

## Chapter 3

*To do all that one is able to do is to be a man; to do all that one would like to do is to be a god.*

*—Napoleon Bonaparte*

### **Legion of The Blue Scorpion**

#### **Gabon, Africa**

Set deep in the Grotte du Lebamba caves, the legion lab of Corvus's V Africana was about to initiate the Alpha transfer sequence for guardsman Andre Munroe. The subject, an Alpha, had yet to make the soul transfer Jump into his clone-blank, a procedure initiated by killing the Alpha. Entering the prep room outside the legion's operation lab, all Dr. Okeke could think about was why his vast talents were being wasted in a procedure akin to putting down a dog.

"Ah, Doctor Okeke. Good to have you join us." The legion's lead phycologist, Dr. Moss, commented off-handedly, "We don't expect much from this one." He laughed nervously, "Here is my authorization to proceed with the Jump," Dr. Moss handed him the e-paper, "And good luck." Dr. Moss turned to confer privately with Dr. Khalid, the head of cloning operations for the V Africana.

Dr. Okeke was irritated by the exchange as the both were being secretive in their usual pompous way. He did not look up from the e-paper at Dr. Khalid's approach. "I have not had an

opportunity for the pre-jump examination. Who authorized this Jump?” Okeke snapped. The expensive shiny silk of the men's suits irritated him further—*it's a lab, for god's sake*.

Khalid's condescending tone barely hid his disdain. “Colonel Phipps, of course, but the pre-jump exam was carried out by Dr. Melbourne.”

“Then why in the hell am I the attending Doctor?”

“Colonel Phipps requested you,” Khalid stated matter-of-factly, as though to a child.

Okeke paused, and shoulders dropping, he bent to the inevitable. “Very well, then let's continue. I need the subject's name and cohort.”

“Andre Munroe.” Khalid read from the pad, “Attached to the Fifth Cohort, um, Fifth centuri, Gamma squad. Twenty-two, African heritage, modest IQ, polytheist, let's see . . . says here he believes he's from a family of Shaman.” Dr. Khalid laughed, “It seems everybody in this back-ass country is related to a Shaman.” He rattled off the rest of the relevant data detailed in pre-jump examinations.

“Means little.” Okeke shrugged, “The spiritual affiliation of the subject does not seem to matter.” About ninety-eight percent of the jump transfers were not successful, and the ones that were didn't remain stable for long. “Either he'll return or won't. I see no rhyme or reason why some do or don't.” Okeke trailed off.

“Oh, one last thing,” Khalid paused at the half-opened door. “Munroe's a volunteer.”

“Really . . .?” Okeke raised an eyebrow, now actually looking at Dr. Khalid. “That's odd.” He didn't know what to think of that, only that it might prove to be an exciting experience.

“It's only the second time, you know . . .” Khalid flashed his irritating little smile, “You familiar with Dr. Lewis from the III Canadian?”

Okeke rudely brushed him away with a gesture. “Yeah, I had the same orientation you did.”

“As I’ve already informed the tech, Dr. Moss wants the pre-jump recorded this time.”

“Fine.” Okeke turned his attention to the attending tech, “Whenever you’re ready.”

After reviewing Jump procedures and what particular data was to be monitored, Okeke stalked off to the lab. As callous to human life as he was, he was a remarkable doctor—bedside manner notwithstanding—and the complications of cloning operations suited him. Since the clones were not considered human, consideration of their circumstances was not his concern.

For the past two years, he had worked on correcting the physical developmental anomalies that continually cropped up during the cloning operations—then the Jump experiments started. Like everyone else involved, it messed with his reality. He was not a religious man *per se*, but through his tribal background, he’d heard of spirits inhabiting objects. But this cloning thing was different, unnatural. Apparently, When the Alpha dies, the bond with the spirit breaks. Then, an Alpha’s soul transfers, but only into a genetically paired clone. The transfer didn’t always take, and most of the time, the targeted clone becomes . . . odd, unstable. It was just effing weird—hard to fathom. He had his own theories on why some failed to transfer.

He briefly acknowledged two lab techs busily setting up monitoring equipment in the operation lab, where the dry aseptic smell always sharpened his focus. Passing through privacy curtains, he was surprised to see the Jump subject smile at him. It was as though he was almost in a relaxed state. Almost, meaning that he was not wild-eyed with terror like all the others. Okeke scanned through the subject’s e-sheet. This Jump session was with a neopagan male Alpha, but clones were always male. Due to the complexity of changes in female anatomy during puberty, it was next to impossible to produce viable she-clones. Okeke stared at the Munroe Alpha, again noting the unusual air. Glancing at the two-way observation window, he shrugged theatrically—there’s always someone watching.

“I am Dr. Okeke, and I will be attending your Alpha-transfer.”

“Well met, doctor,” Munroe, strapped to an upright metal gurney, clumsily waved his lower arm in an attempt to formally bow. “I am looking forward to the experience.”

Okeke gave him a sideways glance. “Well met?”

“Yes, it’s the greeting of a true Paladin.”

Okeke did not have a response to this.

“They originated in the court of Charlemagne where they were warriors of renown, fierce Knights, who—always in the right—were almost *impossible* to defeat at arms.

“You’re a student of history?”

“Not really. I read about it in some D&D books, then researched it. It’s something I want to be—a dealer of justice through arms.”

“What is this . . . D&D?” Okeke busied himself with turning on and checking monitoring bud placements.

“It’s a mystical world called Dungeons and Dragons where honor and noble quests hold more importance than money or selfish material pursuits.”

“I see . . .” He didn’t. “I heard you volunteered for this procedure?” Okeke was no longer surprised that this delusional halfwit had volunteered. The kid’s got issues—probably do well with the Jump.

“Yes, I am not afraid.” The thin-faced Munroe looked down at the straps Okeke was testing. “I was wondering if . . . ah, does the body feel the ah, the death?” Munroe stared off, glassy-eyed.

“Pain?” Okeke looked up at the kid, seeing him for the first time. “Funny, to my knowledge, I don’t think anyone’s ever asked a Beta if there was. Not that you could believe them if they did.” He added ominously, placing a couple of additional wireless sensors on Munroe.

“When I come back, I’m gonna let you know, doc.” Munroe straightened his back in an attempt of bravado. “I can handle it.”

Okeke turned his head and mumbled under his breath. “Yeah, well, there’s little else you can do.”

Nonchalantly injecting the blue compound that would cause all brain function to cease, he began to whistle, barely noticing Munroe's passing. The Alpha’s organs would be harvested later.

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Floating toward the ceiling, Munroe paused in confusion at the scene below him. He wasn’t sure what was happening. Did the doctor give me the injection? From the almost serene actions in the room, he couldn’t tell. At first, he didn’t even recognize his strapped-down body. Now floating above the building, a red fibrous membrane-like tunnel formed around him. Much like the red clay fields of his youth, the resemblance to dank earth and rotting vegetation was so vivid he imagined smelling them. Flowing by, he didn’t know if he emerged from the fleshy tube or it just fell away from him, for there had been no feeling of travel.

All around him was floating mist as though cast about in the wind, but there was no wind. The sky was dark grey with a distant swirling light that drew him in. When he focused on the light, he felt a presence behind him that seemed to vanish whenever he turned to observe it. Frustrated with this, he turned back to the swirling light, where intense emotion began to flow from. Then peripherally to his left, a Shaman he thought he recognized from his youth appeared.

“Enter it, and you shall surely die.”

The mere thought of the vortex caused its reappearance high and to the right of the Shaman, whose image flickered under the light. Munroe felt drawn to the light and began to drift.

“It’s a light of annihilation.”

People in medieval dress began to step out of the mist, and he slowed the drifting. Munroe could now make out a knight, peasants, wizards, and a prince. The growing tide of many voices echoed in the place. Like observing a distant flame, he felt their purpose but not their substance. As his curiosity grew, his drifting slowed to a stop. When the light no longer interested him, it abruptly collapsed into itself.

This cannot be real, he thought. These characters are all from ancient lore. What is happening here? Murmurings diminished while a semicircle dais of white marble and gold materialized in the distance. The people turned away, dissipating as they faded back into the mist. Curious, he willed himself toward the dais. Is this a pantheon? Are these the demi-gods who rule this place? Fueled by self-delusion, another image began to solidify. It was something Munroe recognized from Egyptian mythology.

“I know what it is you desire,” The image was shifting in appearance, changing faces. It seemed to solidify when Munroe thought he recognized one.

“What are you saying?” Confused, he was getting scared.

“I can help you find what you truly seek—that which awaits you.”

“Who are you, really?” Feeling threatened, he wanted to withdraw.

“Often, I have been a spirit of flesh as you once were a spirit in the flesh. I have been many things, in many places, of many times. I am amorphic—not constrained.”

“What?” He could sense its resolve. “Well, what do you want with me?” He recognized great authority, and that excited him.

“I can give you the power you seek, but *you* must choose.” At that moment, Munroe understood.

“You want me to join you, become a sword in your cause.”

“Yes,” Its shape finally settled on that of an ancient king who wore a simple robe of handwoven crimson cloth. He wore a tarnished gold crown that seemed neglected for ages—a seax was in his left hand. “I offer many rewards to those who choose to be my instrument.”

Deep within the very essence of his existence, he knew he was playing a dangerous game, and once committed, there would be no going back. However, for the first time in his life, his fate was his to control. “What can I do?”

“I will show you, but first, you must become reborn to the purpose. You must actualize your commitment.” The image morphed into a beautiful black woman wearing only a thin mesh of gold. The tips of her long, tightly braided hair shone white like molten embers. He could not help but notice her protruding nipples. The sense of danger enthralling, he quivered in excitement at the sound of her voice. “We must loosen the grip held on the people of this land. A foreign god has held the young for too long—they lack the will to fight.”

“I understand. Total passivity equals total subjugation.” He quoted. Though familiar, Munroe had no idea who first said it.

Her eyes plumbed the depth of him. “The leaders must be replaced, for they ignore their destiny. The very thing that gave the tribal ancients true authority is the power to choose their own course, to become their own masters.”

Enlightening him as a forgotten truth, Munroe saw the problem and the solution simultaneously. “True power lies within the will.” He spoke the ancient words.

“The people’s obligation to their tribal gods must be remembered. They must join in the fight against this foreign God and His trinity of power.”

“What do you require of me?” Again, intuitively, the answer was there. “Commitment flows through self-sacrifice.”

“Corvus is my instrument; you must not waiver in obedience or resolve.”

“I will not fail.” Munroe felt himself growing heavier. Back in the earthly tunnel, these words weighed heavily upon him. After his Beta awakening, Munroe’s struggles were closely monitored, and much like the other transfer subjects, he seemed to phase in and out of personality. Other personifications would surface, then dissipate. After passing a series of psych tests, the doctors were amazed at the rapidity of his adjustment to the new clone body, and he was cycled back into the general population. Two days later, a barracks monitoring bud recorded an unfortunate reaction common to Beta-clones.

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At the legion’s hospital, tech sergeant David Cullen reviewed Munroe’s case with Dr. Moss

“The only thing he said in the recorded video was, ‘I will join you now.’ It was pretty creepy, doctor.” Cullen paused the vid where a naked and kneeling Munroe held his sword upright on the floor with his eyes squeezed shut.

“Dave, were there any personality conflicts?” Dr. Moss asked.

“None.” Having once considered taking his own life, Dave had to turn away from the image. Dr. Moss noted the change but misread it.

“I know these things are a bit unsettling, but we must rely on the process.

“Did you have a chance to read his induction reports?”

“I scanned them; the boy was not the sharpest knife in the drawer.”



“This reaction is why no further attempts were authorized. I don’t think . . .”

“Don’t worry. Dr. Moss’s tone was conciliatory. “The prejump *was* cleared by command, and Munroe cleared the SAPS testing and PET scan parameters within tolerance. In fact, this guy’s self-determination was off the charts—he just lacks the training—so we need to find a way to bring him along.”

“*Besides* the fact he was a volunteer?” Dave resumed the vid. “That’s gotta tell us something, right?”

“I thought the same.” Dr. Moss turned to the screen, “Now, what do we have here?”

“Well, for one, he jumps right in without looking. Notice the sword blade’s orientation.”

“Yes, I see he has it lined up wrong.” Dr. Moss shook his head. “Thankfully, the sword was as dull as him.”

The vid showed the sword striking perpendicular between the ribs, turning with Munroe as his weight carried him to the floor. As the sword cut a shallow slash across the ribcage, Munroe cried out in pain. The recording ended as fellow troopers subdued him before he could try again.

“When was this?”

“Two days ago, sir. The eval team confirmed it wasn’t a beta adaption issue; he was *actually trying* to promote himself to Gamma.”

Dr. Moss’s eyebrows went up. “Any DID voices or personalities?”

“None observed or that he blamed.”

Dr. Moss considered this. It wasn’t difficult to catch a Beta lying; they always blamed others, often imaginary people, for senseless actions. “What’s different with this one?”

“Before he plunged on the sword, he said he wanted to join someone.”

“Join who?”

“Corvus, sir.” Tech Cullen shifted in his seat, “Here’s an excerpt from the psych team’s eval when Dr. Lishman asked the Beta what he saw during his transformation.” Dave read the file excerpt aloud.

*Munroe: “I saw my destiny.”*

*Dr. Lishman: “And that is?”*

*“To serve, to become a useful Gamma.”*

*“And how will you accomplish that?”*

*“By my will.”*

Dr. Moss frowned. “That’s an odd response.”

Dave nodded. “The guy’s convinced he was born to do this. Something about being a paladin in a former existence.”

“Well, we’ve seen weirder shit from these Beta’s, and it’s not the first suicide attempt.” Dr. Moss sighed. “By *his* will? What the hell does that mean?”

“Don’t know, other than it’s another case of narcissism like the others, but this is the first Beta volunteer. Again, that might be something . . .” Tech Cullen left the implication hang.

“No, there was another one in Canada, one of the doctors . . . uh, Dr. Lewis.”

“Really?” Dave straightened up; he’d not heard that one before, “A doctor, really? What happened?”

“Beta suicide.”

“Was he trying to reach Gamma also?”

“I don’t think so, but that’s about all there is.” It was still classified, so Dr. Moss dropped it. “Look, if this guy wants to go Gamma, then let him. I’ll clear it.” He pointed at Dave. “You will be personally responsible, and I will need full monitoring on this subject 24-7.”

“Who do you think should run the transfer?”

“Easy. Use Dr. Okeke. He’s had experience with this one, and Lord Tertius will want to monitor this one personally.”

“Ok, sir.” Dave smiled, hopeful that someone would take notice. He knew it was a chance for him to be recognized. If the Gamma takes, then I’ll be noticed. Then, for a moment, Dave considered the alternative. Well, if it's bat-shit crazy and doesn't take, we’ll just kill it anyway. He pushed back the fear-revulsion whenever he thought of clone transfers. It was just so fricking weird.

Two days later, Dr. Okeke made final adjustments on an oblong bed that contained a growing clone with the latest improvements to the 24C blastosphere—a clone military batch. The military corpsman intern was studying cloning growth procedures, and it required him to unlearn much of his college education. Near the end of the first stage growth cycle, the mesh frame of a human’s skeletal system was visible in the gel. At many different points in the mesh, bone grew along what looked like red and white roots. Frayed ends were sprouting everywhere on the woven frame.

“As you can see, the skeletal system partially grows along these charged carbon nanotube raceways.” Okeke moved the imaging pen. “After the first week, they already begin to look human. Here, the bone structure is formed first, unlike the normal growth process. Within the collagen bath are all the necessary nutrients the capillary system usually supplies. The osteoblasts will adhere to the bowed framework, providing the taut tension required. This will give strength to the budding skeletal musculature and tendon systems.”

“These osteoid sheets,” the intern was glued to the imaging monitor, “Are rapidly forming the bone tissues at a highly accelerated rate.” He moved a nano-imaging scanner through the gel. “How is this possible? I mean, I get the mesenchymal differentiation and all that, but how in the hell do the blood vessels and nerve systems integrate before the process even completes its . . .”

“Steady on, son,” Doctor Okeke calmly stated, his French accent naturally pedantic. “These processes are quite complex when taken as a whole, but if you could just picture it from the single bio-aspects systemic angle, then combine the symbiotic interaction of . . .” The doctor's words were cut-off by four audible pulses signifying a Jump transfer. “Time for another lesson in crazy,” Doctor Okeke joked half-heartedly.

“Crazy?” The intern repeated.

“Yes. When the clones emerge from the growth tanks, they are non-sentient, spiritless—they contain no soul. When the first donor, the Alpha of the first successful clone, died in an auto accident, the soul of the Alpha had jumped into his clone. Now animated with the Alpha’s spirit, the clone was literally the new Alpha, replete with the Alpha’s memories, dispositions, and temperaments. Only now, it’s referred to as a Beta. This process is referred to as a Jump transfer.”

“I’ve . . . I’m not familiar with Jump transfers.”

“But you have heard of them, or else why are you here?” Okeke challenged.

The intern just meekly nodded. “Rumors mostly.”

“Jump transfers are experiments where the Alpha is terminated to initiate a soul Jump, resulting in a spirit transfer into the nearest clone blank. The clone blank that receives the spirit is called a beta clone. The Beta spirit transfers do not always take, though.”

The intern could not grasp what he was hearing. He fell back on an old college tactic to shield his ignorance and used an interrogative. “Why?”

“Unknown. The idea of a spirit . . . or a quote ‘ghost in the machine’ as Nietzsche would have it, is not generally accepted by western science. All cultures in the world recognize some form of awareness separate from the body. This notion comes from the two pillars of science: observation and reason. To think otherwise is just stupid.”

“I thought the role of science was to define reason beyond revelation, or at least that is what my professor believed.”

“And if the event is caused by a spiritual action, does that invalidate your professor’s heuristic?” Okeke’s tone raised with his vehemence, “An observer must keep their mind open if there is to be any gain from observation. Unfortunately, many people seem more interested in their own observations being recognized than the truth of the observation. Which side do *you* wish to place your efforts on?”

“Um,” the intern shifted his weight. “With observing, sir?”

“Then, I will continue.” Okeke’s tone returned to an instructive one. “Consider that all systems act in concert with what they are in contact with. It is symbiotic in nature but specific as to its use. The skeletal structure is not living, so it does not require a nutrient source, but the cells that construct it do. If we isolate the neural system from . . .” Okeke paused at Dr. Moss’s entrance.

“Good morning, doctor.” Dr. Moss nodded his head as he felt a man in charge should. “My apologies for the interruption, but Lord Tertius has orders regarding the Munroe-Beta. There has been a . . . a complication.”

“Very well,” Okeke turned to the intern, “You have studies to attend to. I want you to focus on the mossy climbing fiber system for tomorrow. Use the C-138 clone for your observations. It’s now at that stage. Do not let your ignorance get in the way of your observations. If you don’t understand the system—stop, then research it.”

“Yes, doctor, and thank you, doctor.” As the intern headed for the door, he paled under Dr. Moss’s scrutiny.

“How is it going, son. You transferred in from the medical field ops, didn’t you? Haskins, isn’t it?”

“It’s Lt. Hawkins, sir. Captain Haskins was my commander.”

“Yes, well . . . anyway, the Captain thought highly of you, said you had a keen mind.”

“Thank you, sir. Please excuse me.” He hurried out as though the room was about to spontaneously combust.

“Nervous fellow . . .” Dr. Moss walked over, taking a chair. “I’ll get right to it. Based on experimental data, Corvus’s first cloning team has determined that the more fear and doubt during the beta transfer, the more likelihood of success. But that determinization does not seem entirely accurate. In your jump experience with the Munroe-Alpha, was he fairly calm?”

“He was. Considering that Munroe knew he was about to be killed, the exhibited stress was surprisingly low.”

“Why do you think that was?”

“I don’t know—the boy’s nuts. What’s this about?” Okeke was trying to discern where this line of conversation was going.

“It’s been postulated by Dr. Khalid that the success of a jump may be directly related to a subject’s level of intelligence. Would you agree with that?”

Okeke scoffed. “It takes intellect to recognize the lack thereof.”

“Truly. What do *you* see?”

Okeke sat down and paused in thought. “I think you have two problems that may not be related. First, why does a Jump transfer fail, and second, why do most Beta-transfers awake insane and babbling? I will address the first. What if it’s a . . . a comprehension aspect?”

“I don’t follow.”

“When someone is forced to an action by an unforeseen danger, they don’t take the time to consider alternative courses of action unless they have been confronted with a like danger, experienced it, and survived it.”

“Apply this to Munroe.”

“His belief he would survive the procedure was reinforced by what he learned from D&D.

“D&D?”

“A medieval role-playing game invented by some guy in the States—I looked into it. As game players experience dangers during role-playing, they must adapt to given situations using their creative motives and skills. Decision-making plays a direct role in the survival of a player’s avatar, that’s vested with much time and effort from the player—hence the risk.”

“That’s crazy. Unless there is some risk of being killed while playing this D&D game, the risk factor will not line up.”

“Like I said, the boy’s a little nutty.”

Dr. Moss sat back and considered this. “It’s of your opinion that a successful transfer is due to situational recognition? No, that’s not what you’re really saying here. You’re saying it’s a matter of responding with reinforced action, which is not faith but resolve.”

“Yes, but more than just resolve. The belief that the event will result in a predictable outcome—hope. Again, Munroe had high hopes he would make a successful Jump.”

“Interesting . . . and the second part of your clone theory?”

“Still considering it.” Okeke was hesitant, “I don’t have enough data to support any conclusions just yet.”

“I think I can help you with that.” Dr. Moss stated somewhat ominously. “Munroe’s Beta-Jump has been approved, and Lord Tertius has agreed that you should monitor the jump.”

Okeke’s naturally suspicious nature went on full alert. “I have only done three Beta-jumps, and I was only assisting.”

“Is there a problem?”

“Beta-jumps, by their nature, are always a problem. Other . . . personalities can arise during sedation. If not handled correctly, the resulting clone is problematic, to say the least. I don’t know if I’m the one you want for a Beta—they are . . . tricky.”

“Lord Tertius requested you.”

Okeke now understood the previous line of questioning. “Who is doing the assist?”

“Do you need one?” Dr. Moss challenged.

“Well, I’ll need time to review some Jump tapes. When is this to occur?”

“The Jump eval is just entering its final stage, and the jump is scheduled in two days.” Dr. Moss looked away for a moment before returning. “Look, I want you to approach this unfettered. Of course, it will be recorded, but I want your interaction with the DID changes to be one-on-one. It’s time to put your theories to the test, doctor.”

Okeke’s instincts told him this was a bad idea. But, when have I ever shied away from anything? “Ok, I’ll do it.”



In the legion's clone operations room two days later, Okeke watched as two attendants led in a harnessed Munroe-blank strapped to an upright metal gurney. The Munroe-beta, already prepared for the transfer, was tied down and sedated.

Okeke was trying to solve the odd emergence of different personalities after jump transfers. There were a few competing theories, with the majority convinced it was DID. But since these personalities had specific knowledge unattainable by the Alpha, the DID theory lost creditability. Believing in reincarnation, Okeke theorized that these emerging personalities were connections to a person's past life, actual past personalities taking over the clone's spot of consciousness, or SOC. Because the clone's SOC was overridden by the Alpha spirit during clone transfer, and spirits are not bound by time, past incarnations of the Alpha may be accessing the clones. As Okeke entered the operation room, he was excited to test his theories.

Then the Munro-beta spoke. "So, doctor, what is your purpose today?"

Okeke turned on Tech Cullen. "My orders were to have this beta sedated."

Cullen's face was white. "It . . . he is, doctor."

Okeke smiled. "Is that a fact," He checked Munroe's brain wave pattern on the monitor. "So he is." He stared at Munroe's prone body for a few minutes. Other than his mouth being slightly open, there was no indication he was awake. Returning to the gurney, Okeke was terribly excited. Could this be some type of spatiotemporal separation? As bizarre as this is, I must focus or miss a valuable opportunity from some childish distraction. "I am here to initiate your Beta-jump." He said, mindful of the objective.

"Good to meet you, doctor," This was not Munroe's 'greeting of a true Paladin,' Okeke noted. Also, the mouth never moved.

“And whom am I speaking with?” It was taxing to keep the excitement out of his voice. He needed to stay calm and make it safe for the emerging personality to interact.

“Dr. Mauser.” It was Munroe’s voice but hollow, as though projected. “I am a little concerned with Andre’s treatment.”

“Notice the accent, doctor?” Tech Cullen observed. “I’d say it was from East Germany.” He avoided looking directly at it.

“And just who is Andre . . .” Dr. Okeke checked on the clone-blank and prodding carefully at the monitoring equipment. Nothing seemed out of sorts.

“That’s what I am concerned with. You don’t even care enough to remember the guy’s name, let alone his welfare. Maybe when you play this back, you can make a note of it.”

“Why do you say that? You believe this is being recorded?”

“Where can you hide? The watchers are always present.”

Concerned the spirit would leave, Okeke stepped on the floor switch turning off the recording monitor. “Why do you care if others hear your words?”

“What I say is for you, dear doctor, your machines are irrelevant, simple toys. Do you care about your future?”

“Why are you here? You’re from Germany, right?” Okeke glanced over at Cullen. “When did you get your degree? What did you use it for?”

“We both are bound to the same Hippocratic oath, Doctor. It’s our duty to care.”

“What year is it? Do you even know?”

“What does that have to do with anything? Why Doctor, becoming quite obtuse we are.”

Okeke laughed. “Not really, just checking up on your reality.” Okeke walked behind the monitoring station. Cullen’s face shone with sweat. “What do you think?”

Cullen's eyes were glassy. "The personality has just applied a moral heuristic, and its language usage has suddenly stepped up a notch. So, to be sure, there are different educational and cultural backgrounds than Munroe. How much does it know, I wonder. Its cohesive thoughts are quite different than the plodding Alpha-Munroe."

"I agree," Okeke looked back at the beta-clone in total concentration.

After pulling up Munroe's file, Cullen compared the two brain wave patterns, then pointed at the results. "Yet, there is no change in pattern."

Okeke bent over to look at the monitor more closely.

"You lack understanding, doctor," The Munroe-beta announced, "and you forget your oath."

Okeke grinned at Cullen before walking over to the beta. "And, how am I breaking my oath, Doctor?"

"Come on, we both are well aware of Sweitzer's work. In fact, wasn't the first time you broke yours near the very site he first drafted the oath? Yes, I believe that's right, Doctor. Let's see . . . yes, it was a rape/murder that you covered up for your friend by not reporting in the correct DNA profile to forensics. You substituted the testing data and used some innocent kids' DNA data. Yes, he was convicted in your friend's place. Didn't that boy die in prison? Hanged himself if I recall . . . kid left a note—I didn't do it." The beta's laugh was haunting as its lips never moved.

Okeke's grin froze on his face. "How . . . how could you possibly know that?" He whispered, "Did Rene tell you that?" Okeke looked at the monitoring station before quickly shifting to the two-way mirror of the observation deck. He knew the room mike was off, so he covered his reaction with a shrug. "That's interesting, doctor."

“Yes, but you know Rene couldn’t have said anything.” The beta’s voice lowered, “Because Rene killed himself. But you know that already. I guess he just couldn’t handle the fact that his old college buddy, his best friend, was blackmailing him. And then what, you blew the money you extorted on . . . on a couple of hookers and some blow, wasn't it? Shit,” It chuckled, “You don’t even remember that weekend, do you? You should—it’s what led you here.” Eyes still shut, it lifted its head as though scanning the room. It spoke louder. “Working here certainly wasn’t your first choice, was it?”

“I can’t complain.”

Then the beta opened its eyes. What Okeke saw would haunt him for months. Fully dilatated, the black eyes stared back with hollow regard. “I am here to collect a debt, doctor.” It smiled coldly.

Okeke stepped back. There’s no threat here. He checked that the Munroe-beta and the Munroe-blank were still strapped down.

“Doctor . . . ” Cullen called from behind the monitoring station, but Okeke was lost in revelation as time seemed to slow.

After college, he worked for a CSI unit in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. One raucous night, he had boasted that he was a fixer to a couple of hookers, and if they ever needed his services—a little money could go a long way. Soon, he was making tons of side-scratch. As word spread of his corruptive nature, Corvus stepped in, and within six months, Okeke was part of Corvus’s organization. He had no idea how Corvus found him, but he was happy they had. The money was right, they respected his talents, and good times were always ready to be had. But the best part was that he was untouchable, for Corvus was a powerful shield. “I guess the end does justify the means—if you can get away with it.” He muttered.

“Doctor?” Tech Cullen’s urgent tone snapped him back.

“What?”

“The wave patterns have changed, and I’m getting spikes all over the visual cortex.”

“That’s because its eyes opened.”

“Doctor, its brain patterns have changed, and they are now syncing with the visual cortex.”

“That’s . . . not possible.” He returned to the monitoring station. “Well, I’ll be . . . go and find Dr. Moss. I think we may have a breakthrough.”

After Cullen left, Okeke shut the whole monitoring system down before returning to Munroe-beta. “Well, thanks for that little history lesson, Doctor . . . Dr. whatever. I didn’t really catch your name, but I don’t really need to, now do I.” He laughed cruelly. “I don’t know how you could possibly know these things, but hey . . .” He shrugged dramatically, “who gives a shit, right? A shot of the blue should top this conversation off nicely.” He drew out some tape to cover the beta’s mouth.

“Yes, well, we *will* meet again, won’t we, Dr. Franc” It used Okeke's call name when he was for hire. “You have a debt to pay, and you *shall* pay it.

Okeke paused before forcibly taping the beta’s mouth shut. Grabbing it by the chin, he stared into the blackness of its eyes. “Who are you? “How in the hell can you know that name?”

“We are known as many, dear doctor.”

And with that, he slapped the tape over its mouth and injected the blue compound shutting all brain function—its organs would be harvested later.

\* \* \*

The death of the beta body pulled Munroe from a dream into a waking clarity. The experience was similar to his alpha jump, with the flesh-like tunnel, nondescript landscape, and

the same bright vortex still consuming the sky. Only this time, a great mist covered the ground like the jungle fog of his youth. There was no horizon, no sky above, no light vortex. As the beautiful black woman, still dressed in her web of golden thread, came out of this mist, she wore a headdress of Ostridge feathers.

“Well met my lady. How shall I address you?”

“I am Neith of the ancients. I come to guide you as I have guided your fathers in time past.”

“I’ve not heard this name. Are you from the tribe of my forefathers?”

“I am from long before, and I carry many titles. Many sons of the Nephilim, heroes of old, originated from Kush. Giants amongst men waging great battles throughout the sands of time.”

Images of old tribal battles appeared in the mist, which gradually morphed into temples, then chariots before the Pyramids. “Behold the children of Isis.” Next, Grecian temples amidst an ivory city appeared. On a desert plain, a Spartan spear-Phalanx repelled a chariot attack. “Athene of Sparta.” Different temples appeared in the foreground of a suffusion of alien landscapes, the scenes flashing by as though borne on the wind. The mist, now churning with images of battle, held a Roman army before the burning Jewish temple. The smell of destruction permeated his mind, leaving Munroe enthralled. Swirling smoke from the burning Temple solidified into Louvain, Stalingrad, London, Berlin, Tokyo, Hanoi—always instruments of warfare raged within the smoke. Then, a gigantic raven circled slowly, its wings scattering the smoke, breaking up the images of war until there were none left. The Eagle of Rome’s battle standard stood before him as the roiling clouds cleared.

“Many names I’ve held through the ages. I’ve overseen many great cities, where the people grew arrogant as their waning faith led to destruction and change, evolving into destitution and slavery.” Her expression was that of ancient frustration.

“Your imagery tells much,” Munroe was excited, “Who are you really. Are you a—a god?”

“I am many: Neith, Isis, Athene . . .” At each title, her shape changed, finally settling into an olive-skinned woman in a sheer gown, her blue-black hair oiled and tied back. “Minerva is how you shall address me, and Corvus is my instrument. I have summoned Rome from the depths of past glories. She will retake her rightful place as governess of the masses.” She showed sprawling cities with soaring buildings, vast roadways, and thousands of people pullulating in massive marketplaces and everywhere—the symbol of the Eagle. “If you are found worthy, you shall have your place in eternity or eradication.” She gestured to the light, which suddenly appeared in the sky. “The choice is yours.” Munroe once again felt the compelling pull of the swirling vortex.

“What do you require of me?” It all seemed so implausible. But as he watched the images in the mist, his skepticism became overridden with excitement. Why was he so important, and what did an ancient goddess need him for? What if it’s all true?

“I require nothing more than you offer. Corvus is my instrument, and I need you to serve them. In time, your dedication will lead to greater things.”

The moment Munroe decided, the swirling light diminished into nothing. “I have no authority with Corvus, and I don’t know what to do.”

“I will send another to you so that you may learn and become useful to me. Now, you must rest.”

Once again, Munroe felt the weight of the material world pressing upon him.

\* \* \*

Concerned the prophet would reemerge in the Monroe gamma, Lord Tertius had the observation lounge room cleared before the Jump. As he sat alone watching the exchange with Okeke and the spirit in the Munroe-beta, he was troubled. What he had just witnessed was far worse than he could have ever imagined. As a further precaution, Tertius had separate audio and

video recorders installed. If the prophet returned, he would need to contain any knowledge it may reveal. But the prophet never showed, and when Tertius listened to the conversation after the jump, only Okeke's voice was recorded. It was the same with the video. Tertius had heard it, seen it move, of that there was no doubt.

Only the direct observers witnessed the events, and that was not possible. The Asker-gamma psychokinetic hack into the blank clones now seemed trivial in comparison. On top of that, the probability that the Munroe-beta knew the doctor's personal history is slight. So how in the hell does it know these things? What is going on here? Is Okeke correct that these are former incarnations coming forward? No, not from what just passed. It also was not the Scarecrow.

The entity clearly intended to intimidate Okeke. It knew his past, alias, and places of events, even down to how Okeke's victims died. Yes, the Asker-gamma also used knowledge of history to convince the council that it was the prophet of Minerva. But this . . . this is entirely different.

The Scarecrow knew of Lord Quintus's ritual killing of his brother, but so did Minerva. The same is true about the Scarecrow's knowledge of Corvus's plans. In fact, the first sign of any supernatural ability was Scarecrow's awareness of Wilhauser's crucifix. Then came the cave incident where the Scarecrow could not foresee the priest's actions. Because of that, it was defeated and expelled, but something very different is at play here. And then again, this may all be subterfuge. Only Okeke can possibly know the truth. Tertius got up to pace.

Sextus prematurely launched Phase One solely on the strength of Scarecrow's revelations. Once set into motion, there is no pulling back. It was the sign Sextus had been waiting for. If this Scarecrow is false, it cannot be aligned with Minerva, let alone be her prophet. If the prophet is false, then what does this mean? What does it want with Corvus? "What does this new entity want



with Okeke?” What debt does he owe? I can’t see where these avenues lead, but one thing is for sure, Okeke’s clones should be transferred to the IV Hispania immediately.

The Beta jump of trooper Munroe went far beyond Corvus’s expectations. After only a few days, not only did the Munroe-gamma awake coherent, he awoke with a determined purpose. Like other gamma’s, he seemed to phase in and out of personality, but he stabilized over the next few days, showing a level of confidence and intelligence previously unknown to the evaluation team. After just one week, Munroe was recycled back into the legion for observation.

Doctor Okeke’s report on the event included the pre-jump interaction with Munroe during the set-up phase, but not as it occurred. Okeke described the pre-jump conversation with the Munroe beta regarding personality definition. He reported that Munroe’s beta personality would not engage at first because it knew it was being recorded. Okeke described it as a lab-rat syndrome, where the Beta felt nobody was concerned for his welfare. Borrowing markedly on the theories of psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, he credited his success to the ability to “collapse the internal conflicts” inherent in the conflicting personality traits of Betas. Okeke himself didn’t hold to any of this touchy-feely dreck, but he knew his audience would. The truth was by far more absurd.

Doctor Moss was delighted with the result and lavish in his praise of Okeke. He was not happy the recording was turned off, but who can argue with success? He informed Okeke that he was creating a new position for him as the Administrator of Jump-Transfer Operations. Okeke was tasked to prepare a paper for the Primary Council in Rome—a high honor indeed. Dr.Moss agreed with Tech Cullen's opinion that this was the breakthrough everybody was looking for, and the change in brain wave pattern was tangible proof.

For Okeke, there was a breakthrough of a different sort. Something inside had changed from the transfer event. He felt vulnerable, and that was something he once vowed would never happen again. His emotions were rampant and unpredictable, but that wasn't the worse of it. The entity inside Munroe was now active in his dreams—watching him, judging him. The entity never appeared as some physical manifestation, but it was always present. His sanity was eroding. He would cower in fear of being watched no matter what he dreamt, leaving him sweat-drenched and out-of-breath. There was no escape—sleep terrified him. It was time to get someplace safe. One of his dreams reminded him where to find a safe haven. After thirty-some-odd years it was time to repatriate with his family tribe. With a week of careful planning and avoidance, he fled the V Africana.

The Munroe-gamma was recovering In the Legion's clone crib when a clairaudient voice startled him. *"Do not be afraid."* The voice spoke clearly in his mind. *"Minerva sent me to instruct you. I need you to focus on the mist. Allow it to form in your mind until all other things recede."*

When he closed his eyes, after-images began to solidify into a solid sheet of sparkling white. He felt like he was melting into nothingness when suddenly the mist appeared, and a white-haired, bearded old man stood before him. "How shall I address you?" Munroe bowed.

"As Magister. Think of me as your guide. I will reveal things far beyond your current capacity to reason. At first, you must not try to understand them, only *believe* they are real." Munroe nervously plunged in with all the trepidation of a first-day student.

In his first lesson, Munroe was required to stand outside the SOC and concentrate on life's spiritual essence while disincorporated. Watching the world outside the SOC was like experiencing

life looking through a window, akin to watching a play from the stage-side. He could recognize what was occurring without being in it. In many ways, it was analogous to dreaming.

“Try to feel the living presence of other beings. When you think you have connected, return to the SOC to see their auras.” Magister instructed.

It had taken on the mental image Munroe expected—that of a bearded old alchemist from the court of Charlemagne, complete with a chemical-stained apron. Trained to identify mood by aura wavelength, it also taught him a language translation method. How to think in his native tongue while speaking in another. After mentally composing the words, the body would utter the language he wanted. To trust this process took an inordinately long session in the mist. When Munroe returned to the SOC, he was shocked to discover that over two days had passed. Weak from hunger, he felt his body’s depletions.

“What happened? How did the days pass so quickly?” He asked.

“Your spirit is attached to a material element, and that element is still in space-time. So, your observation point remains in that space-time. Time is not relative to your individual observation in the mist, so time does not pass the same way. Time is only relevant to an event.

“Yet, you said you do not change; you do not grow old,” Munroe observed.

“Only for the unattached spirit does the passage of time hold no physical relevance.”

“Is that why I was so drained when I returned to the SOC?”

“Yes. You need to keep the physical connection fresh for your spirit to remain bound. If separated for too long, the body can die. Another can occupy the SOC without great stress to the body. Ultimately, it’s up to you to maintain the physical condition of the clone body.”

“Ok, I will try to limit my time in the mist.”

As hard as these lessons were, the most strenuous training was spiritual projection. This was most difficult because it required one to act without action, be without being. Long periods of studying Zen did little for him, no matter how many teachers from history Magister projected in the mist.

“How in the hell can rock grow when it’s dead, and how is the ocean in a drop when it’s obviously the other way around?” It was frustrating; these lessons were based on antithesis argument.

During one episode, an image of a scientist appeared who, by his glasses and lab coat, Munroe figured was from the 1950s. He was there to Q & A on how the physical universe was balanced. This was necessary to understand how the spiritual world relates to the material universe. Munroe called him Labcoat.

“When particles are first converted from energy, they appear in two parts—each with opposite polarity. In the case of an electron, the lightest particle, there are two charged particles: a (-) electron and a (+) positron. The positron is antimatter, and short lived. It’s by this process the physical universe is kept in balance. Particles are not the only thing with this type of basis.”

“I don’t understand.” This statement was becoming a mantra for him.

After a lengthy session, labcoat offered a simple concept. “If all substance is formed simultaneously with its opposite, all events must have a counter or antithesis. The universe is not made of static material; the particles of its makeup are in a constant state of flow, like a wave. This wave can be directed by the will. You must learn to will an event to occur. Taking no action allows belief to let an event happen—do not try to steer it. You need to step away from the system of local causality you have been indoctrinated with.”

“What does that mean, and how do I know when to do this?”

“Observing an event is not knowing.” The labcoat stressed, “Knowledge comes through wisdom, which is well-considered experience. So, consider this: The larger the system, the more local causality plays a role.”

“Because . . . because the particles are dependent on the wave?” Munroe was beginning to understand the underlying attributes.

“Because of the things of necessity—meaning things that lack will. So, energy conservation is the natural state, the ground state. After a willful action, the potential energy of a system eventually returns to its lowest possible energy state, waiting for an actor to impose will upon it. To see the truth of this, first place yourself in your spatiotemporal mind as an observer, not the actor. Then, set the body to a task allowing it to complete that task without managing it—let it go as it will go.”

“I have not been successful in holding that state.” Munroe was getting frustrated. Emotion, blocking all attempts.

“I will instigate it. You must hold it.” The mist evaporated into the light of his barracks.

For Munroe to accomplish out-of-body (OBE) projection, Labcoat had to set his body into a semiconscious phase, but only incrementally. Once he could adequately project himself, albeit only short distances, he thought he was ready to connect with another living thing.

Labcoat disagreed, and Munroe was drawn back into the mist.

“You need to learn to do something more than just a connection. You need to plug in, use the spirit-field, and hack into a clone-blank.”

“By hack, you mean control one. How can I . . .”

“Because the clones live in a relative state of diminished will, they should prove ideal for psychokinesis. Usually, we choose animals as familiars, but the clone will not resist you, and they are of the same species. This should make the connections easier.”

“Okay . . . What did you mean by spirit-field?”

“Say you are in a room measuring the air temperature at selected grid points. Each intersecting point laid out in the grid is a part of the field; the size of the grid squares can vary. Really small, or Quanta, means minute—atomistic; hence the term quantum field. When describing space, a field is different than a plane. Planes are thought of as levels held by constraining barriers—the field is space within a plane. The idea of multiple universes speaks of different astrological planes.”

“Are you talking about levels in the heavens? I was taught that there are many levels to hell but not to heaven and that Astral planes were these levels. Are there spirit boundaries?”

“The spirit-field is not bound by Astral planes; it is an imposition on the spatiotemporal physical world. Both exist in concert but not symbiotically— it's extratemporal.”

“So, one overlays the other?”

“In a way, yes. Since time is a measure of change, time passes in the mist only when dealing with the combined material and non-material aspects. In a comparison analogous to quantum field theory, spirits can move within the field, interact with the mind/spirit, and by that interaction, cause a new reaction. Spirits can also interact with the physical world but in a limited manner. Within this overlay of spirit/physical, time passes only when synced. But don't waste your experiences there because, in your current state of being, you would not be able to tell the difference—you could lose all sense of self.”

“When I project, what determines the connection?”

“It is similar to your connection with that clone body. A spirit in the spirit-field initiates the action. The body in the physical field interacts with material elements through the laws governing them. I can teach you how to spiritually interact with material things, but you will not be able to affect them or actually cause an inanimate object to move. However, you can project the event into another human’s mind so that to the observer, or observers, the object will appear to have moved. Only great spirits have the power to affect the physical world.”

“Can spirits control another spirit?” His mind was working out avenues of power.

“We can compel or sway certain actions in others . . . it’s not all that different than what you do in the physical plane.”

“What about miracles? When somebody changes the physical world by just using will? How does that work, and when can I learn that?”

“If you serve us well, many amazing things may be revealed. But back to the task at hand. Clear your preconceptions and observe.”

Munroe phased into the SOC and found himself in the clone crib, sitting on a bed.

*“For this to properly work.”* The clairaudient voice surprised him; it was different than before—less vivid. *“You must be able to physically see the clone. You should feel its essence as something different, more than something added. Then, as before, extend a part of the white aura surrounding you like a cord, and when it connects to the clone, test its hold by feel. I will induce the state.”*

Munroe prepared himself.

*“Now, stay loose and watch the clone—wait for the projection.”*

It did not come.

*“Clear your mind, dammit, use your power word.”*

A power word represented universal vibration. It was to be spoken repeatedly, sent off to meld with the infinite—a type of Mantra. His power word was Paladin.

Munroe tried and failed. This wounded Munroe where he was most vulnerable—he felt his insignificance magnify. Magister was not angry, only disappointed.

The next few days were bitter ones. The sergeant was coming down hard on him because he couldn't do anything right. Since he was a Gamma, a psych team was called in. This was dangerous because of the lie detection procedures. Not wanting to be revealed, Magister would hold the SOC during these times.

During one mist session, Munroe was given the battle of Malta to study. While watching the battle, he was able to zoom in like a video game to witness up close the actions of the Knights. It was like walking around inside a movie. Curious, he thought, how a rag-tag group of Christian knights could hold off a Muslim army more than seven times their size. A realization came to him while a nun was arguing with a wounded knight in the ill-fated Castle of St. Elmo. Here, he finally understood the level of faith needed to make the connection.

*“Your sword arm has been badly wounded, the port has fallen, ships burnt.” The nun had exclaimed. “What can you do in the face of such violence? You die for a lost cause.” the Knight began to rise from his bed, but she held him down.*

*He protested. “I must do my part—we all must do our part or fail.”*

*Nodding at the situation's futility, the nun was helping him to the door when the Muslim artillerymen found their range. The room exploded in a cloud of dust killing all inside.*

Munroe had no way of relating to the experience he had just witnessed, but the idea was not lost on him. Do what is expected of you because you can't control the rest. Worry only about



what you must do, and let the system adapt and modify. *“Let it go as it will go—I think I get it now.”* He spoke clairaudiently, but more to himself.

*“Fine. Next time, we will try attaching to a stable, sleeping clone.”* Magister suggested, *“That way, its movements will not distract you. When you return to the SOC to rest, think about that Maltese nun’s will, what she relinquished.”*

The next day, after his shift in the hospital’s clone recovery area, Munroe was ready to try a connection again. Entering the clone crib, he opened a sleeping clone’s top shirt thinking the link would work better with direct skin contact. He placed a single fingertip where he thought the center of its heart lay and set the connection imagery in his mind before the Magister began to induce the mental state. Focused on purpose, Munroe initiated the cord’s projection in his mind’s eye. Watching the white cord snake out of him towards the clone was challenging to control because when mentally directed, the connection would degrade.

*“Let it go as it will go.”* Magister reminded him.

Finally, he willed it to connect and let go, only observing without additional action. The cord touched the clone’s aura, and the connection held. Since a clone-blank’s aura is translucent white, it was hard to clearly see the point of contact.

*“Magister, I can feel it. It’s. . . like a warm burst of staticky wind, but there is no wind.”*

*“Yes, I noticed. Now, carefully, I want you to listen through its ears.”*

*“You want me to do what?”*

*“You are connected. Listen carefully, and you will hear what it’s hearing.”*

*“It’s a bit disorientating, like hearing through a tunnel.”* Excited by this, the connection began to pull.

*“Do not focus on the mechanics, or you will lose it.”*

But the experience was way too mind-blowing for him. He was *actually hearing* something from someone else's ears. And with that giddy glimpse of the transcendental, the connection broke suddenly and snapped violently back. A wave of nausea overtook him so entirely that sounds seemed to spin—he retched violently. With a sudden onset of severe vertigo, his body on the verge of collapse, the spirit took control of the SOC as he passed straight into the mist.

“You must continue your Zen studies, for only then will you be able to see without looking and listen without hearing.”

Munroe understood the rebuke, but he *was* pretty pleased with himself. The mist cleared as he phased back into the SOC. He saw the clone crib door slowly open as his sergeant cautiously stepped in.

“There you are, Corporal Munroe. What in the hell's going on in here? Are you ill?” He looked down at the wash of bile on the floor.

Munroe was trapped and left speechless, so the entity immediately took control of the SOC. Munroe watched from the mist as the clone's finger raised for the sergeant to wait. The finger turned to the still sleeping clone, pulling a cover over its bare chest.

The sergeant nervously looked around the crib. Troopers who worked with clone-blanks knew how unpredictably dangerous they were, so the sergeant treated them with respectful trepidation. “Well?” The sergeant spoke in a low tone.

“No, Sarge, not me. This clone is ill.” As Munroe's body stood and headed for the door, the spirit whispered the lie. “I needed to check on the last batch we released from the ward. Dr. Khalid was concerned with their adjustment and requested a visual inspection.” Magister held up Munroe's phone with its physio-monitoring attachment still dangling from the port. “Would you care to see the results?”

“No, not really,” The sergeant looked at him suspiciously, then shrugged. “Captain wants to see you immediately.”

Now calm, Munroe was allowed to phase back into the SOC. “What for? Am I in trouble?”

“Nah, nothing like that.” The sergeant was visibly nervous as two clones, no doubt curious, approached. “Let’s get the hell out of here.” The sergeant stated with some force while hastily opening the door.

Munroe could now see a faint glimmer around the man, streaks of blue and green. He’s scared of them—perhaps I can use that later. “So, why does the Captain need to see me?” He asked, following the sergeant out.

“He wants Dr. Okeke found, and he wants you to find him—bring him back to the fold.”

“Okeke left? Went AWOL?” Munroe was surprised.

“No, he’s in the Rivera. Capt’n wants to know if you’d like to join him there.” The sergeant lightly cuffed him on the back of the head.

“Why me? And I mean no disrespect here, sarge, but why not put the House Guard on it? Ain’t that their job?”

“I don’t know; maybe he thinks it would be funny if you fetched him—what do you care?” The Sergeant’s auras now displayed flickers of red. Does that mean he’s getting irritated? He thought. “Can I take a clone blank with me? It would be an opportune time to get some training done.” This idea was not Munroe’s, but he wished it was. It seemed odd to hear his body speak—he didn’t think he sounded like that. The sergeant didn’t notice any difference.

“No, no trainers are currently available. You should know this, and another clone bout is scheduled for this weekend.”

When Munroe grunted at this, the Sergeant shot him a challenging look.

Steady yourself, man. Munroe reminded himself. I must not grow too bold until I can fully use these new tools. It would be a bit of a game with that cocky doctor. Maybe I should discover what he knows.

The entity's voice was oddly friendly. *"Look to this goon of a sergeant, Andre."*

Munroe realized that this was the only time Magister used his first name. He took heart in this.

*"You saw the fear of clones in his aura. In time, you will read him and see his other fears. There is a deep foreboding he carries with him."*

*"How do I do this?"* Munroe's clairaudient reply was overly excited. "I find myself eager to serve my master." Munroe clasped his mouth. He had mistakenly vocalized this inner thought.

The Sergeant turned, offering a lame smile. "That's good. You will soon get your chance. You will do your master well if you can not only manage to find the doctor but bring him back so he may be properly educated on the error in his ways."

"Yes, sir." Munroe was excited as he considered the possibilities. These new skills I'm learning will make me formidable. I will be respected, and with respect comes power. My father was a shaman and had many spirit connections until the Christians came. They turned the people away from our tribal spirits. Now, I will show them the true nature of power. With each thought, his trust in the nameless entity grew—and with it, the bond. *"How do I see his other fears?"* Munroe struggled to stay on topic.

*"Sifting through a man's mind is a tricky thing."* The entity responded. *"However, I will help you until you are strong enough, and when you are ready, I will show you the way. But more importantly, you must quickly gain the trust of this organization—it is my master's instrument. You*

*will begin with this sergeant, but be wary of him as this one kills with little emotion. Doctor Okeke is important to Corvus, as the sergeant correctly points out—you would do well to find him.*”

It won't be easy to find him, he thought. There was no response from Magister.

“So how in the hell am I supposed to find him . . . um, the doctor?” Monroe asked the sergeant.

“Shouldn't be that difficult.” The sergeant replied, “We think he's headed for his tribe. Look, ” He stopped and faced Munroe. “Against my better judgment, we've been reassigned to the Black Cohort. My job is to make sure you do your job.” He continued on to the Captian's office.

This sucks. What the hell do they want from me? He thought. *“Magister, what is happening?”*

*“Do not be alarmed with the transfer. It was necessary.”*

Monroe was puzzled. What if I don't want to be in the Black Cohort? He thought. You can't hear what I'm thinking, can you? He waited for a few moments.

Silence.

*“What will happen if I can't find the doctor?”* Munroe projected his inner voice.

*“This should not prove too difficult. I will show you how to track the doctor through dreams, using his own mind to display images his eyes register along the way.”*

Why didn't you tell me that before? He thought. Silence. This is way too cool. He smiled.

*“You like that plan?”*

*“Yes, That's way too cool. Can you teach me that?”*

*“No, you are not yet in the proper state to do so.”*

*“Right, one thing at a time.”*

Munroe's pace slowed as the relationship with the spirit sank in. He thought, I'm still my own man, and these spirits can't take that away from me. What else can't they do?

The sergeant stopped outside the Captian's office, noting that Munroe was no longer following. "Come on, corporal, there is nothing to fear." He called down the hall.

"Right, sarge." Munroe jogged the last thirty feet. "I think I know a way to track Okeke." He eagerly announced, coming to a stop outside the door.

Grabbing the door handle, the sergeant hesitated. A look of concern passed briefly over his features. "We'll discuss that later."