edged off the building, Seana looked down at the deep crevices called streets.

It was a very short hop down Park Avenue to the Met Life building, which had recently reopened its famous Copter Club decades after an ill-fated accident had shut it down. Ari bribed the pilot to let him make the landing which he did as expertly as he seemingly did everything else.

They were ushered inside like royalty by a number of seeming lords-and-ladies-in-waiting—and given the best table in the house, on a small stage from which they could see both rivers. The champagne continued to flow and then came the many courses of exquisite cuisine.

“So—at the McKenzie party, I didn’t learn much about you,” Ari said, drinking in her beauty as if he owned it.

“Your date didn’t like me much,” Seana teased, her eyes playful.

“How come you were the only unattached female there?”

“No one I wanted to go with.”

“You give tarot readings for lots of rich people—that must be how you know Mrs. McKenzie?”

“Nice woman,” Seana said authentically.

He seemed to agree, though his body language suggested certain reservations. “Hmm...” starting out ambiguously and then finding something good to say. “I like her society *balls*.”

They were enjoying a first course of lobster something, with a white wine pairing.

“I had a secretary check the original guest list for the McKenzie party... you weren’t on it...” he disclosed between bites.

She stopped in mid-mouthful.

“Why were you checking me?” she asked with a calm smile.

“The only unattached woman... I’ve got to suspect the motives of a woman who tries to meet me. Sorry if that seems... cold. I can assure you my feelings toward you are anything but. Please don’t be offended. I’m a straight-up person, I just say what I think.”

“You *are* psychic... I asked to be put on that guest list... I *did* want to meet you,” Seana revealed, also between bites.

“Why? All the usual reasons, like my money?”

“No,” she improvised. “I’m attracted to geniuses, it’s the pattern of all my relationships.”

“You’re a genius groupie,” he said and smiled affectionately, his paranoia significantly abated for the moment.

“Actually, more psychics than geniuses,” she reflected. “TIME says they call you ‘Mr. Brain’ on Wall Street... I’m looking for ‘Mr. Superhuman’...”

“How do I stack up so far?”

“I’m very interested,” she said and managed to seem to mean it, even to his discerning extra senses.

“Good. I admire good taste,” he said.

Accumulations of alcohol and perhaps whatever he might have slipped her caused great gaps in her memory of the rest of that night. She retained awareness of dancing at El Morocco, where a Latin band played and they danced the guajira. He was a professional level ballroom dancer of course. She appeared to be one too, so well did she follow his strong lead. He shamelessly sported an erection in his pants, grinding it against her as he held her tightly to his body. She was only slightly aroused but pretended more.

“You dance beautifully—just like you do everything else,” she said.

“You haven’t experienced how I do everything else... yet.”

She sensed them in bed together for a fleeting instant. *Did he plant that image?* She made sure not to think in words because that was the easiest way to get read.

“No one’s ever followed my lead so well,” he said truthfully.

The next morning, she also remembered the two of them had somehow landed in the Jacuzzi, both wearing their respective form of panties. She had been wearing one of his shirts. She remembered lazily sticking her toes out of the bubbling water and looking at them, at which point she remembered herself saying, “It’s getting late. I’ve had a wonderful time... I

don't want the night to end, but I've got to give a reading in the morning..."

Then she remembered him helping her out of the Jacuzzi, taking her in his arms and kissing her passionately. She had responded in kind. As their lips parted, she had stepped back and he had grabbed her hand.

She remembered smiling softly and heard herself saying, "Not all at once." This recollection came with a sigh of relief.

He had smiled softly too, softening the grip on her hand. "I like it that way too."

3

The next morning in Shannon's office, Seana reported to Shannon and Williams.

"*The* most arrogant bastard—and I thought Jason Page was arrogant—" Seana began but Shannon, looking pained, waved for her to keep her voice down. She went on in a very low but audible voice, "No matter what you guys tell me I have to do with him, I hate his guts—"

Ω

Templegard was on a hospital ship under sedation, having been treated for extensive wounds. His dreaming consciousness was aboard the spaceship with his friends and comrades in this mission, whatever it was. He felt happy. The spaceship seemed to be heaving like a ship on the waters but he liked that too. Through the big transparent dome, he and all his friends now marveled at seeing *six* planets roughly lined up from Saturn to Mercury, including Earth, pointing at the center of the Milky Way. This was it. He didn't know what "it" was but he knew it would be big and it would be good. It was something they had all longed for—for a very long time.

Ω

Deep beneath the Ural Mountains, Nastassia wakened and sat up in bed with a curious expression. She got out of bed quietly

and dressed rapidly. Minutes later she moved down a tunnel to an elevator and pressed the call button; moments later the door opened. An armed guard stood in the elevator, with his gun aimed at her.

“Not allowed,” he stated.

“You’re going up there anyway,” she said, “couldn’t I just ride with you—I need to see the sky—the guards let me.” She made herself seem like a little girl far from home and afraid to never see the sky again. The guard could not picture her as a vulnerable little girl, especially since he had a crush on her, but he acquiesced and let her ride with him.

Shortly they were above ground and outside, the guard checking the perimeter, and she standing and hugging herself against the cold wind to look up at the sky. She at first saw nothing unusual. “Just a dream,” she said to herself.

Then as her eyes panned around toward the center of the Milky Way, the curvy planetary lineup came into her view. “No... it wasn’t...” she almost gasped in wonder.

Ω

At the same moment in New York, in the field headquarters of Theta Force, Shannon sat on the observer side of the one-way mirror looking out at the exercise room, where Williams, Seana, Khan and Page sat in lotus position, wearing headsets, their eyes seemingly looking inward, with Khan spinning a Tibetan Prayer Wheel, and hypnotic Northern Indian chants droning from the speakers.

Williams could see the four of them reflected in the mirror he faced. Then he heard an androgynous voice in his mind say, “The self sees itself as dwelling inside.” He contemplated that for a moment. *Yes, my self seems to me to be behind my eyes*, he thought, although not in words.

His perspective then changed in an unusual way. He seemed to pull back and up from out of himself, and found himself looking down at the backs of the four of them, including himself. The voice then said, “Or the self sees itself as dwelling everywhere.” Williams pondered that for a moment.

No, he couldn't remember ever picturing himself dwelling everywhere, but now he could, now that his awareness hovered outside of himself.

Shannon's voice came softly in his ear through the headset. "Marty, please report."

Shannon observed Williams stand and leave the exercise room while the others continued to concentrate. The door opened and Williams came in. He gave off a strong energy that put Shannon on alert. Williams sat down and said, forming each word with difficulty, "High... hard to talk."

"You take anything?" Shannon asked. Williams shook his head.

"Beyond words... don't lose by wording... *different*," Williams said.

Shannon stared at him. "Forget the training schedule," he said.

Williams returned to the exercise room and took his seat. Again, he saw the reflection in the mirror of the four of them concentrating. He suddenly heard himself think the words, *We had to give up psychic powers to use words.*

Only at first, said the androgynous voice.

Williams suddenly saw a vision of an undersea plant, each spiky branch having a shrewd-looking human face at the tip of it. A hundred cunning faces filled the screen of his mind.

You wonder who I am, the androgynous voice said. *Think about this: how can intelligence emerge at the part...*

Williams now saw his undersea plant as if he were trucking back from it. Looked at from further away, it formed a stupid-looking face.

And not at the whole?

Whoever was taking Williams on this journey now showed him empty space. The exercise room was gone. There were no stars. As he looked around, Williams' eyes fell on his image of God: light shining from Him, long-flowing beard, Grecian robe and sandals.

Life, a drug, you, as God, take...

God pops a pill and winks at Williams.

To forget you're alone... a trip away from Oneness.

God swoons.

Looking where he just saw God swoon, Williams now sees a male figure in bed, turning over, waking up, sitting up. He recognizes the figure as himself.

In the observer room, Shannon sees all four of the sitters looking stunned. The Prayer Wheel is still spinning and the deep voices are still chanting. He sees Williams look at the others questioningly and they all nod. Shannon touches his Bluetooth. "Marty, please report."

Moments later, Williams joins Shannon in the observer room.

"We're receiving," Williams said, "some sort of transmission... I think we're all getting it."

"How do you know?"

"The four of us... feel like one."

"Why today more so than any other day?"

"Seems we've turned some corner."

Ω

Half a planet away Nastassia lay wired up, alone in the nearly-featureless testing room.

"Same assignment," her boss Karesky said gruffly through the speakers.

"Locate the top brass of the American psychic force," Nastassia confirmed.

"Right. Theta Force."

Nastassia closed her eyes, going directly into a trance-like state.

"Stronger today..." she noted. "I've been feeling this... they are in two places..."

"Where is the leader?"

"Body of water..." Nastassia began.

"Which one?"

"Ocean... harbor..."

In the adjacent observer room, General Nikolai Karesky, head of Psychotronic Division One, watched her on a video monitor, along with an aide. Karesky flicked off the mic.

“We’ve waited so long... could this really be happening now?” the General mused aloud.

“Northern port...” Nastassia’s voice came over the speakers.

The aide watched an EEG PET fMRI screen. “Brainwaves consistent with psychic performance,” the aide reported. “Highest in the theta band. Left-right symmetry. Serotonin and oxytocin.”

“Why today?” Karesky asked himself. “Like flicking a switch.”