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# **DOMAIN**

by *N.Y. Times* Best-Selling Author  
**Steve Alten**



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## **JOURNAL OF JULIUS GABRIEL**

I stand before the vast canvas, sharing the feeling of loneliness its creator must have surely felt thousands of years ago. Before me lies the answers to riddles--riddles that may ultimately determine whether our species is to live or die. *The future of the human race--is there anything more important?* Yet I stand here alone, my quest condemning me to this purgatory of rock and sand as I seek communion with the past in order to comprehend the peril that lies ahead.

The years have taken their toll. What a wretched creature I've become. Once a renowned archaeologist, now a laughingstock to my peers. A husband, a lover--these are but distant memories. A father? Scarcely. More a tortured mentor, a miserable beast of burden left to my son to lead about. Each step across the stone laden desert causes my bones to ache, while thoughts forever shackled in my mind repeat the maddening mantra of doom over and over in my brain. What higher power has chosen my family among all others to torture? Why have we been blessed with eyes that can the signposts of death while others stumble along as if blind?

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**Am I mad? The thought never leaves my mind. With each new dawn, I must force myself to reread the highlights of my chronicles, if only to remind myself that I am, first and foremost, a scientist, nay, not just a scientist, but an archaeologist--a seeker of man's past, a seeker of truth.**

**But what good is truth if it cannot be accepted? To my peers, I no doubt resemble the village idiot, screaming warning cries of icebergs to passengers boarding the Titanic as the unsinkable vessel leaves port.**

**Is it my destiny to save humanity, or simply to die the fool? Is it possible that I have spent a lifetime misinterpreting the signs?**

**The scraping of footsteps on silica and stone gives pause to this fool's entry.**

**It is my son. Named for an Archangel fifteen years ago by my beloved wife, Michael nods at me, momentarily warming his father's shriveled pit of a heart. Michael is the reason I persevere, the reason I do not end my miserable existence. The madness of my quest has robbed him of his childhood, but far worse was my own heinous deed, committed years earlier. It is to his future that I recommit myself, it is his destiny that I wish to change.**

**God, let this feeble heart last long enough to allow me to succeed.**

**Michael points ahead, reminding me the next piece of the puzzle beckons us. Stepping carefully so as not to disturb the pampa, we stand at what I believe is the beginning of the 3,000 year old message. Centered upon the Nazca plateau, laid sacred from the mysterious lines and colossal zoomorphs is this--a perfect circle, carved deeply between the black patina coated stones. Extending out from this mysterious centerpiece like sunbeams from a child's painting are twenty-three equidistant lines, all but one running some six-hundred feet. One line is aligned with the Solstice, another with the Equinox, variables consistent with the other ancient sites I've spent a lifetime exploring.**

**It is the twenty-third line that is most intriguing--a bold carving within the pampa, extending over rock and hill for some twenty-three miles!**

**Michael shouts, his metal detector erupting as we approach the center of the figure. *Something has been buried beneath the topsoil!* With renewed vigor, we dig through the**

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gypsum and stone, exposing the yellow dirt below. It is a heinous act, especially for an archaeologist, but I convince myself that the end shall ultimately justify the means.

And there it is, glistening beneath the broiling Sun. Smooth and white, a hollow cylinder of metal, a half-meter long, that has no more right being on the Nazca desert than I have. A three-pronged candelabra-like design adorns one end of the object. My feeble heart flutters, for I know the symbol as I know the back of my weathered hand. *The Trident of Paracas*--the signature icon of our cosmic teacher. A similar glyph, 600-feet long, 200-feet across, adorns an entire mountainside not far from here.

Michael steadies his camera as I open the cannister. Trembling, I remove what appears to be a length of parched canvas, my fingers registering its disintegration as it begins to unravel.

It is an ancient chart of the world, similar to the very one referenced 500 years ago by the Turkish Admiral, Piri Re'is. (This mysterious map was believed to have been the inspiration for Columbus's daring expedition in 1492.) To this day, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Piri Re'is map remains an enigma, for upon it appeared not just the undiscovered landmass of Antarctica, but the continent's geology, drawn as if the terrain possessed no ice. Satellite radar scans have since confirmed the incredible accuracy of the map, further baffling scientists as to how anyone could have drawn the charts without the aid of an airplane.

Perhaps the same way these very Nazca figures were drawn.

Like the Piri Re'is map, the parchment I now balance in my hand was laid out using an advanced knowledge of spherical trigonometry. Was the mysterious cartographer our ancient teacher? Of this I have no doubt. The real question is--*why* has he chosen to leave us this particular map?

Michael snaps a hurried Polaroid as the ancient document sings, then crumbles to dust within my hands. Moments later we are left to stare at the photograph, noting that an object, obviously of great importance, had clearly been highlighted. It is a small circle, drawn in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, situated just to the northwest of the Yucatan Peninsula.

The location of the mark startles me. This is *not* one of the ancient sites, this is

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something else entirely. A cold sweat breaks out over my skin, a familiar numbness rising up my arm.

Michael senses death approaching. He searches my pockets and quickly locates a pill, placing it beneath my tongue.

My pulse eases, the numbness retreating. I touch his cheek, then coax my son to return to his work. With pride I watch as he examines the metallic container--his black eyes, portals to an incredibly disciplined mind. Nothing escapes my son's eyes. Nothing.

Within moments, he makes another discovery, one that may explain the location highlighted in the Gulf of Mexico. The metal detector's spectral analyzer has determined the molecular breakdown of the dense, white metal--its very composite, a story unto itself.

The ancient cylinder is composed of iridium.

Pure iridium.

-- Excerpt from the Journal of Professor Julius Gabriel,

June 14, 1990

## ***PROLOGUE***

*65 million years ago*  
*Milky Way Galaxy*

A spiral galaxy--one of 100 billion islands of stars moving through the dark matter of the universe. Rotating like some luminescent cosmic pinwheel in the vastness of space, the galaxy hauls more than 200 billion stars and countless other bodies within its titanic vortex.

Let us examine this galactic hub. Observing the formation within our three-dimensional limits, our gaze is first drawn to the galactic bulge, composed of billions of red and orange stars, swirling within clouds of galactic dust some 15,000 light years across (a light year being approximately 6 trillion miles). Revolving around this lens-shaped region is the flatter, circular

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disk of the galaxy, 2,000 light years thick, 120,000 light years across, containing most of the galactic mass. Whipping around this disk are the galaxy's spiral arms, home to bright stars and luminescent clouds of gas and dust--cosmic incubators birthing new stars. Extending above and beyond these spiral arms is the galactic halo, a sparsely populated region containing globular star clusters which support the more senior members of the galactic family.

From here, we move to the very heart of the galaxy--a complex region surrounded by swirling clouds of gas and dust. Hidden within this nucleus is the true power-train of the celestial formation--a monstrous black hole--a dense, swirling vortex of gravitational energy, three million times heavier than the sun. This ravenous cosmic machine inhales everything within its unfathomable grasp--stars, planets, matter, even light, as it churns the heavenly bodies of the spiral galaxy.

Now let us look at the spiral galaxy from a higher dimension--a fourth dimension of time and space. Branching out through the galactic body like arteries and veins and capillaries are unseen conduits of energy, some so vast they could transport a star, others delicate, microscopic strings. All are powered by the unimaginable gravitational forces of the black hole, located at Galactic Central. Access a porthole into one of these conduits and you have accessed a fourth dimensional highway crossing the boundaries of time and space--assuming, of course, your transportation vessel could survive the trip.

As the galaxy revolves around its behemoth center point, so too these snake-like streams of energy move, always circling, continuing their timeless trek across the galactic plain like some bizarre spokes on a forever rotating cosmic wheel.

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Like a grain of sand caught in the mighty current of a gravitational stream, the asteroid-size projectile races through the fourth dimensional conduit, a porthole of time and space presently located in the Orion arm of the spiral galaxy. The ovoid mass, nearly seven miles in diameter, is protected from the cylinder's crushing embrace by an emerald-green anti-gravitational force field.

The celestial traveler is not alone.

Concealed within the spherical object's charged magnetic wake, bathed within the protective tail of the force field is another vessel--smaller, sleek, its flattened, dagger-shaped hull composed of shimmering gold solar panels.

Navigating through the dimension of space and time, the cosmic highway deposits its travelers to a region of the galaxy located along the inner edge of Orion's arm. Looming ahead--a solar system containing nine planetary bodies, governed by a single yellow-white star.

Sailing by way of the star's gravitational field, the immense iridium vessel closes quickly on its intended target--Venus--the second planet from the Sun, a world of intense heat, enshrouded in a canopy of dense acidic clouds and carbon dioxide.

The smaller vessel closes from behind, revealing its presence to its enemy.

Immediately, the iridium transport alters its course, increasing its velocity by tapping into the gravitational pull of the system's third planet, a watery, blue world containing a toxic atmosphere of oxygen.

With a brilliant flash, the smaller ship expels a white-hot burst of energy from an extended fin-like antenna rising from behind its bow. The charge streaks through the ion stream of the sphere's electromagnetic tail like a bolt of lightning coursing along a metal cable.

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The charge ignites upon the iridium hull like an aurora, the electrical blast short-circuiting the vessel's propulsion system, knocking the behemoth violently off-course. Within moments, the damaged mass is seized within the lethal embrace of the blue world's gravitational field.

The asteroid-size projectile hurtles toward Earth, out of control.

With a sonic boom, the iridium sphere violates the hostile atmosphere. The mirror-like outer hull cracks and pits, then blazes briefly into a blinding fireball before plunging into a shallow, tropical sea. Barely slowed by thousands of feet of water, it strikes bottom in a fraction of a second--causing--for one surreal moment, a cylinder of ocean to empty to the sea floor.

A nano-second later, the celestial impact detonates in a brilliant white flash, unleashing 100 million mega-tons of energy.

The thunderous explosion rocks the entire planet, generating temperatures that exceed 32,000 degrees Fahrenheit, hotter than the surface of the Sun. Two gaseous fireballs ignite at once. The first, a dust cloud of hot, powdered rock and iridium coming from the disintegrated outer hull of the vessel, followed by billowing clouds of highly-pressurized steam and carbon dioxide, the gases released as the sea and its limestone bed are vaporized.

The rubble and superheated gases rise into the devastated atmosphere, drawn upward through the vacuum of air created by the object's descent. Enormous shockwaves ripple across the sea, giving rise to monstrous tsunamis that crest to heights of three hundred feet or more as they hit shallow water and race for land.

***Southern Coastline of North America:***

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In deadly silence, the pack of Velociraptors closes around its prey, a thirty-one-foot long female *Corythosaurus*. Sensing danger, the duck-billed reptile raises her magnificent fan-shaped crest and snorts the humid air, detecting the scent of the pack. Trumpeting a warning cry to the rest of the herd, she crashes through the forest, galloping towards the sea.

Without warning, a brilliant *flash* stuns the fleeing duck-bill. The reptile staggers, shaking its great head, attempting to regain its sight. As its vision clears, two raptors leap from the foliage and screech at the larger beast, blocking her escape as the rest of the pack pounces upon the Corythosaur's back, gouging her flesh with their deadly, sickle-clawed feet. One of the first hunters finds the duckbill's throat, biting into the animal's esophagus as it digs its feet and sickle claws into the soft flesh below the sternum. The wounded reptile chokes out a cry, gagging on its own blood as another raptor bites down upon its flat snout, plunging its front claws into the Corythosaur's eyes, bringing its heavier foe whimpering to the ground.

In moments, it is over. The predators snarl, snapping at each other as they tear apart mouthfuls of flesh from their still quivering prey. Occupied with the kill, the Velociraptors ignore the trembling ground beneath their feet and the approaching thunder.

A dark shadow passes overhead. The bird-like dinosaurs look up as one, blood dripping from their jowls as they growl at the mountainous wall of water.

The twenty-two-story wave crests--then falls--pummeling the startled hunters, liquefying their bones into the sand with a thunderous *clap*. The wave sweeps north, its kinetic energy obliterating everything in its path.

The tsunami inundates the terrain, sweeping vegetation, sediment, and land creatures within its roaring swell as it submerges the tropical coastline for hundreds of miles in all



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directions. What little forest remains outside the wash path ignites as searing blast waves turn the air into a veritable furnace. A pair of *Pteranodons* attempt to escape the holocaust. Rising above the trees, their reptilian wings catch fire, incinerating in the thermal wind.

High above, chunks of iridium and rock that were launched skyward begin re-entering the atmosphere as incandescent meteors. Within hours, the entire planet is shrouded in a dense cloud of dust, smoke, and ash.

The forests will burn for months. For nearly a year, no sunlight will penetrate the blackened sky to reach the surface of the once-tropical world. The temporary cessation of photosynthesis will obliterate thousands of species of plants and animals on land and in the sea, as the Sun's eventual return is followed by years of nuclear winter.

In one cataclysmic moment, the 140-million-year domain of the dinosaurs has come to an abrupt end.

\* \* \*

For days, the sleek gold vessel remains in orbit high above the devastated world, its sensors continuously scanning the impact site. The fourth dimensional highway home is long gone, the rotation of the galaxy having already moved the conduit's access point several light years away.

On the seventh day, an emerald-green light begins to glow from beneath the fractured sea floor. Seconds later, a powerful subspace radio signal ignites, the distress call directed into the outer reaches of the galaxy.

The life forms within the orbiting vessel jam the signal--too late.

Evil has taken root in yet another celestial garden. It is just a matter of time before it is

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awakened.

The golden star ship moves into a geo-synchronous orbit directly above its enemy. A solar-powered automated hyperwave radio signal is engaged, jamming all outgoing or incoming transmissions. Then the vessel shuts down, its power cells diverted to its life support pods.

For the star ship's inhabitants, time now stands still.

For the planet Earth, the clock has begun ticking. . .

# 1

***September 8, 2012***  
***Miami, Florida***

The South Florida Evaluation and Treatment Center is a seven-story white concrete building with evergreen trim, located in a rundown ethnic neighborhood just west of the city of Miami. Like most businesses in the area, the rooftops are rimmed in coils of barbed wire fencing. Unlike other establishments, the barbed wire is not meant to keep the public out, but its residents in.

Thirty-one year old Dominique Vazquez weaves through rush hour traffic, cursing aloud as she races south on Route 441. The first day of her internship and she is already late. Swerving around a teenager riding the wrong way on motorized skates, she pulls into the visitors parking lot, parks, then hastily twists her waist-length, jet-black hair into a tight bun as she jogs toward

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the entrance.

Magnetic doors part, allowing her access into an air-conditioned lobby.

A Hispanic woman in her late forties sits behind the information desk, reading the morning news from a clipboard-sized, wafer-thin computer monitor. Without looking up, she asks, “Can I help you?”

“Yes. I have an appointment with Margaret Reinke.”

“Not today you don’t. Dr. Reinke no longer works here.” The woman fingers the page-down button, advancing the news monitor to another article.

“I don’t understand. I spoke with Dr. Reinike two weeks ago.”

The receptionist finally looks up. “And you are?”

“Vazquez, Dominique Vazquez. I’m here on a one-year post-graduate internship from FSU. Dr. Reinike’s supposed to be my sponsor.” She watches the woman pick up the phone and press an extension.

“Dr. Foletta, a young woman by the name of Domino Vass--”

“Vazquez. Dominique Vazquez.”

“Sorry. Dominique Vazquez. No, sir, she’s down here in the lobby, claiming to be Dr. Reinike’s intern. Yes, sir.” The receptionist hangs up. “You can have a seat over there. Dr. Foletta will be down to speak with you in a few minutes.” The woman swivels her back to Dominique, returning to her news monitor.

Ten minutes pass before a large man in his late fifties makes his way down a corridor.

Anthony Foletta looks like he belongs on a football field coaching defensive lineman, not walking the halls of a State facility housing the criminally insane. A mane of thick gray hair rolls

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back over an enormous head, which appears to be attached directly to the shoulders. Blue eyes twinkle between sleepy lids and puffy cheeks. Though overweight, the upper body is firm, the stomach protruding slightly from the open white lab coat.

A forced smile, and a thick hand is extended.

“Anthony Foletta, new Chief of Psychology.” The voice is deep and grainy, like an old lawn mower.

“What happened to Dr. Reinike?”

“Personal situation. Rumor has it her husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Guess she decided to take an early retirement. Reinike told me to expect you. Unless you have any objections, I’ll be supervising your internship.”

“No objections.”

“Good. He turns and heads back down the hall, Dominique hustling to keep pace.

“Dr. Foletta, how long have you been with the facility?”

“Ten days. I transferred down here from the State facility in Massachusetts.”

They approach a guard at the first security check point. “Give the guard your driver’s license?”

Dominique searches her purse, then hands the man the laminated card, swapping it for the visitor’s pass. “Use this for now,” Foletta says. “Turn it in when you leave at the end of the day. We’ll get you an encoded intern’s badge before the week’s out. ”

She clips the pass to her blouse, then follows him into the elevator.

Foletta holds three fingers up to a camera mounted above his head. The doors close.

“Have you been here before? Are you familiar with the layout?”

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“No. Dr. Reinike and I only spoke by phone.”

“There are seven floors. Administration and central security’s on the first floor. The main station controls both the staff and resident elevators. Level 2 houses a small medical unit for the elderly and terminally ill. Level 3 is where you’ll find our dining area and rec rooms. It also accesses the mezzanine, yard, and therapy rooms. Level’s 4, 5, 6, and 7 house residents.” Foletta chuckles. “Dr. Blackwell refers to them as ‘customers.’ An interesting euphemism, don’t you think, considering we haul them in here wearing handcuffs.”

They exit the elevator, passing a security station identical to the one on the first floor. Foletta waves, then follows a short corridor to his office. Cardboard boxes are piled everywhere, stuffed with files, framed diplomas, and personal items.

“Excuse the mess, I’m still getting situated.” Foletta removes a computer printer from a chair, motioning for Dominique to sit, then squeezes uncomfortably behind his own desk, leaning back in his leather chair to afford his belly room.

He opens her personnel file. “Hmm. Completing your doctorate at Florida State, I see. Get out to many football games?”

“Not really.” *Use the opening.* “You look like you’ve played a little football before.”

It is a good parlay, causing Foletta’s cherub face to light up. “Fighting Blue Hens of Delaware, class of ‘79. Starting nose tackle. Division 1-AA. Would have been a lower round NFL draft pick if I hadn’t torn my knee up against Lehigh.”

“What made you get into forensic psychology?”

“Had an older brother who suffered from a pathological obsession. Always in trouble with the law. His psychiatrist was a Delaware Alumnus and a big football fan. Used to bring him

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down to the locker room after games. When I injured my knee, he pulled a few strings to get me into grad school.” Foletta leans forward, placing her file flat on the desk. “Let’s talk about you. I’m curious. There are several other facilities closer to FSU than ours. What brings you down here?”

Dominique clears her throat. “My parents live over in Sanibel. It’s only a two hour ride from Miami. I don’t get home very often.”

Foletta guides a thick index finger across her personnel file. “Says here you’re originally from Guatemala.”

“Yes.”

“How’d you end up in Florida?”

“My parents--my real parents died when I was six. I was sent to live with a cousin in Tampa.”

“But that didn’t last?”

“Is this important?”

Foletta looks up. The eyes are no longer sleepy. “I’m not much for surprises, Intern Vazquez. Before assigning residents, I like to know my own staff’s psyche. Most residents don’t give us much of a problem, but it’s important to remember that we’re still dealing with some violent individuals. Safety’s a priority with me. What happened in Tampa? How was it that you ended up in a foster home?”

“Suffice it to say that things didn’t work out with my cousin.”

“Did he rape you?”

Dominique is taken back by his directness. “If you must know--yes. I was only ten at the

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time.”

“You were under the care of a psychiatrist?”

She stares back at him. *Stay cool, he’s testing you.* “Yes, until I was seventeen.”

“Does it bother you to talk about it?”

“It happened. It’s over. I’m sure it influenced my choice of career, if that’s where this is leading.”

“Your interests too. Says here you have a second degree black belt in Taekwondo. Ever use it?”

“Only in tournaments.”

The lids open wide, the blue eyes baiting her with their intensity. “Tell me, Intern Vazquez, do you imagine your cousin’s face when you kick your opponents?”

“Sometimes.” She pushes a strand of hair from her eyes. “Who did you pretend to hit when you played football for those Fighting Blue Hens?”

“*Touche.*” The eyes return to the file. “Date much?”

“My social life concerns you as well?”

Foletta sits back in his chair. “Traumatic sexual experiences like yours often lead to sexual disorders. Again, I just want to know who I’m working with.”

“I have no aversions to sex, if that’s what you’re asking. I *do* have a healthy mistrust toward prying men.”

“This isn’t a halfway house, Intern Vazquez. You’ll need thicker skin than that if you expect to handle forensic residents. Men like these have made names for themselves feasting on pretty college women like you. Coming from FSU, I’d think you could appreciate that.”

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Dominique takes a deep breath, relaxing her coiled muscles. *Dammit, tuck your ego away and pay attention.* “You’re right, doctor. My apologies.”

Foletta closes the file. “Truth is, I have you in mind for a special assignment, but I need to be absolutely certain that you’re up to the task.”

Dominique re-energizes. “Try me.”

Foletta removes a thick brown file from his top desk drawer. “As you know, this facility believes in a multi-disciplinary team approach. Each resident is assigned a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, social worker, psychiatric nurse, and a rehab therapist. My initial reaction when I first got here was that it’s a bit overkill, but I can’t argue with the results, especially when dealing with substance abuse patients and preparing individuals to participate in their forthcoming trials.”

“But not in this case?”

“No. The resident I want you to oversee is a patient of mine, an inmate from the asylum where I served as psychological services director.”

“I don’t understand. You brought him with you?”

“Our facility lost funding about six months ago. He’s certainly not fit for society, and he had to be transferred somewhere. Since I’m more familiar with his history than anyone else, I thought it would be less traumatic for all concerned if he remained under my care.”

“Who is he?”

“Ever hear of Professor Julius Gabriel?”

“Gabriel?” The name sounded familiar. “Wait a second, wasn’t he the archaeologist who dropped dead during a Harvard lecture several years ago?”



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“Twelve years ago.” Foletta grins. “After three decades of research grants, Julius Gabriel returned to the States and stood before an assembly of his peers, claiming that the ancient Egyptians and Mayans had built their pyramids with the help of extraterrestrials--all to save humanity from destruction. Can you imagine? The audience laughed him right off stage. He probably died of humiliation.” Foletta’s cheeks quiver as he chuckles. “Julius Gabriel was a real poster child for paranoid schizophrenia.”

“So who’s the patient?”

“His son.” Foletta opens the file. “Michael Gabriel, age thirty-six. Prefers to be called Mick. Spent the first twenty-five years of his life working side by side with his parents in archaeological digs, probably enough to turn any kid psychotic.”

“Why was he incarcerated?”

“Mick lost it during his father’s lecture. The court diagnosed him paranoid schizophrenic and sentenced him to the Massachusetts State Mental Facility where I served as his clinical psychiatrist, remaining so even after my promotion to Director in 2006.”

“Same kind of delusions as his father?”

“Of course. Father and son were both convinced that some terrible calamity is going to wipe mankind off the face of the planet. Mick also suffers from the usual paranoid delusions of persecution, most of it brought about by his father’s death and his own incarceration. Claims that a government conspiracy has kept him locked up all these years. In Mick Gabriel’s mind, he’s the ultimate victim, an innocent man attempting to save the world, caught up in the immoral ambitions of a self-centered politician.”

“I’m sorry, you lost me on that last bit.”

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Foletta leafs through the file, removing a series of Polaroids from a manila envelope.

“This is the man he attacked. Take a good look at the picture, Intern. Make sure you don’t let your defenses down.”

It is a close-up of a man’s face, brutally battered. The right eye socket is covered in blood.

“Mick tore the microphone from the podium and beat the victim senseless with it. Poor man ended up losing his eye. I think you’ll recognize the victim’s name. Pierre Borgia.”

“Borgia? You’re kidding? The Secretary of State?”

“This was nearly eleven years ago, before Borgia was appointed U.N. representative. He was running for Senator at the time. Some say the attack probably helped get him elected. Before the Borgia political machine pushed him into politics, Pierre was apparently quite the scholar. He and Julius Gabriel were in the same doctoral program at Cambridge. Believe it or not, the two of them actually worked together as colleagues after graduation, exploring ancient ruins for a good five or six years before having a major fallout. Borgia’s family finally convinced him to return to the States and enter politics, but the bad blood never went away.

“Turns out it was Borgia who actually introduced Julius as the keynote speaker. Pierre probably said a few things he shouldn’t have said, which helped incite the crowd. Julius Gabriel had a bad heart. After he dropped dead backstage, Mick retaliated. Took six cops to pull him off. It’s all in the file.”

“Sounds more like an isolated emotional outburst, brought on by--.”

“That kind of rage takes years to build up, Intern. Michael Gabriel was a volcano, waiting to erupt. Here we have an only child, raised by two prominent archaeologists in some of the most desolate areas of the world. He never attended school or had the opportunity to socialize with

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other children, all of which contributed to an extreme case of antisocial personality disorder.

Hell, Mick has probably never gone out on a date. Everything he ever learned was taught to him by his only companions, his parents, at least one of which was certifiable.”

Foletta hands her the file.

“What happened to his mother?”

“Died of pancreatic cancer while the family was living in Peru. For some reason, her death still haunts him. Once or twice a month he’ll wake up screaming. Vicious night terrors.”

“How old was Mick when she died?”

“Twelve.”

“Any idea why her death still creates such trauma?”

“No. Mick refuses to speak about it.” Foletta adjusts himself, unable to get comfortable in the small chair. “The truth, Intern Vazquez, is that Michael Gabriel doesn’t like me very much.”

“Transference neurosis?”

“No. Mick and I never had that kind of doctor-patient relationship. I’ve become his jailer, part of his paranoia. Some of that no doubt stems from his first years of residence. Mick had a hard time adjusting to confinement. One week before his six month evaluation, he flipped out on one of our guards, breaking both the man’s arms and kicking him repeatedly in the scrotum. Caused so much damage that both testicles had to be surgically removed. There’s a picture somewhere in the file if you care--”

“No thanks.”

“As punishment for the attack, Mick spent most of the last ten years in solitary

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confinement.”

“That’s a bit severe, isn’t it?”

“Not where I come from. Mick’s a lot more clever than the men who we hire to guard him. It’s best for all concerned to keep him isolated.”

“Will he be allowed to participate in group activities?”

“They have strict rules about mainstreaming residents down here, but for now, the answer’s no.”

Dominique stares at the Polaroids again. “How concerned do I need to be about this guy attacking me?”

“In our business, Intern, you always have to be concerned. Is Mick Gabriel a threat to attack? Always. Do I think he will? Doubtful. The last ten years haven’t been easy on him.”

“Will he ever be permitted to re-enter society?”

Foletta shakes his head. “Never. In the road of life, this is Mick Gabriel’s last stop. He’d never be able to handle the rigors of society. Mick’s scared.”

“Scared of what?”

“His own schizophrenia. Mick claims he can sense the presence of evil growing stronger, feeding off society’s hatred and violence. His phobia reaches a breaking point every time another angry kid grabs his father’s gun and shoots up a high school. This kind of stuff really gets to him.”

“It gets to me too.”

“Not like this. Mick becomes a tiger.”

“Is he being medicated?”

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“We keep him on *zyprexa*--twice a day. Knocks most of the fight out of him.”

“So what do you want me to do with him?”

“State law requires that he receive therapy. Use the opportunity to gain some valuable experience.”

*He's hiding something.* “I appreciate the opportunity, doctor. But why me?”

Foletta pushes up from the desk and stands, the furniture creaking beneath his weight. “As director of this facility, it might be construed as a conflict of interest if I were the only one treating him.”

“But why not assign a full team to--”

“No.” Foletta’s patience is wearing thin. “Michael Gabriel is still my patient, and I’ll determine what avenue of therapy is best suited for him, not some Board of Trustees. What you’ll soon find out for yourself is that Mick’s a bit of a con artist--quite clever, very articulate, and very intelligent. His IQ’s close to 160.”

“That’s rather unusual for a schizophrenia, isn’t it?”

“Unusual, but not unheard of. My point is--he’d only toy with a social worker or rehab specialist. It takes someone with your training to see through his bullshit.”

“So when do I meet him?”

“Right now. He’s being brought to a seclusion room so I can observe your first encounter. I told him all about you this morning. He’s looking forward to speaking with you. Just be careful.”

\* \* \*

The top four floors of the facility, referred to as units by the S.F.E.T.C. staff, each house

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forty-eight residents. Units are divided into north and south wings, each wing containing three pods. A pod consists of a small rec room with sofas and a television, centered around eight private dorm rooms. Each floor has its own security and nurses station. There are no windows.

Foletta and Dominique ride the staff elevator to the seventh floor. An African American security guard is speaking to one of the nurses at the central station. The seclusion room is to his left.

The director acknowledges the guard, then introduces him to the new intern. Marvis Jones is in his late forties, with kind, brown eyes that exude confidence gained through experience. Dominique notices that the guard is unarmed. Foletta explains that no weapons are permitted on residential floors at any time.

Marvis leads them through the central station to a one-way security glass looking in on the seclusion room.

Michael Gabriel is sitting on the floor, leaning back against the far wall facing the window. He is wearing a white tee-shirt and matching slacks, his physique appearing surprisingly fit, the upper body well defined. He is tall, nearly six-four, two-hundred and twenty pounds. The hair is dark brown, a bit on the long side, curling at the fringes. The face is handsome and cleanly shaven. A three-inch scar stretches across the right side of the jaw line, close to the ear. His eyes remain fixed on the floor.

“He’s cute.”

“So was Ted Bundy.” Foletta says. “I’ll be watching you from here. I’m sure Mick will be quite charming, wanting to impress you. When I think you’ve had enough, I’ll have the nurse come in and give him his medication.”

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“Okay.” Her voice quavers. *Relax, God dammit.*

Foletta smiles. “Are you nervous?”

“No, just a little excited.”

She exits the station, motioning to Marvis to unlock the seclusion room. The door swings open, stimulating butterflies to take wing in her stomach. Pausing long enough to allow her pulse to slow, she enters, shuddering as the double *click* seals the door behind her.

The seclusion room is ten by twelve feet long. An iron bed is bolted to the floor and wall directly in front of her, a thin pad serving as a mattress. A solitary chair faces the bed, also bolted to the floor. A smoked panel of glass on the wall to her right is the undisguised viewing window. The room smells of antiseptic.

Mick Gabriel is standing now, his head slightly bowed so she cannot see his eyes.

Dominique extends a hand, forcing a smile. “Dominique Vazquez.”

Mick looks up, revealing animal eyes so intensely black that it is impossible to determine where the pupils end and the irises begin.

“Dominique Vazquez. Dominique Vazquez.” The resident pronounces each syllable carefully, as if locking it into his memory. “It’s so very nice to. . .”

The smile suddenly disappears, the pasted expression going blank.

Dominique’s heart pounds in her ears. *Stay calm. Don’t move.*

Mick closes his eyes. Something unexpected is happening to him. Dominique sees his jaw line rise slightly, revealing the scar. The nostrils flare like an animal tracking its prey.

“May I come closer, please?” The words are spoken softly, almost whispered. She senses an emotional dam cracking behind the voice.

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Dominique fights the urge to turn toward the smoked glass.

The eyes reopen. "I swear on my mother's soul that I won't harm you."

*Watch his hands. Drive the knee home if he lunges.* "You can come closer, but no sudden movements, okay? Dr. Foletta's watching."

Mick takes two steps forward, remaining half an arm's length away. He leans his face forward, closing his eyes, inhaling--as if her face is an exquisite bottle of wine.

The man's presence is causing the hairs on the back of her arms to stand on end. She watches his facial muscles relax as his mind leaves the room. Water wells behind the closed eyelids. Several tears escape, flowing freely down his cheeks.

For a brief moment, maternal instincts cause her defenses to drop. *Is this an act?* Her muscles recoil.

Mick opens his eyes, now black pools. The animal intensity has vanished.

"Thank you. I think my mother must have worn the same perfume."

She takes a step back. "It's *Calvin Klein*. Does it bring back happy memories?"

"Some bad ones as well."

The spell is broken. Mick moves to the cot. "Would you prefer the chair or the bed?"

"The chair's fine." He waits for her to sit first, then positions himself on the edge of the cot so that he can lean back against the wall. Mick moves like an athlete.

"You look like you've managed to stay in shape."

"Living in solitary can do that if one's mind is disciplined enough. I do a thousand push-ups and sit-ups everyday." She feels his eyes absorb her figure. "You look like you work out as well."



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“I try.”

“Vazquez. Is that with an s or a z?”

“Z.”

“Puerto Rico?”

“Yes. My. . . my biological father grew up in Arecibo.”

“Site of the largest radio telescope in the world. But the accent sounds Guatemalan.”

“I was raised there.” *He’s controlling the conversation.* “I take it you’ve been to Central America?”

“I’ve been to many places.” Mick tucks his heels into a lotus position. “So you were raised in Guatemala. How did you find your way to this great land of opportunity?”

“My parents died when I was young. I was sent to live in with a cousin in Florida. Now let’s talk about you.”

“You said your biological father. You felt it important to distinguish him as such. Who’s the man you consider your true father?”

“Isadore Axler. He and his wife adopted me. I spent some time in an orphanage after I left my cousins. Iz and Edith Axler are wonderful people. They’re both marine biologists. They operate a SOSUS station on Sanibel Island.”

“SOSUS?”

“It’s a sound underwater surveillance system, a global network of undersea microphones. The Navy deployed SOSUS during the cold war to detect enemy subs. Biologists took over the system, using it to eavesdrop on marine life. It’s actually sensitive enough to listen in on pods of whales hundreds of miles away as--”

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The penetrating eyes cut her off. “Why did you leave your cousin? Something traumatic must have happened for you to have ended up in an orphanage.”

*He’s worse than Foletta.* “Mick, I’m here to talk about you.”

“Yes, but perhaps I’ve also had a traumatic childhood. Perhaps your story could help me.”

“I doubt it. Everything turned out fine. The Axlers gave me back my childhood and I’m--”

“But not your innocence.”

Dominique feels the blood rush from her face. “All right, now that we’ve established that you’re a quick study, let’s see if you can focus that amazing I.Q. of yours in on yourself.”

“You mean, so you can help me?”

“So we can help each other.”

“You haven’t read my file yet, have you?”

“Not yet, no.”

“Do you know why Director Foletta assigned you to me?”

“Why don’t you tell me?”

Mick stares at his hands, contemplating a response. “There’s a study, written by Rosenhan. Have you read it?”

“No.”

“Would you mind reading it before we meet again? I’m sure Dr. Foletta must have a copy stashed in one of those cardboard boxes he calls a filing system.”

She smiles. “If it’s important to you, then I’ll read it.”

“Thank you.” He leans forward. “I like you, Dominique. Do you know why I like you?”

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“No.” The fluorescent bulbs perform a moonlight dance in his eyes.

“I like you because your mind hasn’t become institutionalized. You’re still fresh, and that’s important to me, because I really want to confide in you, but I can’t, at least not in this room, not with Foletta watching. I also think you may be able to relate to some of the hardships I’ve gone through. So I’d like to talk to you about a lot of things, very important things. Do you think we could talk in private next time? Perhaps down in the yard?”

“I’ll ask Dr. Foletta.”

“Remind him of the facility’s rules when you do. Would you also ask him to give you my father’s journal. If you’re to be my therapist, then I feel it’s of vital importance that you read it. Would you mind doing that for me?”

“I’d be honored to read it.”

“Thank you. Would you read it soon, perhaps over the weekend? I hate to give you homework, this being your first day and all, but it’s vitally important that you read it right away.”

The door swings open, the nurse entering. The guard waits outside, watching at the doorway. “Time for your medication, Mr. Gabriel.” She hands him the paper cup of water, then the white tablet.

“Mick, I have to go. It was nice meeting you. I’ll do my best to have my homework done by Monday, okay?” She stands, turning to leave.

Mick is staring at the pill. “Dominique, the relatives on your mother’s side. They’re Quiche Maya, aren’t they?”

“Mayan? I-I don’t know.” *He knows you’re lying.* “I mean it’s possible. My parents died when I was very--”

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The eyes look up suddenly, the effect disarming. “Four *Ahau*, three *Kankin*. You know what day that is, don’t you, Dominique?”

*Oh, shit.* . . . “I--I’ll see you soon.” Dominique pushes past the guard, exiting the room.

Michael Gabriel places the pill carefully in his mouth. He drains the cup of water, then crumples it in the palm of his left hand. He opens his mouth, allowing the nurse to probe with her tongue depressor and pencil-thin flashlight, verifying that he has swallowed the medication.

“Thank you, Mr. Gabriel. The guard will escort you back to your room in a few minutes.”

Mick remains on the cot until the nurse has closed the door. He stands, returning to the far wall, his back to the window, the index finger of his left hand casually sliding the white pill out of the empty cup and into his palm. Resuming his lotus position on the floor, he tosses the crumpled cup onto the bed while slipping the white tablet into his shoe.

The *zyprexa* will be properly disposed of in the toilet when he returns to his private cell.

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