

SCIENCE FICTION



THE DAY OF  
THE NEFILIM

DL MAJOR

## Praise for *The Day of the Neflim*

“I have been reading SF since about 1970, when I was ten years old, having inherited a bookshelf of the greats – Heinlein, Herbert, Azimov, Bradbury, Vonnegut, etc, when my family moved in to a new house. Since then I have devoured just about everything in most of the genres that have populated the print and electronic worlds as they have matured along with the realities of hard science. I have also been a fan of conspiracy lit, be it templar, illuminati, or of the X-Files sort.

In the last year, as a result of having an iphone and discovering *manybooks.net*, I have started consuming more and more SF from the ‘unknowns’ and ‘unsigned’ which have been showing up with a greater frequency, and the fact of the matter is:

*The Day of The Neflim* is one of the best SF novels I have read since I began reading.

Maybe that’s just because all of what I have read until now provided the knowledge and context to appreciate the depth of David’s work, which didn’t allow me to put it down until I finished it. Straight through, in one sitting. Yeah, that’s right, I did not put the book down until I finished reading it. Couldn’t.

Well done David. Keep writing. Can’t wait to read your next book... You would make Robert Anton Wilson proud, and Douglas Adams smile.” — *exiledsurfer* on *Manybooks.net*

“...I love this book as much as I love all of my favorite science fiction books, and that’s a quantity that defies quantifiers. Everything in this book is perfect. The ending is perfect; the villains are perfect; the characters and images and settings are perfect. I, too, could barely put it down. And I want to also say, thank you.” — *P. Deering*

“I’ve read a lot of SF and conspiracy theories in my time, watched thousands of SF movies and documentaries, but I’ve never come across anything with the likes of your imagination. I was only able to understand it because of all I’ve read and watched in the last twenty years. I’ve never read any of your work before, but I believe you stand out.” — *E.V.*

“This was an excellent read. Elements of Moorcock, Heinlein and Barker. Deserves serious consideration for the avid SF reader. Hopefully will spawn some more installments in the story line. Also feel it has the makings of a good screenplay. Thanks for the great writing David!” — *Ron W.*

“And just as Pig ‘was going to have a crap in the grass, then a roll in the mud’, it finished. Great read, I hope to see more. Reminds me a lot of that Triffids book which sticks in my mind from about 40 years ago. Good read :)” — *be1952*

“Loved the book. It ranks, in my mind, with L. Ron Hubbard’s *Battlefield Earth*. Would be a great movie. Please continue.” — *LG*

“...this is an excellent full-on fantasy sci fi that incorporates current parallels and a unique and engrossing universe. An interesting blend of 2D and 3D characters and an interesting ‘life in the interior’ scenario. When’s the movie coming?” — *RS, PalmGear*

“Well I just finished the first half of this fine story, what can I say other than I’m hooked!!!!!! Who’s the blue mutant woman, does Bark get with Reina?!?! Can the rebel mutants shut down the Nefilim grid and engage theirs before it’s too late?!?! Hmm, I guess I won’t find out until you release the second half. A big New York City thanks to you and some fine SF writing.” — *LC, Palmgear.com*

“Thank you for publishing the *The Day Of The Nefilim* for the Palm. I have enjoyed the imagery that you have provided in the story and think that your style of writing is very captivating. Keep up the good work, and thank you again. I have enjoyed the reading MUCH so far!” — *WP, Palmgear.com*

“Wow!!! Oh my. I almost quit work to finish the first part. I got lost in the awesome surrealism of this novel. When I started reading, I couldn’t put it down. Please (I beg), for humanity’s sake, make Part 2 available in the .lit version. I’ll pay for it. I’ll almost buy a Palm Pilot just to read the second part.” — *lawalty, Handango.com*

“Great story! One of the most original I’ve read in a long time! Brilliant use of characters and current events. I couldn’t put it down.” — *MF, Palmgear.com*

“Okay, okay. That was coooooooooooool.”  
— *MP, Branch Manager, West Indianapolis Branch Library*

“It’s an odd book...” — *DS*



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# THE DAY OF THE NEFILIM

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## THE DAY OF THE NEFILIM

by David Major

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## Prologue / 1

The sun darkens. At first imperceptibly, and then with greater speed, it casts an unfamiliar veil over itself. It is the first eclipse in years.

The people look up at the sky, where some of them notice to the east a star falling to its death, and others watch the hulking disk of the moon that obscures the sun. It was all there in the sky that day, above Barker's Mill.

After a few minutes, the eclipse is over. The planets creak slowly along their orbits, and soon everything is as it was.

On the ground far below, life teeters on the edge of changing forever, but for today at least, it changes its mind and proceeds as it always has, grinding along the rusting tracks of its normality. It forgets quickly the strange orange dusk that had descended from the middle of the day.

On the edge of a tree-lined bay, with water the same deep green that you find in the glass of old bottles, stands Barker's Mill. The town has been laid out with the same care that a child gives to the arrangement of a new set of blocks. Its houses sit solidly, arranged in neat rows, portly squires gathered around a dinner table on their foundation seats of brick and bluestone. It is a most respectable gathering; everyone is well behaved.

It has been like this since the town began. To the people who live there, it feels as though it has been like this since the beginning of time. Which, of course, is not the case.

Meanwhile, far away, the General dreams, and Bark dreams.

For now, they don't remember the things they dream, but in time that will change; for one of them at least, and for the other it won't matter.

Their paths are linked, like the curls of a tattoo of snakes; but also like a tattoo, the effect will not be to everyone's taste.

These things happen.

## Prologue / 2

The planet had been traveling through the cold, deathless silence for a long time. Like a marble worn smooth with age, it rolled across the black expanses of deep space, patiently following its preordained path. The planet's orbit was a huge ellipse, and the sun that held it in its sway was growing closer now as the planet tumbled into the star's inner system, towards perihelion.

The star's radiance began to heat the frozen orb. The liquid and gas that had long since been frozen solid by the unyielding cold of the vacuum of space began to thaw. If there had been anyone on the planet's bleak surface to see, the approach to its star would have been greeted first with wisps of vapor as the atmosphere began to return to its gaseous state. Then clouds of mist formed, covering the entire globe in wreaths of swirling white. As the approach continued, continents of ice crumbled, disintegrating into the seas that had begun to form.

Life that had been suspended in the death of absolute zero began to stir. Life cycles resumed as seed found sustenance in the chilled tundra, and creatures emerged from eggs hatching in the slight warmth of the sun. Spores drifted through the reconstituted atmosphere, seeking and finding refuge.

Deep in the frozen earth, other processes were set in motion.

Ice fell from hollowed, gaunt faces; deep black eyes flickered and opened. Muscles that had been as solid as ice for eons flexed and moved again. Tall forms moved through dark caverns.

*Neflim*, they called themselves.

# **PART 1**



## The New World Order comes to town.

For Reina, Barker's Mill had been home since the day a few years ago when she had got off the bus that stopped here on its way north. It was coming up to eight years since she had left the city, and she had no nostalgia for any part of it. She had been on the dole when she first arrived in Barker's Mill; she had worked as well, of course. This place didn't suck money out of you with the same unrelenting efficiency that the city did. And you can't spend your whole life on the dole, she had thought, so she gave it away, and got a couple more part-time jobs instead. Her life had soon settled down into the comfortable rhythm that the place encouraged in everyone who lived here.

One of the several jobs she held was driving for an old farmer who came into town only when he had to. Which meant almost never these days, because Reina did his driving and ran his errands. Her job was to load her pickup with produce and drive it into the buyer in town. She and the old man had piled the crates of vegetables and fruit into the back. It was a fine afternoon for a drive; she had the window down and the breeze felt good.

While Reina was driving into town, the government was doing the same.

A couple of miles out, just as she was coming up to the creamery by the bridge over Old Goat Creek, the familiar shape of an army truck, painted white with its metal and glass all shiny and its headlights burning hot in the midday sun, filled her rear-vision mirror. As she rounded a curve, she saw that the truck wasn't alone. She pulled over into the gravel and started rolling a cigarette as the convoy went past. Damn, it was hot. She felt like a drink.

There were half a dozen trucks, followed by heavy transport vehicles that carried earthmovers, and other equipment covered by huge tarps. Everything was painted white and bore the letters 'UN', large and blue. The soldiers, of whom there were many, all

wore the familiar blue helmets.

This wasn't new. There had been soldiers and other strangers all over the area for the last few months. They kept to themselves, in the base they had built among the sand dunes on the other side of the harbor. They didn't have much to do with the town, and when they did, they hardly said anything, which only encouraged speculation among the locals.

At the rear of the convoy were two long shiny cars, black instead of white, with windows of dark tinted glass and little blue flags that fluttered daintily on their front guards. Inside, the General and the other officers sat in air-conditioned comfort and watched the rustic world outside glide past.

## A broken rudder.

*Far, far away, within the curled and convoluted folds of a place and time far removed from Barker's Mill, Onethian and Sahrin are becalmed, and although they've been becalmed for quite a while now, they're happy.*

*They are happy because finally they have a solution to the problem of the broken rudder. Using material scavenged from crates that tumble out of the cargo hold and over the deck, they've replaced the old rudder with a new creation of wood and rare metals and some strange pieces of ceramic, the original use of which is a mystery to everyone and of consequence to no one.*

*The result of their labor more closely resembles an artifact from some exotic culture than anything as mundane as a rudder, but there is nothing to lose, and they had to do something about their predicament. They couldn't assure the Captain that it would work, but he gave his assent to the exercise, there being no reason not to try, and besides, Bark is as eager as any of them to get under way again. They have been aimlessly adrift for long enough, he thinks, lying idly on a pile of sacks and eating a piece of dried fruit from one of the barrels in the hold.*

*He looks up at the bare masts and imagines the sails unfurled and full, the ship once more making its way through the clouds and nebulae of deep space.*

*But the ship sits idle. The clouds of space scud slowly around them, and until the rudder is fixed, they are going nowhere. Until then, here they must stay, suspended in an azure limbo of no time and no space.*

*And until then, they have all the time in any world.*

*Bark slowly calculates a trajectory, and then watches as the piece of fruit follows it, up, and then down, over the side of the ship, into the void. He idly plays with one of his earrings for a minute, then goes back to sleep. Bark has never been in a hurry, and he's not going to start now.*

## Thirsts are slaked.

Passing Reina, the UN convoy drove into town. People stopped to look. The only time there were so many vehicles on the main street these days was when the army was passing through.

The vehicles, and the soldiers in them, were from all over the world. There were Syrians, Israelis, Russians, Koreans and Africans, and there were Americans. Months ago, the children had run to hide, but now they gathered in small groups and pointed and waved at the soldiers. Some of the soldiers waved back, and threw sweets to the children. The adults stood and crossed their arms and looked on with expressionless faces.

The main part of the convoy – the soldiers and their heavy trucks and all their equipment – drove straight on without stopping, heading along the road that would take them around the harbor to the sand dunes opposite town.

The officers consulted between the two black shiny cars on their cell phones, and decided to stop for a break. They pulled into the parking lot beside the Red Lion, and the officers emerged from behind the tinted windows, blinking in the sunlight as they put on their sunglasses.

They went into the bar and sat around one of the white plastic tables in the beer garden. From here, they had a clear view across the water, where outcrops of volcanic rock dotted the sand dunes like raisins on a cake. From here, the only sign of human activity was the small dark mass of tents, buildings and fences.

It was a hot day. The sun was strong, and despite the shade provided by the umbrellas of the beer garden, the half dozen starched white collars quickly became limp with perspiration. The talk was of politics and careers.

After a while they leaned back in their seats and marveled, each one to himself, at the wonderful and important things that were happening beneath the sand and rock across the water, and how fortunate they were that history had chosen them to do this work.

Except the General, of course; he had chosen himself. He sat silently while his subordinates talked, tapping his fingers lightly against the side of his glass. If there weren't appearances to keep up, he might even have been smiling to himself.

## A map gives up its secrets.

A long way from the garden bar at the Red Lion...

*On the ship, Thead is unconcerned by the fact that they have been unable to continue their voyage, and is equally uncaring about the success of Onethian and Sahrin. He has his own project to think about, and he feels one of life's important moments approaching. It is the crossing of a threshold – a tide reaching its high-water mark. This has been a long time coming, and the moment belongs more to him than anyone else; it is the unraveling of the secret of the map.*

*Thead sits back and runs his hands through his thinning shoulder-length hair. His skin, rough and pockmarked, is shiny with sweat from his exertions, even though they have all been cerebral in nature. His eyes, normally thin and constantly shifting, widen momentarily as he makes a connection on the maze before him. He smiles to himself and leans back over the map.*

*It was given to one of the ship's former crews, at a place they visited so long ago that its name has long been forgotten. Since then, it has taken on great importance to all the crews of the ship, from those whose names are lost in antiquity down to the six who make up the crew of the present day. A rich mythology has formed around the parchment. The mysterious territory which has its features drawn on the faded surface is part ancestral homeland, part legend.*

*The map has long been Thead's obsession. Long after the curiosity of others has turned away and settled down into a collection of comfortable and reassuring myths, he still studies it relentlessly.*

*He crouches down among the tall, gangling structures of the ship's foredeck, in a makeshift study created from barrels and boxes and sheets that he has taken from the cargo hold. Here he spends his days, and here he is today, sheltered from the wind and the distraction of his crew mates, bent over his precious parchment.*

*When he is sure of a new realization, he makes the faintest*

of marks on the parchment – a circle, a line, an arrow – in soft graphite that can easily be removed, his touch is so deliberate and light.

The maze of symbols and labels are sometimes in a language familiar to him, but most of them are in a foreign script, the slow deciphering of which has been his work. Its flourishes and curlicues never cease their whispering to him; sometimes he hears the voices through the night as he dreams. Sometimes his dreams have form, as though they are populated by entities, and those nights are not easy. It is better when the dreams don't come.

The rest of the crew is happy enough to leave Thead to his musings. And Bark, of course, is happy with things that way as well. There are members of the crew with whom he has easier relationships.

It makes sense that there should be someone working on the map, and it is as well that it is Thead. Practical tasks have never suited him, and the rest of the crew would be distracted if Thead were to spend too much time with them. There is something about him that makes them uneasy.

The hull of the ship creaks as it floats, moving listlessly in the gentle current.

Apart from Onethian and Sahrin, who are busy with the new rudder, the crew has nothing to do. Bark is still asleep on his pile of sacks. The Senator is working on another one of his speeches that he will never deliver, and Kali is below decks, in the galley.

Thead feels a rush that surges through his whole body. Steadying his hand to keep it from shaking, he makes a faint mark on the map.

The final piece of the key falls into an ancient lock.

He has it! He leaps up and runs the length of the ship, shouting, waving the map above his head. Idiot, Onethian thinks.

At first no one else understands the reason for the disturbance, but they soon recognize what he is holding. They drop what they are doing and follow him, even Onethian. This must be a good day. First the rudder being fixed, and now this...

*Thead crouches down beside Bark and spreads the parchment out on the deck. The others gather around and watch intently, without understanding, as Thead guides Bark through the glyphs and symbols.*

*When Thead finishes speaking, his finger is slowly circling a small and insignificant looking set of marks on the map.*

*Bark straightens and looks up. He is wide awake now. He stretches as he contemplates the clouds wrapping themselves into cool wreaths around the ends of the ship's masts. All around them, hills of denser cloud lie stacked one upon the other, reaching as far up and as far down into the depths below them as anyone can see. The more distant clouds move slowly, carried by the most gradual and impartial of tides.*

*But something apart from the clouds is moving. Bark can feel it. It is their future that is spread out before them on the deck.*

*But do they complete their mission, and deliver their long overdue cargo, or do they follow the course that Thead has discovered on the map?*

*All of them feel the answer. It isn't long before the rudder is in place, and as soon as everything is ready, they set sail.*

*It exhilarates them to be moving again. The sight of the billowing mountains of cloud in movement lifts their spirits, and even the ship itself seems to rejoice as it carries them along.*

*They follow Thead's directions. The seductive joy of submission to a higher purpose spreads through the crew. The wind seems to catch their enthusiasm, and it picks them up, bearing them along confidently. They sail down narrow byways and across vast uncharted wastes of space. They cross darkness and light, places where there are no clouds, and places where there is nothing but cloud. They see strange creatures in even stranger skies, such that no one would believe. They see signs and wonders. The cargo lies forgotten in the hold.*

*Finally, after a long time, and several adventures that in normal circumstances would themselves be considered sufficiently unusual to warrant retelling, they arrive above a new land.*

## **A brief history of Barker's Mill, and Reina makes plans for the weekend.**

A century ago, the hills across the harbor from Barker's Mill had been covered with forest. Giant trees, hundreds of years old, towered over dense confusions of bush. Then a new type of human arrived, different from the ones who had lived there before. The original inhabitants' small numbers and simple lifestyle had not lain heavily upon the land, unless you counted the extinction of a few species of large flightless birds that were good eating and easy to catch.

These new humans wore heavy clothing to protect themselves against the weather, and they wore boots on their feet. Their horses pulled carts through the mud of the paths that they cut through the forest. They chopped down the trees and cut them up and put the lengths of wood on the carts. They left behind piles of burning branches, and all the rubbish that followed them everywhere. The hills were soon becoming bare.

They took the cut wood around the harbor, to where an individual named Barker had built a timber mill and where houses were appearing in clearings carved out of the forest. Soon there was a town, with a store and a school. The town came to be known as Barker's Mill.

The people of Barker's Mill built themselves a church in which they gathered to celebrate their good fortune.

For the next few decades, the town amassed a degree of wealth by removing the rest of the trees from the hills around the harbor and selling the timber to anyone who would buy it. When the forest was gone, the mill closed down. The sons and daughters of the Barker family, now rich, moved elsewhere.

Where the forest had once been and where there was now none, the hillsides gave way under the rain. The topsoil, now dust, muddied the water as it ran down to the sea, or it was lifted by the wind and carried away, falling to the ground as a fine layer of

annoying gray dust that discolored everything. After a few years, the sand and rock that had supported the topsoil were totally exposed.

Once the sand was uncovered, there was nothing to stop it from sliding off the hillsides. Streams became choked and then dried up altogether. Their beds disappeared under the sand. It was said by the locals that somewhere under the sand were buried the remains of an old village in which a few natives and settlers had lived together even as the forest was disappearing. No one knew the identities of the people who had lived there, just as no one knew where they had gone after the sand had flowed over their houses. There were stories, though.

There was another story as well, a much older one, which belonged to the indigenous people. Their legends told of another race that had lived in the area, long ago. But those stories were ancient now, and almost entirely forgotten. A few of the old people remembered fragments of them, and the young didn't care.

They didn't care because the legends were from the past, from the old world of spears and weaving flax and cooking food in the ground, and this was now. Most of the young people moved to the city and never came back. The area had its own history now, and the people who lived and worked there were fourth, fifth, and sixth generation. They were the locals now, and anyone who rolled through here in a convoy, army or otherwise, in trucks or shiny cars, was an outsider.

When she got into town, Reina pulled up outside the Red Lion. It was hot and dry, and she had time for a drink before unloading at the buyer's. Crossing the street, she saw the black cars sitting in the car park. If it weren't for the two uniformed drivers leaning against the side of one of them, talking and smoking, it would have looked as though the mob was in town. She went in.

Bryce was sitting at the bar.

Reina sat beside him. She dropped a note on the bar and pointed at one of the taps. The woman behind the bar put a beer in front of her. "Thanks, Denise."

“What do you make of these?” Bryce nodded towards where the officers sat, sweating in the shade.

“Their trucks passed me on the way in. Big ones, covered with tarps. Machinery or something,” Reina replied. “I suppose they’ve gone over to the dunes?”

“Yeah, the trucks and the other stuff shot straight through. This lot must think they’ve earned a break. Pretty, aren’t they? Nice braid, shiny medals...” He was talking deliberately loud. A couple of the officers turned and looked coldly in their direction.

“Jesus, keep it down...” Reina laughed, not really caring whether he did. She was well acquainted with his ideas about the military, authority, and the system in general. He was an anarchist, and he didn’t mind who knew it.

Bryce stared back at the officers, goggle-eyed, daring them.

Reina picked up her beer. “Give it up, shithead. What do you think it’s about?”

“You mean none of the theories we’ve come up with have impressed you? You’re a hard woman to please. Shall we go over and have a look?” He nodded towards the open doors. Through them, the dunes on the other side of the harbor were visible.

“Yeah, we haven’t been over for a while, have we. Not now, though. I’m working, as we speak. What about this weekend? After netball?”

“After netball it is, then. A bit of fascist-watching to round the afternoon off. We’ll take lunch and a bottle.”

The officers were about to go when their trucks came into view across the water. From where they sat, the vehicles looked like tiny matchbox toys as they entered the compound, but the comparison never occurred to them. Such thoughts do not commonly exercise themselves in minds such as these. The officers finished their drinks and watched as the compound’s gates closed behind the last of the trucks. Then they got back into their black cars and set off along the road around the bay, leaving clouds of dust hanging in the air behind them.

In the leading car, the General, permanently assigned by

his government and his uncle (in this case, the same thing) to the standing army of the United Nations, turned up the air conditioning and loosened his tie. The gin had made him sleepy.

His lethargy was due to more than just the drink, though. He had been feeling haunted all day. The previous night, while he slept, he had dreamed.

*He was in a huge room... It had walls of dark, finely carved stone and a high ceiling lost somewhere in a darkness that seemed to gather around him like a cold, shifting fog. In the dim light he saw obelisks, twice as high as a man.*

*There was no one in the room, but it lacked the stillness that it should have had. There was a sense of being, of something, which slowly coalesced, taking on a form that was invisible but palpable, that brushed against him like seaweed swirling in a tide. The sensation of voices, a hot, dry rustle of moth wings, fluttered around his head...*

When he woke, he couldn't remember anything of what the voices had said. That had frustrated him at the time, and the memory of it frustrated him now. There was an urgency, he could recall that much. He felt, in his dream and afterwards in the shower, and as he put on his uniform, that they – whatever *they* were – were trying to tell him something. There was something in the whispered dialogues that made him feel uncomfortable.

In the end he gave up, as practical men should do when confronted with dreams. He had a lot to do.

The General was the only person here who knew everything about the operation. Everyone else, including the archaeologists, knew enough to do their job, and no more. The bigger picture was not their concern.

Of course, there had to be some people whose jobs demanded that they know more than they could be trusted with. It was unfortunate. Sometimes it was possible to clean their brains out – there was technology more than equal to the task; but sometimes memory removal wasn't possible or appropriate. Sometimes it was necessary that someone disappear. But the

General was a reasonable man, and he tried to keep those losses to a minimum.

They were approaching the gates of his new command.

## An arrival.

*“This is the place,” exclaims Thead, checking the map, then looking through his sextant, and then through his telescope again, checking and rechecking.*

*Thead is used to the idea that he is doing an important thing. This place was promised to them a long time ago. They might not know exactly what awaits them, but over successive generations, the ship’s crews have made up stories among themselves. It is those stories that have kept their faith alive through the centuries, and it is those same stories that stir their blood now.*

*In the direction of the sun, an ocean reaches out towards the horizon. Below them, a coastline meanders slowly away in both directions, indented by bays and inlets. A town, sheltered by the surrounding hills, hugs the edge of one the larger bays. In its streets they can see life, tiny, like fleas crawling through the fur on a dog’s back.*

*“Thead,” says Bark after they’ve spent a few minutes looking in silence, “where are we? What does the map say? Where should we look now?” He wants to ask what they should look for, but no one knows, and they all know that no one knows, so there is no point in asking.*

*Thead is happy now that his opinion matters. “I can’t be sure. We’re in the right area, according to the map. More, I can’t say. There is nothing more on the map that can help us. Nothing that I can see, anyway.”*

*“We’ll moor the ship there,” says Bark, pointing to the opposite side of the harbor. “Away from the town, above those dunes.”*

*They cross the harbor. Bark is enjoying himself. This is a great moment in history, even if it is just the history of the ship, not Big History. It’s as close to a Great Moment as any of them have ever been, with the possible exception of Bark himself, who can recall from somewhere the investiture of some kind of emperor, sometime in something called the Middle Kingdom. Something like that. It*

*was a long time ago, in one of his other pasts.*

*Near the dunes, Onethian, always first in line to do any physical work, flexes his muscles and leans into the winding gear, letting the anchor descend to the ground. It lodges in the branches of a tree, and the Senator and Sahrin join Onethian as they begin winding the chain in.*

*The ship descends towards the ground. The three of them strain at their task, and it isn't long before their skins shine with sweat. "Get lost, old man," grunts Onethian. "You're getting in the way."*

*"Leave him alone," says Sahrin as the Senator puffs obediently away and sits down.*

*Kali, drawn from below deck by the sound of the winch, goes to one of the viewports and immediately calls out.*

*Below them, sitting on a ledge of rock among the sand dunes, are three people.*

*The ship, along with themselves, is invisible to the local inhabitants, so they aren't concerned about being noticed by the three on the ground, but there is still an element of surprise in seeing some of the locals so soon. And for them to be, from this distance at least, the same as the crew; that is to say, human, or at least the same basic shape – that in itself is unusual.*

*Now they need to make another decision.*

## The view from the dunes.

A few days later, after netball and as arranged, Bryce and Reina stopped at Tommy's place on their way to the dunes. We've got a couple of bottles, they said, and bring some smoke, some of that leaf you had the other day, and we'll lie in the sun and watch the boys at the camp work. Good enough, said Tommy, who wasn't doing anything anyway. He'd just had a couple of tattoos removed, and didn't feel like working.

"More bloody army, mmm. Foreign again, yeah? Or were they ours?" Tommy was saying a short time later. He was pretending to be interested for Bryce's sake, and as usual he wasn't doing a very good job. They were in Reina's pickup, heading around the bay towards the dunes. Tommy was sitting between Bryce and Reina, trying to roll a smoke, and failing because the road was bumpy. "Ah, fuck it," he said, folding the plastic bag back into his pocket.

"There's no such thing as *our* army, mate," said Bryce. "You should know that by now, with all the bloody lectures I've given you. They all belong to the ruling class. The elites, if you want to use the modern term. Armies always have, always will. These guys are UN, they belong to the big State, the new one. They've got zip to do with us, that's for real."

"Yup," replied Tommy.

"Yeah, yup," said Bryce. As usual, he was frustrated by his friend's indifference, but he'd gotten used to it when they were in the army together. "I suppose you won't care about them until they do something that fucks you up personally."

"Fair guess, mate. Do you want some of this?" Tommy had found a joint somewhere.

They turned off the main road and took a smaller track. After a couple of minutes, the track ended. They got out of the pickup and walked into the sand dunes.

After a short walk across the sand, they reached their favorite

outcrop of rock. It was easy to get to, comfortable, and gave them a good view of the military encampment. Once they were settled, Reina pulled a pair of binoculars out of her pack.

A few of the soldiers were still unloading equipment from the trucks, even though it was a few days since the convoy had passed through town.

The stuff was being taken into a tunnel that both Bryce and Tommy knew well. For as long as they could remember, it had been a local landmark, where the local children would play all the games that children play anywhere when such a wonderful resource as a cave is available. It was – or at least it had been before the soldiers arrived – a short cave, about fifty feet long, with a gently sloping floor that ended with an impassable rock face where the roof had collapsed some time in the distant past.

Things must have changed. They had watched from their hiding place over the last few months as the cave had swallowed huge amounts of equipment. Building materials were taken into the tunnel and never reappeared. They had seen tons of tailings being taken in trucks to the water's edge and dumped.

They had all sorts of theories that came and went, depending on what they saw, what the latest whisper in town was, or what their mood was. Tommy's interest was casual. If Reina and Bryce hadn't been interested, he wouldn't have bothered coming out here. Reina agreed with Bryce; there was something going on. Whether or not she cared much about it was another matter.

## **The General peruses some artifacts, and we meet Bisset.**

Past the point where the rock fall had been cleared, a string of lights illuminated ancient walls, sloping down and fading into the distance.

They had found a lot, but as for knowing what the tunnels meant – the answer, it was hoped, was somewhere below them. That, at least, was what the drones had been told. As far as they knew, they were here to dig up the secrets of the past, to move long lost knowledge to the surface in container loads of rubble and artifacts.

A new tunnel had been built near the entrance. It branched off from the old one and housed the offices and research areas. The rooms here were lit, heated, sealed, and entirely functional. This was the General's first stop.

He stopped briefly at a door that bore his name. He went into his new office and dropped his case on the desk. So, this was going to be home for a while. He looked around. They'd set it up well enough. It would do. He turned and left again, heading further down the corridor to the research labs.

The archaeologists were there, sorting through artifacts that had been brought up from the lower levels. The objects were piled together on long tables, waiting to be classified according to whatever system had been contrived for the exercise; an intellectual folly which the General was happy to have no part of.

Bisset, the chief archaeologist, was there. Middle-aged and paunched, he usually made up for a lack of hair by using too much oil, but working here must have been getting to him, and he had let what was left of his hair do as it wished. It was sticking out like a frizzy gray halo, making him look like the mad scientist he almost was. He was holding a fragment of something up to the light and turning it around slowly, dictating notes to one of his staff.

He glanced up as the General approached. "You've arrived,"

he said, dispensing with formalities. “You’ll want to take a look at these. They’re only the small ones. Here are some photos of some of the larger pieces that have had to stay down below because of their size.” He indicated a pile of prints. “There are thousands of the things, and we’ve only just scratched the surface.”

The General thought back to when the first samples had been put in front of him. It had been several months ago, in Bisset’s office at Mount Weather.

“This is strange stuff. I’ve never seen anything like them. What do you make of them? Not a fair question, I suppose,” he had asked the archaeologist.

“On the contrary, it’s a very fair question,” Bisset had replied. “Mysteries like this have been around for a long time, though they never get much of an airing in public. The Smithsonian’s got a lot of it, but only our own people have access to it. As far as we know, this is the largest collection that’s ever been found at a single site. Even Acambaro is nothing compared to this.”

Bisset had shifted his attention to a small group of clay figures. Two human figures, male and female, were standing side by side, facing a lizard-like creature slightly taller than them and standing on its rear legs, supported by its tail. The three of them could have been having a conversation.

There was enough knowledge on this table to rewrite all of human history. But history, of course, could not and would not be rewritten. The future was more important than the past, and the present would take whatever shape was needed to provide the required future.

“We’re going to have a strange few months, aren’t we, Professor?” The General picked up a ceramic of a stegosaurus.

“It looks that way,” Bisset replied. “The items on this table, including the one you’re holding, were found under rock at least two million years old. And the tunnel system itself is at least as old. This changes a few things.”

## **An encounter in the dunes.**

*Bark, Onethian and Thead have joined Kali to see what has attracted his attention. Sahrin and the Senator come over as well. The whole crew is there.*

*Below them, the ground appears to be alive. A pulse rises and falls, like heat existing on some other scale of temperature. Trails of comings and goings are almost visible, as though what is happening is just around the corner of perception, asleep in a dream of its own. Bark feels something familiar in the scene.*

*The activity on the ground surrounds a cave entrance at the bottom of a cliff.*

*“Playtime?” Onethian rubs his muscular hands together like the idiot he can be sometimes.*

*“You could try being a little more serious,” the Senator says, displaying a rare moment of resistance.*

*“I could,” grunts Onethian, “but I’m not going to.”*

*“Shall we take a look?” Bark remembers that he’s the Captain.*

*Onethian and Sahrin return to the winch. The ship soon starts to move again, swaying slightly in the wind as it descends. When the bottom of the hull reaches the treetops, Bark calls for the winding to cease. Thead finds a space among the branches, and lowers the ladder to the ground.*

*A short walk across the sand dunes separates them from the site of Kali’s discovery. They set out, and are about to descend an incline when they notice below them the three people that they had seen from the ship. The strangers are watching the same area that has caught their own attention.*

*As Bark expects, Bryce, Reina and Tommy fail to see the new arrivals, who are now standing directly in front of them and inspecting them with great interest.*

*The visitors and the locals are in the same space, but like two signals traveling down one wire, they are out of phase with each other. They are in different versions of the same world.*

*"They're a strange color," says Sahrin. She looks at Reina's dark coffee-colored skin, and then at Tommy, who is an even darker shade of the same color. Bryce is more her own color. "I like her," she says, looking back at Reina. "She's gorgeous."*

*"She's impressive, yes, but this one's dress sense is winning the battle for my attention. Just look at this," Bark says, nodding towards Bryce, who is shading his eyes against the sun as he peers down into the encampment. Had he known that his grip on fashion was being questioned, he wouldn't have been able, let alone motivated, to defend himself. As usual, he was in jeans, tired runners and a torn denim jacket with a big yellow smiley face on the back. "Shocking," says Bark, feeling suddenly pleased with his own choice of a loose red and purple striped silk shirt, burnt orange tights, and embroidered canvas boots. Bark can always be relied on to dress for an occasion, even one that has little chance of happening.*

*"Could you tell what rank he was?" asked Bryce.*

*"What rank who is?" says Thead. The local's speech warbles slightly, as though he is speaking under water, but it can be understood.*

*"Remember," says Onethian. "They can't hear us."*

*"I know that!" snaps Thead, who has a problem with Onethian and his unending helpfulness. "I wasn't talking to him, I was talking to us. Even you, if you've got anything sensible to say."*

*"A general, I think, I don't know. Do you want a turn?" Reina handed Bryce the binoculars.*

*"They'd be handy," says Bark.*

*"We don't need more crew," Sahrin says.*

*"The glasses, not the locals."*

*"Oh, the glasses... yeah, I guess."*

*"It's guarded all the time, and now that there are more soldiers, we'd never get in, no way," said Bryce.*

*"Did you hear that? They want to get in there," says Onethian.*

*"It's not as though we want to get in, anyway, right?" said Reina, suspecting that Bryce might be missing his soldiering days.*

“Nah,” replied Tommy, watching a bird in a tree and at the same time feeling relieved that neither of his friends were sounding serious about going down there.

*“These people appear to have the advantage of a bit of local culture,” the Senator says. “And if they’ve been watching this place for a while, they might have some useful information.”*

*“That may be,” replies Bark, “but I’d prefer that we rely on our own judgment.” The others agree, and begin to move down the hill.*

*“But why don’t you stay, Senator, and see if their conversation sheds any light on our situation. We’ll be back soon,” Bark says, turning to follow the others.*

*The Senator, never one to argue (at least that is how he sees himself) finds a space on the rock ledge and sits down.*

*It doesn’t take Bark and the others long to reach the perimeter fence. They stop in front of it, and look along its length and then at each other. They shrug, as if deciding something not very important at all, and then walk through it. It flickers briefly, creating a brief nimbus of fairy lights around them.*

\* \* \*

Underground in the control room, a private currently more interested in a recent earthquake in the Ukraine than anything else was making a coffee when he was drawn back to his computer by the beeping of an alarm.

On the screen he saw that the fence’s field had been breached in five places, all close together, as though a group of something was moving together.

“Shit,” he thought and said in Ukrainian. “Intruders.” He flicked through the cameras along the fence. There was nothing there. Everything was fine; the fence was intact.

Damned machine. It hadn’t acted properly since they hauled it off the truck. Private Dosteyin went back to his coffee.

## Archeology 101.

The General and the archaeologist were standing with a group of engineers in front of a wall, surrounded by the crumbling remains of subterranean buildings. The General reflected, not for the first time, on the attraction of archeology. To unveil these things that had been buried, unseen and unsuspected, for so long that no human had any idea of the time involved...

The original inhabitants of the excavations had been human, or at least humanoid, judging by the architecture. Whoever they were, they had been tall; the doorways and steps suggested a height of seven or eight feet. They didn't yet know how many kilometers of tunnels there were, but it was a large system, bigger than the others that had been found in other parts of the world.

There were three other locations that were known of. One was in the jungles of the Yucatan Peninsula. Another was in the Himalayas, inside the Chinese border, which had meant that some high-level and very careful cooperation was going on. The third site had been found under the sand in Saudi Arabia, at a place where nomads had gathered for rituals for as long as they could remember, and where earthmovers and trucks and scientists and soldiers now gathered.

And there was this site, near the northern tip of the North Island of New Zealand. It was the fourth site, the last to be identified.

Time was short. The other three sites were ready and waiting. Everything was in place.

The UN had been sure that there was something to be found when they sent the first party of surveyors here. The ruins had been found exactly where they had been expected; at the point which, combined with the other three sites around the world, formed an irregular but very precisely shaped tetrahedron, the four corners of which were occupied by these impossible ruins, buried under rock that was millions of years old.

The workers who had been involved in the initial exploration had been given all the normal mind-clearing drugs, after which all memory of the excavations had been removed. As always, there were a few in whom the suggestion didn't take, so there had been some accidents to arrange. Training mishaps, the odd helicopter crash, that sort of thing.

The New Zealand site was the last piece of the puzzle. There had been some tension in the air at Mount Weather when the General had left to come here. There was doubtless a lot more now.

The wall in front of them was at the end of one of the labyrinth's main tunnels. They were almost a kilometer underground.

Both men could feel what had been described in the reports. The soldiers and engineers who were with them stirred uneasily. The first people to stand here three months ago had described it as a feeling of apprehension that grew stronger the longer you stayed in the vicinity of the wall. Eventually, it became so strong that it was impossible to remain there. It crawled at the base of your brain, physical and thoroughly visceral. An unnamed dread of *something*.

They could feel it now.

"Amazing," the General said, his flesh gathering into cold goose bumps. His breathing had become shallow. "I found it hard to believe the reports."

"It gets worse than this, sir," one of the soldiers said, moving back a step.

The archaeologist moved closer to the wall. He was sweating heavily. Fumbling, he pulled an implement from one of his pockets and picked at the surface of the stone. After a few seconds he interrupted his scratching and paused, seeming to pay attention to something in the air. Then he leaned closer to the wall and placed one ear against the surface. He turned and beckoned.

The General went over and put his ear against the wall. A deep humming sound was audible somewhere behind the rock. The feeling of apprehension was getting stronger. They moved away, putting welcome distance between themselves and the rock face.

The General turned to a sergeant. "Get a team down here with a resonance cutter and get to work on it. Keep me informed. If there are any problems, I want to know. And I don't want anyone going through there when the wall is breached. As soon as you've made it through, call me."

\* \* \*

A kilometer above, the three locals were still there, but their vigil had entered a familiar and relaxed stage. Reina was rolling a joint from Tommy's leaf, while Tommy himself lay on his back, hands behind his head as he dozed, smiling, in the warmth of the afternoon sun. Bryce was pushing the cork into a bottle of wine with the handle of a knife.

*The Senator, deeply impressed by this capacity for luxury, and warming to the three of them, decides to join in by chewing a few bindoo leaves. They soon have the desired result.*

*"You seem to have a relaxed attitude towards things," he says out loud, not caring that they can't hear him. "You would probably enjoy bindoo," he smiles dreamily. He offers them a sample from his pouch, and shrugs happily when they ignore him.*

\* \* \*

*Having passed through the perimeter fence and interrupted Private Dosteyin's routine, the others arrive at the mouth of the tunnel.*

*"What is it?" asks Sahrin, who has never seen a cave before.*

*"It's a hole," replies Bark. They move forward, tentatively edging into the mouth of the cave. It looks as though it goes on forever. "It's a strange thing indeed," says Bark. A guard standing nearby remains oblivious of their presence.*

*This is the place that Kali had seen from the ship. The movement in the air that had drawn his attention is barely visible now; like smog over a city, it exists only in the distance.*

*Even so, they can still sense that there is something going on. There is an energy here that twists like a trapped animal, caught somewhere between the space that the travelers occupy and the local*

space. Like a sheet of rubber stretched taut and thin, it threatens to tear and reveal the entities they know are here, moving and skittering around like the rats in the ship's cargo hold.

They enter the cave. Ahead of them, lights strung along the ceiling offer a dimly lit path into the depths. To their right is the entrance to the offices and labs.

"Let's have a look in here," says Bark, "before we go any deeper." The truth is that like all of them, he finds the prospect of going underground daunting. It is a new idea, after all. They are all accustomed to open space, with its fields of clouds and stars and nebulae, and its winds that keep changing everything, over and over again.

They go through the locked door and into the administration area. At the end of the corridor they come to a large room, in which a great number of objects have been laid out on long tables. People, some in white coats and some in uniform, are studying the artifacts.

Onethian leans over one of the tables. He watches as one of the whitecoats picks up one of the ceramics. "You should see this."

The rest of them gather around. The figurine the scientist is holding has a human face from which a bird's beak protrudes, and there is some kind of comb on the top of its head. Bird's wings sprout from a hunched back, and it has the legs and tail of a reptile. It is rearing up on its hind legs, using its tail for balance.

They look at the other figures on the table. It is a collection of monsters, mutants and half-breeds. There are combinations of human and non-human, non-human and non-human. One of the figures stands intact and larger than the others, dominating the center of one of the tables. As they recognize it, their spirits fall. The figure, skeletally thin and insect-like, is almost as tall as any of them. The dome of its skull is large, as though it contains great intelligence, but it is obvious from the face that there is no place here for compassion. The eyes, cruel and heavy with black shadows, have been carved deep into the head. The smooth stone gazes coldly at them all, asserting its authority across the ages.

*“They’ve been here.”*

*“And I hope they’re long gone,” says Kali, disconcerted.*

*“Do you think these people know what they’re dealing with?” asks Sahrin.*

*“I have a strange feeling,” says Bark, “that they don’t. And that they will.”*

## A decision is made.

The General left the wall to the exertions of the engineers and returned to his office, where he found the pile of photographs that had been left on his desk.

They were of a chamber, just discovered, in another part of the system. The report with the photos said it was about a hundred meters long, fifty wide, and about ten meters from floor to roof. Big, in other words. It wasn't natural, of course; it had been carved out of the stone using the same heat process that had produced the rest of the tunnel system.

The megaliths he had been expecting were there, arranged across the expanse of the chamber's floor. Massive heavy-roofed porticoes squatted against the walls of the chamber, looking like theatrical props in the stark, high-relief lighting of the engineers' equipment. This was a good find. Mount Weather would be pleased.

And there was something familiar about it... but he was too busy and his mind too distracted for him to connect it with his dream of the night before. It was the fleetest of impressions, coming and going in an instant.

Someone had drawn a map of the chamber. Opening his briefcase, he took out a large map of the tunnel system, found some tape, and stuck it up on the wall. Getting the smaller hand-drawn map, he picked up a pen and marked the location and orientation of the new chamber on the large map.

The addition of the new chamber completed the pattern. The only thing missing was the area beyond the sealed wall, but if he extended the symmetry of the known areas, he could fill in the missing parts there as well. This site was just like the others. Excellent. He picked up a phone and keyed the Secretary-General's private line.

*Although he is unaware of the fact, the General has an audience. The five travelers have left the room full of statues, and have come*

into his office, where they found him contemplating the maps on his wall.

Now they are looking, open mouthed, at the photos spread out on the desk. The shapes, the architecture, and the hieroglyphs are all familiar to them.

Bark is thinking that his strange feeling has been vindicated, and that this is probably not a good thing. "It's them, for sure."

"Yes. Nefilim..."

"If they wake..."

"I think they're already awake," Bark replied. "That's what we saw from the ship. The movement. They're just not on the physical plane yet."

"Do you think these people know?"

"This one doesn't, from the way he looks at the map."

"But how did they know to come here? Somewhere, someone must know."

"Either that or they're about to find out."

"You know, I've never seen Nefilim in the flesh."

"None of us have. The sections of time that they escaped to have always been closed to us."

"Why are we here? Why did the map bring us here?"

"Maybe we should go. I don't care what the map says."

"But there has to be a reason for us to have come here."

"Does there? Just because the map fell into our hands doesn't mean it was meant for us. And just because Thead decoded it doesn't mean that he was meant to. It might have been nothing more than an accident."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Even if it was meant for us, that's no reason for us to accept our lot without question. It's up to us, not some piece of parchment that's been around so long that we're not even sure where it came from."

"True. It's our decision. It's up to us."

"Exactly. In view of which, we should decide what we're doing."

"Well, it does seem interesting."

"Any situation which has something to do with the Nefilim will

*be interesting. That might be a slight understatement.”*

*“Leave me alone. There’s no need to be sarcastic.”*

*“With you it’s hard not to be. This could be a bit dangerous, you know. We’ve all heard the legends.”*

*“The legends are bad enough, aren’t they?”*

*“The Nefilim legends, you mean? ...they’re not pleasant.”*

*“I’m still curious, though.”*

*“Curious enough?”*

*They are curious enough, it seems. They head for the door.*

*“We’ve come all this way...”*

*“We can’t turn back now...”*

*“But...”*

*“But nothing. Don’t give me the shits, Thead.”*

## Archeology 102.

Deep underground, the wall was starting to give. It started to crack, then resisted for a moment, swelling with internal heat caused by the waves of sound. Finally it gave up, exploding outwards and sending rock fragments showering into the tunnel. There was a heavy, audible sigh as different air pressures met.

The engineers smelled something stale. Before they could do or say anything, they slumped to the ground. An invisible cloud streamed out of the opened chamber, heading upwards through the caverns and tunnels as surely as if it possessed a conscious purpose. It rendered unconscious everyone in its path.

Undeterred by the plight of their operators, the machines kept digging or dusting or grinding. The cloud snaked through the kilometers of tunnels, backed out of blind alleys, retraced its steps, sought out the surface, turn by turn.

For the General and the others in the administration section, the first sign that something was wrong came when the alarms on the machines started sounding because of the inactivity of their operators. They opened a channel to the crew at the wall, but got only silence. They tried to contact other work sites, but there was nothing there either.

Then from a site closer to the surface, they heard incoherent speech; “the air... strange... what the f...” the voice faded into nothing. Whatever it was, it was heading towards the surface.

The General went to the door that led out to the main tunnel. The only person in sight was a single guard.

“In here, now!” he yelled. The soldier turned and started towards him. He was about twenty feet from the door when the General heard a confusion of voices and the unmistakable thud of falling bodies coming from somewhere down the tunnel.

Without a second thought, he slid the door across. The guard stopped and looked towards the depths. His eyes widened, and he dropped his gun and put his hands to his throat. He gulped air

like a goldfish, then fell to the ground.

The door was airtight, as was always the case with operating command centers, so if this was some kind of gas, the area would be safe. The General went to the monitors and flipped through the cameras. One of them was trained on the breach in the wall. He paused when it came up, leaning closer to the screen. He couldn't tell whether the crew were dead or unconscious, but they weren't moving.

The wall was mostly gone. It had been reduced to a pile of rubble, and the area behind it was open but concealed in darkness. As he watched, he saw the shadows begin to flicker with traces of light.

He went to the research area. There were three people in the room: Bisset, a corporal and a young female archaeologist.

"What's going on?" Bisset looked nervous.

"We have a slight problem." The General closed the door and checked the seal. "The team that we left at the wall have broken through..."

Bisset nodded. "Well, that's good..."

"...but there was something down there. Some type of gas. From what I've seen, it's floored everyone down below. How many are there outside? Above ground?"

"Not many, sir," the corporal answered. "I was up there a few minutes ago. A few at the gate, and some engineers in the vehicle section. And the kitchen staff, I guess. Pretty much everyone else was below ground working."

The General called the guard post at the main gate. It was the point in the compound that was furthest from the cave mouth, so if anyone was still on their feet, it would probably be there. The phone at the other end was answered immediately.

"Main gate." The voice was young and scared.

"What's going on up there?"

"Everyone just dropped like flies, General. Men came running out of the workshop and collapsed, and everyone else as well, and now there's just three of us left here. We must have been too far

away, or something. I dunno. What's going on... er...sir?"

The General thought quickly. "Two of you stay where you are. One of you come to the admin section. I don't care which one. The door's shut. Just wait outside it. Do it now. No, wait. What ranks do you have there?"

"I'm a sergeant, and the other two are privates, sir."

"Send one of the privates." If it was some kind of gas, it would have only a limited life. It would probably have dissipated by now, but he had to know for sure, and given the absence of a canary, a grunt would do.

\* \* \*

Up on the rocks, Bryce had watched it all happen. Soldiers staggered around for a few seconds then collapsed to the ground, where they lay twitching peacefully. A few minutes later, one of the guards at the gate ran towards the tunnel and disappeared into it.

"Something's on, eh?" Tommy sat up.

"I reckon. Something's on for sure. Don't tell me you're going to get interested, mate."

"Oh, absolutely." Tommy reached for a cigarette.

A few minutes later, they saw one of the two remaining guards talk briefly into a cell phone, and then they both ran towards the tunnel. The gate was left unattended.

\* \* \*

With the guards from the gate with him, the General felt a little less exposed.

He told Bisset to stay in the lab, but the archaeologist insisted on coming along. His assistant, the young woman, would come as well. The General didn't argue. It didn't matter that Bisset would be there. And the woman would be needed.

He led the group down into the tunnels. Led was not quite the right word, of course; one of the grunts walked point. They all wore gas masks, in case there was a repeat of whatever it was that

had flooded everyone.

*Behind the scientists, five unseen visitors follow in single file.*

When they arrived at the remains of the wall, everything looked as it had through the security camera. The soldiers started to check the bodies on the ground.

“Don’t worry about them,” the General said as he stepped into the chamber.

The air was heavy with something that smelled sour, even through their masks. The floor was shiny and wet.

“Spread out, so we can see what’s going on. This should be one room, about a hundred meters long and about fifty wide.” The General stayed where he was while the archaeologist, the assistant and the four soldiers entered the cavern, their lamps cutting wide swathes in the gloom.

Like the other room in the photographs, this one was full of megaliths. As the columns of rock emerged from the darkness, the General saw that they were about ten feet tall and three feet wide. The walls were covered in alien script and markings.

“This all makes sense. Every site so far has had two of these caverns.” The archaeologist moved towards one of the walls. “And this chamber has these...” He held his lamp up so that its light crawled up the wall in front of him. Designs covered it from floor to ceiling. “This is new.”

The General went to where Bisset was standing. The patterns weren’t painted on to the walls; they were made of a colored resinous substance that glowed with internal color at the slightest encouragement from the lamps. The archaeologist was right. This is what would make all the difference in the months to come. It was the user’s manual.

This had been – and would be again – a command center.

The archeologist’s young assistant was standing in front of another wall covered with what seemed to be a map of landforms. “Another planet,” he said, joining her.

“No, look,” she said, running her light along the edge of a continent. “That’s part of the western coast of Africa. And see...

there's the east coast of Australia... there's New Zealand... before they all moved apart. This is ancient."

"My god, this is old," said the archaeologist, shaking his head.

*Bark and the others don't follow the General and the other locals into the room.*

*To them, there is no darkness at all; the room is full of light even before the halogens are turned on. Up near the smooth dome of the rock ceiling, they can see more of the entities that were gathered around the mouth of the cave, flitting around in the stale air, like beetles with wings that are brittle and dry and make a hard rustling sound that make you want to shrink away. There is an urgency in the movement; a deep hum below the hysteria, a frequency lower than the human ear can detect.*

*Kali sits down on a piece of the dismembered wall. "I don't like this." The whine in his voice is familiar. "I want to go back to the ship."*

*"Well, go back to the ship, then," snaps Bark. He has trouble with Kali sometimes.*

*"Only if we all go." Kali looks up towards the ceiling.*

*"Well, we aren't all going to go, so shut up!" says Sahrin. There has never been much love lost between them. "The Senator's outside, why don't you go and wait with him."*

*"Leave me alone," says Kali, but he doesn't move.*

*Thead shares none of Kali's misgivings. He has joined the locals inside the chamber. He stands before one of the walls, where he instantly recognizes the script as the one that adorns his precious map. One of the beetle-wings whispers in his ear.*

*He reads the script, and understands it as words roll off the entity's dry tongue. It and its kind have a mission that has been assigned to them by the history of their race...*

*Thead feels the thrill of exhilaration as the knowledge grows in him. It is an exhilaration mixed liberally with fear, which makes him feel it all the more keenly. And he enjoys it.*

## Bryce and Reina go exploring.

Outside, the wine and the smoke were forgotten. Bryce, Reina and Tommy were discussing what to do.

“It’s got fuck all to do with us, man.” Tommy was as keen as ever on getting involved.

“And that fact has got nothing to do with anything,” said Bryce. “I say we have a look. What are they going to do? Shoot us?”

“Umm...”

“Look, there’s no one at the gate, is there? If we get sprung we can just say we’ve never seen this place before and we thought it was deserted, and we’re just having a look.”

“Yeah, Tommy, don’t be a wus.” Reina was high.

*“Yes, Tommy, whatever a wus is, don’t be one,” says the Senator dreamily, high on bindoo leaf and not at all worried about being shot.*

“Nup. You guys are nuts. I’ll wait here and finish the wine. You won’t be taking the bottle, I guess?”

“Wus.”

“Yeah right. Someone has to look after home base.”

“Just means more weird shit for us,” said Reina. “Can we take the smoke? There’s another bottle in the truck. See you soon.” She and Bryce set off down the hill.

*The Senator wonders briefly what to do and then follows them.*

\* \* \*

Bryce and Reina found the gate open. Reina stopped at the first body, a tall, skinny soldier lying like a dummy discarded from a shop window. His helmet had come off his head. She bent, placing a hand on his throat. “Hey, he’s alive.”

Just inside the tunnel, they found the entrance to the offices and labs. It was locked. Bryce dragged the unconscious guard over to the door and held his thumb up against the security lock. The door slid open.

Reina was impressed. "Cool! How did you know to do that?"

Bryce laughed. "They're planning on introducing that sort of stuff all over the place in the next year or two."

In the first room, they found the photos on the desk. "Here's something..."

"Check this out." Reina had found the map on the wall.

Bryce came over. "This must be what's down below."

"There's enough of it. It's humungous."

"Let's see what else is here."

They left the office and went down the corridor to the lab. They had never seen anything like the artifacts that were laid out on the tables. The hybrid animal-humans, lizard men and dinosaurs looked like props from a B-grade movie.

"What are these doing here?" Bryce picked up a small brontosaurus. "No prehistoric human ever made an image of a dinosaur. It's impossible. There's the slight matter of a few million years..."

"Oh, wow." Reina had found a meter-high ceramic of a woman having sex with something that looked like tyrannosaurus rex. "That's bent."

"How can you tell?" asked Bryce.

"Idiot. This thing's fucking her, look..."

"You're too kind. And so it is. Now concentrate, we have to think. We've got photos of some ruins, we've got a map, and now we've got some strangely amorous garden gnomes..."

"We have indeed, Sherlock. You're quite brilliant. There's something weird going on here."

"Too right there is. They've been digging all this stuff up. That's how come all the equipment, and all the guys. Shall we go and have a look?"

"Absolutely. Let's have a smoke first."

## Underground.

The General and the archaeologist stood before one of the panels of hieroglyphs, unaware that Thead was observing their deliberations. In the center of the wall was arranged a large spiral pattern of circles, some hollow and others solid.

*“That’s this room,” says Thead.*

“That’s this room,” said the archaeologist. “You see, that’s the tunnel leading to it, and that’s where it was sealed by the wall. And you see the circles? They show the locations of the megaliths in the room. You can see from the diagram that they’re laid out in a pattern, in two joined spirals with the centers towards the ends of the rooms. Those marks to the left and right of the rectangle are their writing. It’s the same script that we’ve seen in the other sites.”

The General knew this. He also knew that the rupturing of the wall had started the process. The crystalline structures inside the rock had begun moving, flowing like fluid through the half-formed veins of an embryo.

*Thead knows much of what is happening, having read the writing on the wall. He congratulates himself on his facility with the language, and briefly has a chance to feel smug about this payoff for his preoccupation with the map.*

The General moved towards the entrance. He knew, at least to some extent, what was about to happen. More was known than had been admitted to anyone – more than the archaeologists knew, and much more than any of the lower ranks realized. One of the advantages of his position was that he could watch history make itself, and know what he was watching.

He looked at his watch. It was approaching time.

The final phase should begin about eight and a half minutes – two of their time units, if the translation had been correct – after the introduction of biomass into the room.

It was a pity that his hand had been forced. The original plan

had been to breach the chamber, establish that it was what they believed it was, then seal it up again. The excavation of the caverns could then have proceeded at a leisurely pace, and when they had learned all there was to know from the artifacts and ruins, the main force of soldiers and archaeologists would have been shipped out, and replaced by specialists from Mount Weather.

At that point, the Nefilim would have been revived, using what had been learned over the last few months. But events had overtaken them already.

The ground shook.

Somewhere, something moved. The halogens tumbled and all but one of them went out, their filaments shattered.

Without warning, the obelisks exploded. Fragments of stone flew everywhere. One of the soldiers made a small, surprised sound as he disappeared beneath falling pieces of rock. Bisset expired without a sound, crushed against a wall by a collapsing pillar.

The General stepped back and drew his gun. He waited out of sight until the woman and the three remaining soldiers appeared, running towards the entrance.

He stepped in front of them. "Back in there." He leveled the gun and pointed it over their shoulders at the blackness behind them. "Now."

"But why... you saw..." The sergeant was bleeding from a gash in his forehead.

The General shot him, then pointed the gun at the others. "Do it now."

Silently, eyes wide, they edged back into the cavern. The explosions had stopped. Columns of shadow began moving among the piles of rubble, like dark searchlights shining down from the ceiling.

The panels in the walls disappeared, revealing banks of controls that pulsed with light in the same way that the designs on the rock faces had.

The columns of darkness began to move together.

Figures became visible in the dark mist. They were humanoid,

but definitely – most definitely – not human. The General held his breath and took another step back.

The creatures were tall, with long gangling limbs. Their elongated skulls were devoid of hair, except for long strings of braids attached to the sides and the back that hung down over thin bony shoulders. Large coal-black eyes looked out from between heavy brows and hollow, bleached white cheeks.

The General knew that the same thing was happening at the three other locations around the world. All the signs had pointed towards this site being the key – the center – the revival of which would be the spark that brought the whole system to life.

He thought of calling Mount Weather, but decided against it. One thing at a time. It wouldn't do for things to get out of control. The General's superiors weren't famous for their tolerance of failure. The fate of his predecessor had been proof enough of that. He would get things in order here first.

The woman and the two soldiers were standing, stupefied, between the entrance and the nearest of the creatures. A low throbbing reverberated through the walls and the floor.

*Kali is whimpering again. Shut up, thinks Bark. We've got enough to deal with. He looks around. Sahrin is watching calmly, but Onethian looks worried.*

The creatures moved forwards. The three humans were frozen, gripped by some unseen force. Long fingers wrapped themselves around the woman and one of the soldiers and lifted them off the ground.

At that point, the spell that had been holding the remaining soldier seemed to break, and he turned and ran from the room, past the General. He stopped and turned. When he saw that the General had turned as well and was aiming his gun at him, he disappeared around the nearest corner, a bullet cracking the rock near his head.

*Onethian, the example set for him, follows suit. This is too much for him. Physical dangers that he can understand are fine; he'll mix it with anyone. But this... he can't put a handle on it at*

*all. Onethian, a traveler of much spine but little imagination, is out of here.*

\* \* \*

Bryce and Reina, descending into the caverns, marveled at what they saw. They gazed in silence, their mouths hanging open at the scale of the ruins.

*The Senator's reaction is more specific. "Oh," he says, recognizing the style. "Nefilim... It has to be Nefilim."*

*He wishes he could tell the two locals about the Nefilim, and how their dark reputation has spread through the furthest reaches of space and time. But then, he thinks to himself (knowing that he is wrong), these are just old ruins, dead, cold, and there is nothing here except dust and dissolution. There's nothing at all for these people to worry about, and certainly nothing for him to worry about...*

\* \* \*

*Meanwhile, Bark, Thead, Sahrin and Kali are feeling strange. Something is happening.*

*A wave passes through them all. They might not understand that anything has changed if the General was not staring at them. They have shifted frequencies, they realize instantly.*

*They are on the physical plane. Unheard of...*

\* \* \*

Suddenly, they were there...

The General saw four strangely dressed and confused people snap into existence a few feet from him. Everyone stood still, forgetting for a few seconds about the Nefilim.

The General came to his senses first. He turned his gun on the group. If he hadn't witnessed their unusual arrival, he would have killed them straight away.

"I don't know who you are, but right now it doesn't matter. All of you stay exactly where you are. I'll kill anyone who either interferes or moves. Got it?"

Bark nodded and said nothing.

The General took his phone from his belt and keyed Mount Weather. Screw waiting for anything. The small screen came to life as the UN logo appeared, and then faded away to reveal the face of the Secretary-General.

The fat face was contorted with rage. “What the hell is going on there? The monitors are down, we’re getting no feedback at all from your site. And the process is starting ahead of time at the other sites! It’s chaos; we’ll be lucky if we can maintain control. What the fuck have you done?”

“My hand was forced, Secretary-General,” the General said in his best voice. “The seal was breached as planned, but we couldn’t close it off. Virtually everyone here is down, in some sort of coma. The creatures have arrived here, what about the oth—?”

“Yes, they have.” The Secretary was sweating. “We’ll have to make the best of it. Do they have what they need?”

“They have the two sacrifices. We were extremely lucky; there was a woman here, one of the scientists. They’ve taken her and a private. Is everything set in the other sites?”

“Yes, no thanks to you. You’re pushing your luck on this one, General. But we’ll discuss that later. Don’t screw up again.”

*Shit.* “I’ve got four uninvited guests here,” he replied. “Are they anything to do with you?”

“No. If they’re not with you, I don’t know anything about them. Kill them.” The Secretary-General closed the connection.

The General pointed his gun at the group.

“Now that wouldn’t be a good idea at all,” said Bark, not sure how far their new corporeality went, and how susceptible to bullets they would be.

“You might well think that,” the General replied, and shot Kali.

Their physical status was established beyond all doubt. Kali was thrown against the wall and slid to the ground, thoroughly and completely dead, a small hole in his chest and a much larger one in his back. Blood spread into a pool on the ground beneath him.

Bark grabbed Sahrin by the arm and pulled her around the same corner that had saved the corporal.

The General swore. Pursuing them through the darkness was not an option.

Thead, too close to the General and his gun to consider the same maneuver, cowered back against the rock. He was trapped.

The General was about to send Thead the way of Kali when his potential victim had the brainwave that would not only save his life, but also open up a new career path for him.

“I can read their writing. I’ve studied it for many years,” he blurted, gesturing towards the Nefilim, who were busy with an array of devices that had appeared from somewhere. “I’m fluent in it.” At this point, Thead had not much else going for him.

*The stranger knows something, the General thought, and he’s scared as well. He won’t be trying anything.*

“You stay in sight,” he said to Thead, who nodded vigorous agreement. “If you move – if you do *anything* – you’re as dead as your friend there.”

If this new arrival could in fact read the Nefilim writing, he might be useful. And delivering him to the Secretary-General would help the General’s return to favor. If not, the stranger could always be executed.

Thead slid down the wall onto the floor. It was infinitely preferable to death, he reminded himself, sitting as he was only a few yards from the cooling corpses of Kali and the soldier.

The General turned his attention back to the chamber. There were at least a dozen of the creatures, and they had been busy.

The female archaeologist (whose name he had never bothered to learn and which now mattered to no one) and the equally nameless and hapless soldier had been placed on large stone slabs that had risen from the floor. The slabs and their occupants were surrounded by columns of intense silver light.

It was time to meet their new allies. He gestured with his gun to Thead, indicating that he should stand up and walk in front of him. Slowly, with an unwilling Thead in the lead, they entered

the chamber.

Each of the humans was being attended by two of the Nefilim. They were having some sort of probes or terminals attached to their heads, their limbs, and their torsos. They weren't temporary, the General noticed. They were being inserted deep into the two bodies.

The subjects had been paralyzed. The only control they had was over their eyes, wide with panic and staring in terror at what was happening.

At each of the three other sites around the world, a male and female had been kept on hand for precisely this moment, and in the last few minutes they would have been delivered over to the Nefilim for this same procedure. The soldier and the woman were being wired into the Nefilim grid. The earth would once again pulse with the power that had maintained and invigorated it in distant times – except this time, the Nefilim would have an ally. The world's governments and the inhabitants of the distant past would be of much use to each other. Combined, they would be invincible; something which the uncooperative parts of the planet would soon come to appreciate.

Thinking this, the General felt invigorated as he stood among the Nefilim.

One of the creatures turned to him.

*'You are early.'*

"It was not something we could avoid. And surely not a problem?" His conditioning was working well. No sign of panic; he felt totally in control. The trickle of sweat running down the back of his neck was due to nothing more than the heat.

The Nefilim laughed, if you could call the sound that, as it tightened an attachment connected to a tube inserted into the thorax of the archaeologist. Her head twitched slowly in response. The Nefilim leaned over, making small clucking sounds, and tightened something. The twitching stopped.

*'There is no problem,'* it replied. *'You have done well. We will be able to work efficiently together, your species and ours. We hope*

*that your race will last longer than our last... friends. But then, they didn't have the pragmatism of you humans. You have been watched, with great interest.'*

The General wondered how these creatures could have known anything about humans if they had been in suspension for millennia, but this was not the time to be distracted by minor details. The connection of the two humans to the Nefilim grid was the important thing.

How his superiors had come to know that all this was going to happen he didn't know – he didn't want to know – but there had been whispers at headquarters of experiments with psychics and remote viewing, and a lot of work had gone into deciphering the strange inscriptions and diagrams that had been found at the other sites. They were methodical, the Nefilim – and their written language reflected the fact – but humanity was no less methodical.

The hows and whys were of no concern to the General. Get the two bodies plugged in, and get above ground, out of here, and wait for the reinforcements to arrive.

“What about my men?” he asked. “How long are they going to stay unconscious?”

*'Perhaps forever. There is no way telling,'* replied another of the Nefilim. *'There had to be some difference between the air of our time and that of yours. We can breathe almost anything, our history is long enough, but your race, it seems, has a more delicate constitution.'*

The General's skin prickled at the sight of the Nefilim's smile. Thin lips peeled back over flat teeth that curved back into the creature's mouth, like rows of tiny fishhooks.

It was at that point that the General realized that the Nefilim wasn't speaking. The pupils of its eyes, marble-small and red, were fixed on him, unwavering. It was using some kind of telepathy.

*'Quite so,'* the Nefilim answered the General's unvoiced question. *'Your own mind is doing the translating. Wherever possible, we prefer that others, you in this case, do the work...'*

One of the other Nefilim made a sound, which for no particular

reason the General took to be their equivalent of laughter. “How long until you will be ready to start the grid?” he asked stiffly.

*‘The point of the alliance between our two races, yes,’* replied the one that had been doing the talking – no, the thinking. *‘Not long. Then we can all begin the real work.’*

The real work... *Something else for later,* the General thought.

## Various people meet each other.

Bryce and Reina, accompanied by the invisible Senator, could easily have encountered Onethian or the fleeing corporal as they found their separate ways through the maze of unexplored side tunnels, but they didn't. Their paths never crossed.

Onethian and the corporal did meet each other, though, near the compound's main gate. Onethian, out of breath and gasping, found Corporal Ortega sitting on some rocks not far from the gate, looking into the middle distance with a dazed look on his face.

Both being too disorientated to be scared of each other, and not at all sure what to do, they set off on the road towards Barker's Mill. In time they arrived at the Red Lion, where they got drunk.

\* \* \*

Bark and Sahrin soon found themselves back in the main tunnel system. They were trying to decide what to do when they walked around a corner and into Bryce and Reina, who were making their way towards the source of the noises they could hear.

*"Bark! Sahrin!" cries the Senator, overjoyed at the sight of them. Their new physicality, however, renders him invisible to them, so that Bark and Sahrin see only the two humans in front of them. The Senator fumes in frustration.*

"Are you going to try to hurt us?" asked Bark.

"...because you'd better not," added Sahrin, doing her best to sound dangerous.

"Chill, whoever you are." Reina wondered who the two strangers were. She'd never seen clothes anything like what they were wearing. Whoever they were, they liked color, texture and accessorizing. And fur.

"As far as we know, we're safe to be around," said Bryce. "Which, I think, is more than can be said for *some* people around here." He pointed towards the depths of the tunnel, from

where a low hum was audible. “We heard shots from down there somewhere.”

“The Senator should be with these two,” Sahrin said to Bark, looking around. “These are the locals we left on the hillside. There was another one of them as well.”

“That would be Tommy,” said Reina, “but you didn’t leave us anywhere. We’ve never seen you before.”

*“I’m here!” cries the Senator, waving his hands in Bark’s face. He tries to touch Bark on the shoulder, but his hand passes through him.*

“Maybe he is, but we just can’t see him,” said Bark. “Remember, we’ve shifted, and we’re physical now.”

“Who are you talking about?” Bryce asked. “We were with a friend of ours, but he stayed on the surface.”

“Never mind,” Bark replied, realizing that they knew nothing about the Senator.

“One of your people has gone mad,” said Sahrin, pointing down the cave. “The Nef... there are some creatures down there, and the people who have been occupying this place...” – Sahrin indicated the unconscious body of a soldier lying not far from them – “are responsible for bringing them here. One of our crew has just been killed, and another one is being held captive. A third one is missing, somewhere in these tunnels. And we left one watching the compound with you people. I don’t suppose you’ve seen him?”

Bryce was impressed. “No, sorry, we haven’t. Creatures... you mean, like, aliens? No shit... You guys aren’t with the soldiers?”

“They’re not from here, that’s obvious,” said Reina. “What’s happening?”

“Later,” said Bark. “I’ll explain later.”

\* \* \*

The leader of the Nefilim stood in front of a wall covered with controls. Lights and shifting shapes danced around the images of another three of the creatures that had appeared in front of him.

They said nothing; they were using the same technique that had been used to communicate with the General.

The Nefilim seemed to come to some conclusion and ended their conference. One of them adjusted a control and the stone slabs that were supporting the humans descended back into the ground, leaving their occupants at floor level.

The rock beneath them shifted and became fluid. It started to claim them; first their limbs and then the rest of their bodies began to melt slowly into the floor. The General could tell by their eyes that they knew what was happening.

Good. He opened his cell phone and keyed the Secretary-General's number.

The fat man came on. He'd been drinking. "Aaah, General..." He chuckled happily.

The General had never liked the Secretary-General. He'd seen him drunk before, during the Turkish thing. He hoped it wasn't a sign that something had screwed up this time as well. "How are things going down there with our new friends? You haven't offended anyone, I hope?"

"No, Secretary, everything is going according to plan, apart from the slight inconvenience of me being totally alone here. All of my men are down, and according to the Nefilim, it could be permanent. I need replacements here immediately."

"Fine." The Secretary-General leaned closer, his bloodshot eyes staring directly into the camera. "We'll get some more men there in a couple of hours. Just a few at first, and better numbers later. But I want you back here on the first helicopter that gets there. Your new boys will be reliable, totally mindfucked, no security risk at all. As you'll be their new C.O.," – the General breathed a quiet sigh of relief – "they'll think you're God. What happened with your mysterious interlopers? Who were they?"

"I don't know, Secretary, but they've been neutralized." He wasn't about to admit that two of them had escaped. "One of them was interesting, though. He claims to have some knowledge of the Nefilim, so I'm bringing him back with me."

“As you wish.” The SG was quite affable when he’d had a few. He should do it more often, the General realized. “Bring a couple of the Nefilim back with you, if they’re agreeable. Tell them we need to meet personally. There are some decisions to make. I’m just sitting here having a drink with President Veal, we’d both like to say hello, wouldn’t we, Helmut? Yes, of course we would. See what you can do, there’s a good General...”

The Secretary-General reached forward and cut the connection, already turning, laughing, to continue his conversation with the President of Europe.

\* \* \*

Bryce had been surprisingly hard to persuade, but descriptions of creatures with multiple rows of sharp teeth and coal-black eyes with glowing red pupils, combined with Bark’s retelling of the General’s capacity for immediate and terminal discipline, finally did the trick. They turned back towards the surface.

“I suppose that means we’ll never get to see one of these creatures,” Reina said.

“I’ll draw you a picture,” replied Bark impatiently.

“What about Thead?” broke in Sahrin.

“Yes, what about your friend?” asked Bryce. “You aren’t going to leave him down there, are you?”

“Oh, yes, Thead,” replied Bark, not sure that he wanted to be reminded. He cursed quietly to himself. They turned back, not at all sure what good they could do. The two locals, not about to be left alone, followed.

*“Just as you should, without a doubt,” fumes the Senator, who for some reason regards himself as the closest thing to a friend that Thead has got. Frustrated by his inability to talk to anyone, the Senator is beginning to feel alone, surrounded by the ghosts of the present.*

\* \* \*

The General noticed that Thead was getting active again, recovering from the stupor of terror that had been keeping him conveniently immobile. He gestured, telling Thead to come and stand where he could keep an eye on him.

Thead got to his feet and came over, not happy at lessening the distance between himself and the Nefilim. One of them sensed his fear and snarled, eyes flashing, thin lips sliding back over its teeth.

The General watched as the floor slowly claimed the soldier and the female archaeologist. After a few minutes, the only sign of them was a few irregularities in the rock surface. Finally the stone crept over them, like moss growing over something rotting on a forest floor. There was no trace at all left of the two victims.

A new, more urgent tone entered the sound that had been pulsing through the room. Visible aethers moved around the Nefilim as they communicated between themselves.

*So this is how it is done, then,* the General thought to himself.

*So they're doing it again,* Thead thought to himself, recalling the legends in which other races served as the catalysts for the Nefilim grids.

Thead could see from the General's face that he had never seen this before.

"Like a crystal, in a radio set," Thead said, moving closer. "Their energy will be used as a tuning device by their grid. I hope you've done some research on your new friends. It is never a good idea to enter into an agreement with an unknown quantity. Or that's how it is in most places I've visited. Perhaps you do things differently here." He was prattling. He stopped when he saw the General's face darken.

The General didn't reply, but he understood what Thead meant.

The lines of energy and force that covered the planet's surface formed a geometric pattern of finely tuned links, each of which was allocated a function in the grid. This was the source of the mythology surrounding ley lines, sites of power and gravity anomalies. Sometimes there was some science involved, but

usually it was too heavily rooted in folklore to mean much.

But this was the real thing. As Thead had said, the life forces of the victims would act like crystals, focusing the earth's raw energy and sending it, in a purified and concentrated form, to other points on the grid. Other points would become communication nodes, and yet others would monitor and survey, refine and redirect.

In short, the demands of a power structure, both political and physical, would be met with ease.

Over time, the influence of the eight victims, two in each of the four sites, would dissipate, like batteries going flat, and they would need to be replaced, the whole ceremony being re-enacted. And thus, the General reflected, was born, among all the races that the Nefilim had dominated, the copycat ritual of sacrifice; the necessity of providing the earth a yearly offering of blood and life energy.

He remembered that the Secretary-General wanted to see some Nefilim. He went to the one that, for want of better instruction, he regarded as their leader, and passed on the request for a meeting. The Nefilim studied him for a few seconds, as if seeking information from his physical appearance, then accepted.

He made sure that the creature knew that more soldiers were on the way. For some reason, it made him feel better.

\* \* \*

The General led his party straight to the surface, expecting the helicopters to arrive at any moment. As it was, they were late, and it would be an hour before the black shapes came floating over the horizon like dark wasps, hugging the treetops.

Thead used the time to think. There could be a career opportunity here if he played it right. The natives were obviously bent on making some sort of deal with the Nefilim.

It was a new angle, he had to admit. Over the years, he'd heard of different ways of dealing with them, but an alliance of equals was a new one. Maybe there was more to these humans than met the eye. Or less. They were either very smart or very stupid.

He was sure that he didn't like the General, who was far too rough for a scientist and intellectual such as Thead. Still, for the sake of science, you do what you must do, he thought. No sacrifice is too great.

He hoped he wouldn't have too much direct contact with the Nefilim, who had a habit, he'd heard, of not distinguishing between their friends and their enemies. Whatever. Science and scholarship, they were the main things... he had responsibilities to truth and knowledge. He was above politics.

*'You may well be above politics...'*

The words leapt from nowhere into Thead's mind. He started, his heart jumping. He looked around and saw the glowing eyes of one of the Nefilim mocking him. Thead felt disconsolate at the thought that he didn't know how long he had been the object of the creature's attention.

*'But I shouldn't worry,'* the voice in his head continued. *'Someone will find a job for you.'*

Thead said nothing and looked away.

## Sahrin goes exploring, and finds some company.

Below ground, they had arrived at the area where the Nefilim had appeared. Sahrin stayed near the entrance to the chamber, keeping watch in case anyone came down the tunnels.

The floor was carpeted with shards of broken rock. Whatever substance had covered the arrays of controls had peeled off the walls like paint blistering in heat, and slumped onto the floor in pools of slime.

The room was empty. The Nefilim had gone, as were the corpses of Kali and the sergeant. There were marks in the dust, left by their heels as they had been dragged away. The trails disappeared into the darkness, into which Sahrin looked uncertainly.

In the chamber, the control panels, still alive, flickered coldly. There was no movement and no sign of life.

“What’s all this about?” Reina asked, looking in wonder at the hieroglyphs and lights.

“This room contains the mechanisms with which the Nefilim control their energy system,” Bark answered. “As for why they would want to do that, we definitely don’t have time to go into that, except to say that it’s in their nature. There’s no sign of Thead here. He was here with one of your soldiers and some of the Nefilim when we left. I’d guess that he’s most likely with them now.”

“They’re not *our* soldiers. Who are the Nefilim?” Bryce asked.

“Can we do this later?” Bark had become impatient. “Or am I alone here in having an appreciation of the immediate danger of our present situation?”

Having satisfied themselves that Thead was nowhere in the chamber, they went back to the breached entrance where they had left Sahrin.

She was gone. Her footprints led off into the darkness, in the same direction as the scuff marks left by the transport of the

two bodies.

Bark swore softly. “Marvelous, this is just marvelous. We’ll have to go after her...”

\* \* \*

Sahrin had gone in search of the source of the noise.

It was the faintest of sounds, quite distinct from the humming that was coming from somewhere in the chamber. It was muffled by the turns of the winding tunnels and walls of heavy rock, but it had still been loud enough to catch her attention.

She knew she should have called the others, but something stopped her. Whether or not that something was just stupidity would remain a point of debate for some time. She edged her way along a wall, following its turns through the darkness. Something glowed ahead of her. As the wall veered to the left, the source of the light came into view.

She was at one end of a long cavern. In row upon row of cubicles, she saw creatures, scores of them, lined up in transparent coffins, like corpses awaiting burial. She edged closer, her surroundings now visible in the pale green glow that came, she saw now, from the containers that housed the bodies.

Rows of the cubicles receded into the distance. There was movement among the ranks of sepulchered bodies.

One of the Nefilim was moving along the aisles. It was working methodically through the ranks of its immobile companions, operating controls, repeating the same movements each time. Then she saw another of the creatures, and a few seconds later a third, all engaged in the same activity.

They were moving away from her as they worked. When she thought it was safe, she moved out of the shadows, and crept towards the nearest of the bodies.

It looked like a monstrous, premature infant in its incubator. Some kind of tape had been wrapped around the torso and head, making the creature look like a half-completed mummy. The ends of the tape were attached to terminals at the foot of the

sarcophagus.

They did have a certain nobility, and it wasn't just because of their height, she thought. The creature's head was larger than a human head, and covered with pale leathery skin stretched taut over high cheekbones and wide temples. Its eyes were shut. She looked closely, noticing the almost imperceptible rise and fall of the creature's chest. Its breathing was slow and slight, barely happening at all.

Then she saw that the tape that was wrapped around its body was moving, almost imperceptibly, like a slow flatworm. She leaned closer. It seemed to be alive. It was using some kind of peristaltic motion, gradually inching its way around the alien's body. Perhaps there was some symbiotic relationship at work here. A parasite/host thing.

She was standing with her face only a foot or so from the entombed creature's head when two things happened at once.

Inside the case, the creature's eyes snapped open without warning. It breathed out loudly, made a high-pitched squealing sound, and turned its head towards her.

At the same time, outside the sarcophagus, the Nefilim that had quietly come up behind her, seeing that the motion of its waking companion would scare her and send her running, quickly reached out and placed a heavy hand on one of her shoulders and another over her mouth.

A shriek died in her throat as she realized instantly that there was no point in alerting the other Nefilim to her presence, if that had not already been done. Besides which, the hand over her mouth was irresistibly strong.

She knew even before she was turned around that the owner of the powerful grip wasn't human; the pressure on her shoulders was entirely alien, like needles that wanted to break her skin.

*'Be quiet.'*

The message came into her mind softly, as though the Nefilim was trying not to alarm her. It bent forward, lowering its face towards hers.

*'You are in no danger from me. The only immediate danger to you is from the others of my kind who are here. And perhaps this one.'*

The Nefilim reached behind Sahrin and did something to a control on the side of the case. She heard a brief scuffle of movement, and then silence.

"What are you going to do to me?" she whispered.

*'No harm. For now, you must trust me, even though you know nothing of me, apart from what you think you know of my race. Both of us are in danger as long as we remain here. Now please, come with me.'*

The creature turned and walked into the darkness.

It had not been threatening; there might even have been a pleading tone in the words that had appeared in her head. In any event, given her present situation, she seemed to have little choice but to go along with it, for the moment at least.

She looked around, and saw no sign of the route that had brought her here. She followed the creature, stumbling through the gloom to catch up.

Once they were some distance down the tunnel that the Nefilim led her into, her eyes became accustomed to a soft gray light that seemed to come from the walls. It was a narrow passageway, and apart from the smooth and level floor, it seemed to be natural. Cave moss clung to the walls. Something brushed against her face and buzzed lazily away.

*'I should return to my friends,'* she thought at the Nefilim's back.

*'That is not possible right now,'* came the reply.

She was being led deeper into the earth, down gradients that became steeper as they went, through tunnels that soon became even more rough and narrow. The artifacts that she'd seen in the tunnels above were no longer in evidence. These tunnels appeared were purely functional, only to be used if you were going somewhere.

Finally, the Nefilim stopped in front of a bare piece of wall and

touched it in three different places. The surface dropped away to reveal another tunnel, bathed in the same gray light. *Secrets?* she wondered. *From who? From the locals? Or do they have secrets among themselves?*

The Nefilim turned and looked at her. 'A few.'

They entered the tunnel. Sahrin made no more attempts at conversation, vocal or otherwise.

## Good morning.

Bark, Bryce and Reina had followed Sahrin's footprints, and were gazing in silence at the rows of unconscious giants. The glow cast from the coffins bathed the whole scene in an eerie light, from which they sheltered in the same shadows that Sahrin had relied on.

Bark was whispering to the other two. "I doubt that these are corpses. They are probably asleep, and nearing the end, I suspect, of a long rest. This is probably not the only place on this planet where this is happening. We should be careful."

The light from the coffins had grown brighter. In the distance, a group of Nefilim ascended a staircase and disappeared through a door.

They heard a sound, or felt a vibration, it was impossible to tell. It seemed to come from the walls themselves. The occupant of one of the closest cabinets stirred suddenly. The Nefilim lifted its hands to its face, and lurched over onto its side. It tried to lift itself up onto its elbows, but it seemed to lack co-ordination and fell back, its limbs moving slowly as though it was a newborn baby.

There was movement in the other chambers. Long limbs stirred slowly, then their actions became more coordinated as the inhabitants became aware of their surroundings and began to orientate themselves.

Without warning, the cabinets filled with clouds of gas.

As quickly as the gas arrived, it cleared. The top of each pod slid back, exposing the inhabitants to the air.

As the Nefilim emerged from their long sleep, the three intruders, without concurring and without hesitation, turned and disappeared back into the shadows of the tunnel they had come down. For now at least, Sahrin was out of reach, and would have to look after herself.



## **PART 2**



## Welcome to Mount Weather.

The helicopters flew along the water's edge, following the curve of the coastline. The beach below would have made an ideal holiday resort, were it not for its isolation. Although part of the North American mainland, it was guarded at its various edges by the sea, mountain ranges, and an intractable stretch of desert.

At a point halfway along the length of the undulating ribbons of white sand, the helicopters turned away from the ocean and headed inland, following the path of a stream that flowed towards the sea.

They were heading for Mount Weather. A huge complex carved out of the interior of an old volcano, it was the operational headquarters of the United Nations. Military, scientific, and communication facilities were maintained by a resident population of more than nine thousand. It was the site of the world's real government, even though the world's population didn't even know it existed.

Mount Weather soon appeared among the clouds. One by one, the helicopters descended into a crevice halfway up its northern face. Along one of the rock faces that were formed by the incision in the mountain's side, hidden under heavy brows of overhanging rock, were arranged a dozen or so landing sites, each one large enough to accommodate several of the helicopters. Arc lights illuminated the landing areas, leaving the depths of the chasm below lost in darkness.

The helicopters landed in front of a group of waiting officers and civilians. Guards surrounded the area.

An overweight, over-jowled man in a finely tailored suit was waiting among the officers. It was the Secretary-General himself.

"General," he said warmly – half a bottle of gin's worth of warmth – as he came across to meet the group. He was accompanied by the President of Europe, who kept glancing nervously in the direction of one of the other helicopters. The two

Nefilim were crossing the landing area towards the group.

“Are they sociable, General?” asked the Secretary-General, lowering his voice. “You’ve had more exposure to them than I have... are they easy to deal with?”

“They’re... *alien*. Don’t expect it to be like talking to any human you’ve ever met. And they can read your...” The arrival of the Nefilim cut him short.

*‘...mind. We can indeed. And you will find us firm, but fair, I think is a phrase that you might understand, Secretary-General.’*

The creature spoke to its companion. Their speech was a thin rasping sound, with none of the resonance of their telepathic communication. It was hard to listen to.

“As you can see, Secretary-General,” the General persisted, not caring whether they heard him, “our guests appear to possess the ability to read minds, and they can communicate directly with us on that level as well.”

The Secretary-General nodded and reached up to offer his hand to the two creatures. They seemed to know what was required and offered theirs in return. *The first physical contact*, the General mused.

*‘Not quite the first.’*

The thought appeared in his brain, and he realized that the second Nefilim was looking at him again. He turned away. He was beginning to develop a dislike for them.

Later, in the hallway outside the offices of the Security Council, Thead was shown – as one parades a slave or a horse in front of a prospective buyer – to the Secretary-General. Thead’s red and white overalls and collection of earrings dangling from one ear combined to convince the Secretary-General that he was some sort of freak.

“Oh, Jesus. Have him questioned. Get everything he knows,” the Secretary-General sniffed, and turned away towards the Council chambers, where the two Nefilim were waiting.

A pair of guards led Thead through the labyrinth of corridors.

“I hope they know what they’re doing,” Thead said to the

stone-faced soldier next to him.

The guard said nothing.

## An alliance.

Several thousand miles away, Bark, Reina and Bryce stood at the top of a sand hill, looking up into the sky. Bark had just told them that the ship was moored above them.

“Where?” Bryce and Reina both asked, squinting into the sky, seeing nothing.

“Just above these trees,” Bark replied, feeling better now that they were above ground. He pointed to a group of pines on a small plateau of rock.

Bryce and Reina looked up beyond the tops of the trees, but there was nothing to see except a glimmer of light in the atmosphere, which might have been something. Or not.

Bark reached out and held onto something. “Like this,” he said, and swung himself upwards. He began climbing, supported by nothing. A few feet above the ground, he started to flicker, then disappeared.

“No shit!” Bryce went to the spot where Bark had been standing and felt around in the air.

His hands encountered something that swayed under his touch. It startled him for a moment, feeling something that he couldn’t see, but he soon deduced from Bark’s actions and the texture of what he could feel that it was nothing more sinister than a rope ladder. He took a firm grip on one of the rungs and swung himself up.

“It’s OK,” he said to Reina, before he disappeared. She watched in silence for a few seconds, took a deep breath, and followed.

As they climbed, the ladder gradually became visible. By the time Bark disappeared over the side of the ship, Bryce could see the dark underside of its hull. He looked down at Reina. They both shrugged their shoulders and continued.

Bark was waiting on the deck. He took Reina by the arm and helped her over the railing.

“Welcome... and what do we have here?”

The Senator was climbing up the ladder behind Reina, grumbling to himself and to anyone who cared to listen. The group's failure at finding Sahrin was still bothering him, and his experience with invisibility, temporary though it was, had not helped his temper. He communicated his feelings on both matters to Bark. At length.

"I suppose you were there when the Nefilim were revived," Bark sighed when the Senator finally finished. "You would have to agree, wouldn't you, that our options at the time were limited?"

The Senator reluctantly grumbled something approaching agreement, and reached into his pouch for a bindoo leaf. He sat down heavily on one of the ceramic converters near the base of the main mast.

"I'm Senator... oh, never mind," he said to Bryce and Reina, who were looking confused. "And you two are locals. You must have had an interesting day." The bindoo was already painting a glaze over his eyes.

"We sure have." They nodded agreement, but their attention was already turning to the ship.

Whatever its position might be in the pantheon of space-going vessels, the ship was a mess. It had been added to relentlessly over the ages, with cabins and decks and masts attached at random, so that they protruded in all directions. It was a floating maze. What little of the original deck that was left was littered with furniture and effects, as if the crew were accustomed to living outdoors. The contents of the hold were bursting from the hatches. Some of the crates had been opened, and their contents gone through.

"Mmm... ok... this is a relaxed looking place," said Reina.

"Well, we are relaxed about most things," replied Bark. He looked over the rail, half expecting to find that they had been followed. Satisfied that they hadn't, he turned back to his guests.

"As you might have guessed, we're not from your world. Some might call us aliens, but actually we're more what you might call distant relatives."

"Relatives?"

“Well, as you can see, there’s no physical difference between us. We are just from a different place, and slightly better traveled as well, that would be right, wouldn’t it, Senator?”

The Senator hummed happily in agreement. “Oh yes, we get around, all right.” He offered Bryce a strip of Bindoo. Bryce took it and started chewing.

“Do you know what’s going on?” Reina asked Bark. “Why all the excavations and drama with the soldiers? And what were those creatures, the ones you call Nefilim? Whatever’s going on, it must be serious if people are getting iced.”

Bark weighed his options for a few seconds. “Why don’t you come with us? In fact, you should come with us. Yes. I could use the help, as you can see...” He gestured towards the Senator, who had retreated into a world of his own. He was nicely relaxed, adding to his notebook of speeches that would never be given.

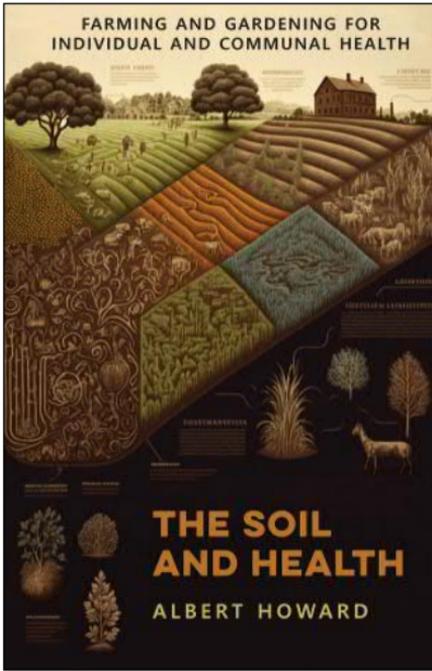
“I can’t sail the ship on my own, and I’ll explain on the way.”

Reina thought about the vegetable deliveries she was supposed to make the following day. She couldn’t see how there was much contest.

“Sure. How long will we be?”

“What do you mean?” asked Bark, releasing the anchor and gesturing to her to help him wind it in.

*What the hell.* Reina began winding and forgot to reply.



## The Soil and Health

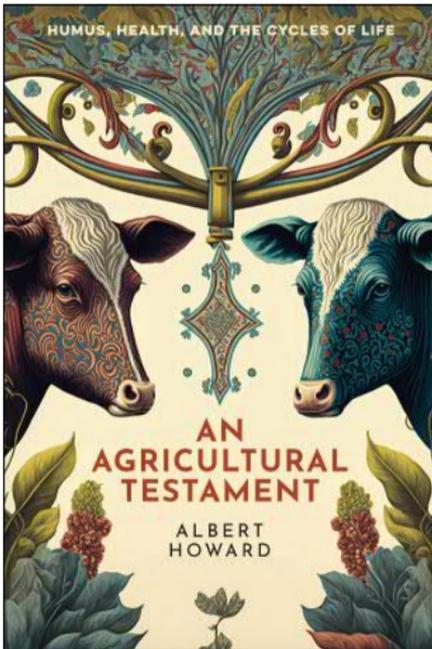
Albert Howard

This valuable book is a detailed analysis of the vital role of humus and compost in soil health – and the importance of soil health to the health of crops and the humans who eat them. The author is keenly aware of the dead end which awaits humanity if we insist on growing our food using artificial fertilisers and poisons.

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## An Agricultural Testament

Albert Howard

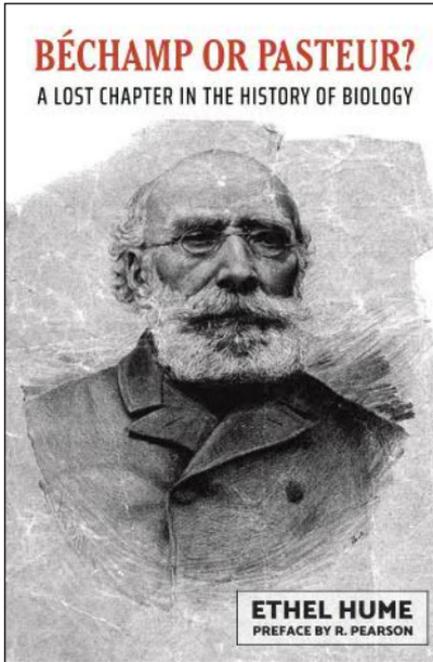
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Ethel Hume / Robert Pearson

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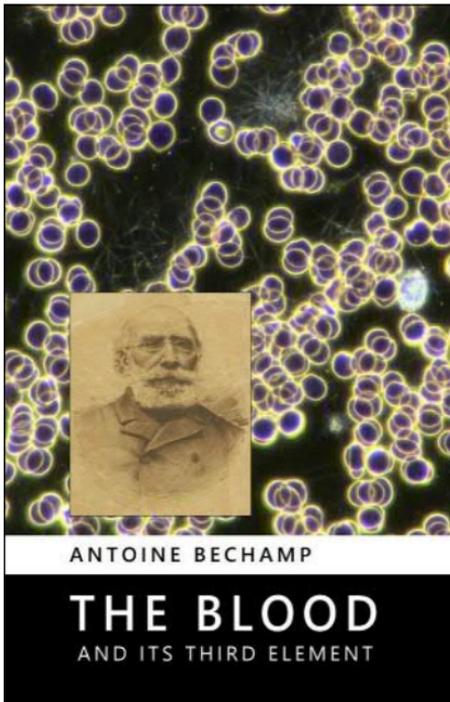
Antoine Béchamp

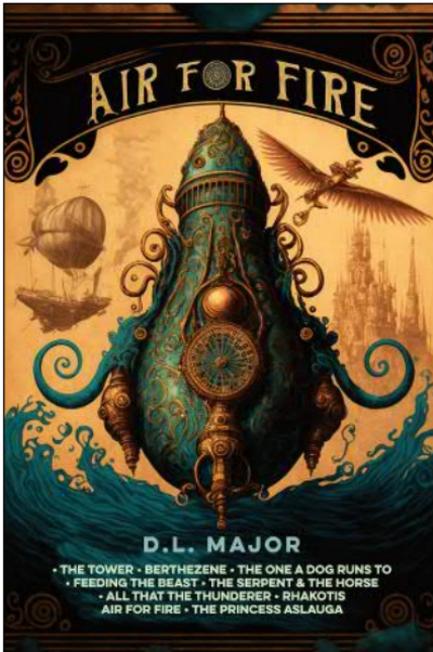
There is no single cause of disease. The ancients knew this. Béchamp proved it with meticulous research, and was written out of history for his trouble. The relevance of his work to the dilemmas that plague the modern medical world remains to this day unrealized by mainstream science and medicine.

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D.L. Major

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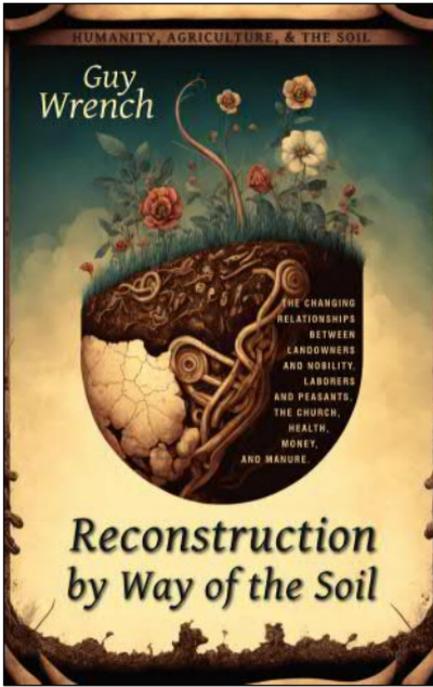
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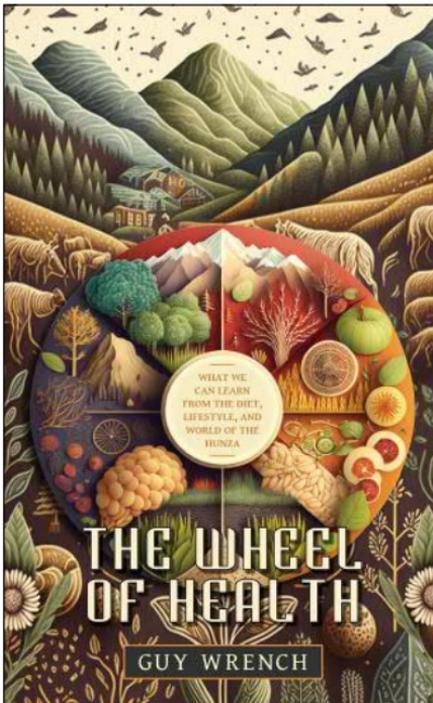
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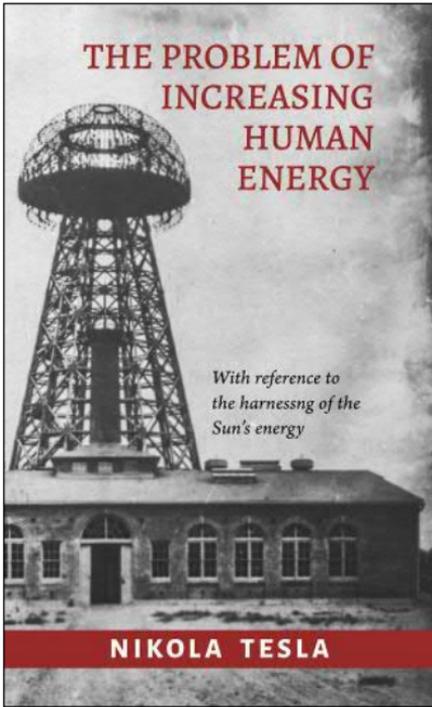
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The Hunza of northern Pakistan were famous for their extraordinary vitality and health. Dr Wrench argues that in part at least, this is because their food was not made 'sophisticated', by the artificial processes typically applied to modern processed food. How these processes affect our food is dealt with in great detail in this book. What Dr Wrench uncovered in his researches goes deeper than just food, though. It's about water.

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Nikola Tesla

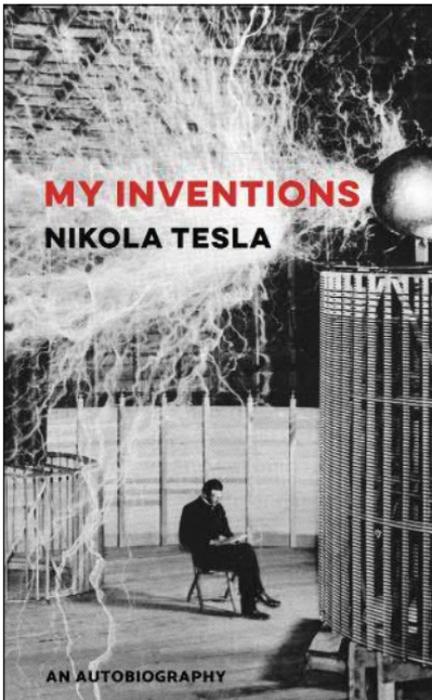
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THE SOUL  
OF THE APE  
&  
MY FRIENDS  
THE BABOONS



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Includes two works by Marais written after his period spent living among a troop of baboons in the South African veldt. *My Friends* was written for a newspaper readership. *The Soul of the Ape* was the more serious scientific document. The excellent introduction by Robert Ardrey was part of the 1969 edition, and adds greatly to an appreciation of the importance of this text.

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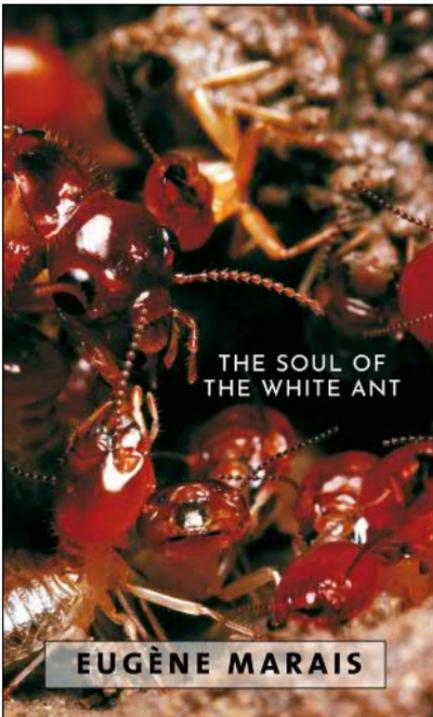
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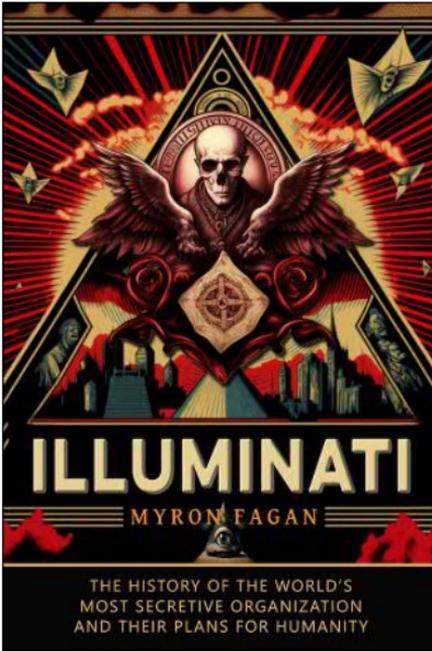
The amazing results of a long, close study of the lives of termites. Eugène Marais compares the infrastructure of a termite colony to that of the human body. Writing from the heart, this scientific author who is also a poet instills a wonder in the reader, of the incredible intricacies of nature, in a light-hearted, easily readable manner.

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# ILLUMINATI

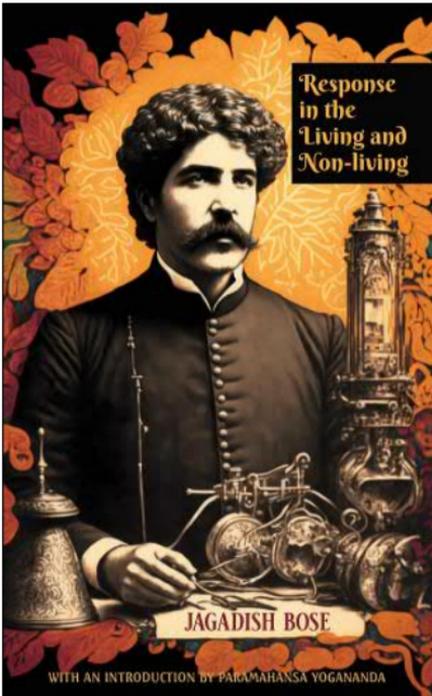
Myron Fagan

This book describes how the Illuminati became the instrument of the Rothschilds to achieve a One World Government, and how every war during the past two centuries has been instigated by this group. This is an historical text with names, dates, organizations and mode of operations, all exposing the octopus gripping the world today.

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Jagadish Bose

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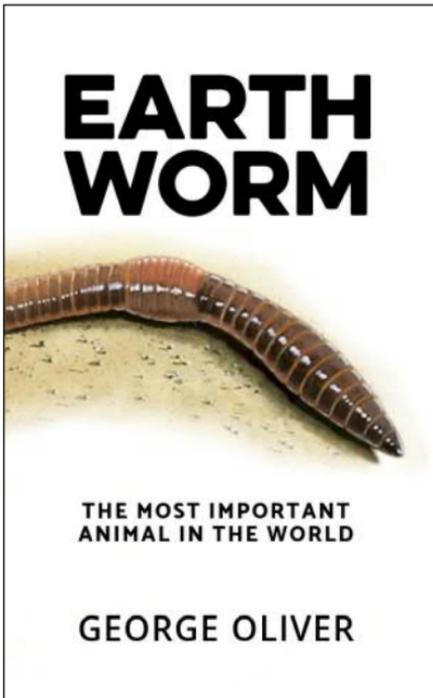
Edmund Morris

Recently we have seen a great back-to-the-land movement, with many young professional people returning to small scale farming; thus it is useful to read about someone who did exactly the same thing in 1864. In that year, Edmund Morris and his family gave up their business and city life for a farm of ten acres, where they made a go of mixed farming, and then wrote a book about it.

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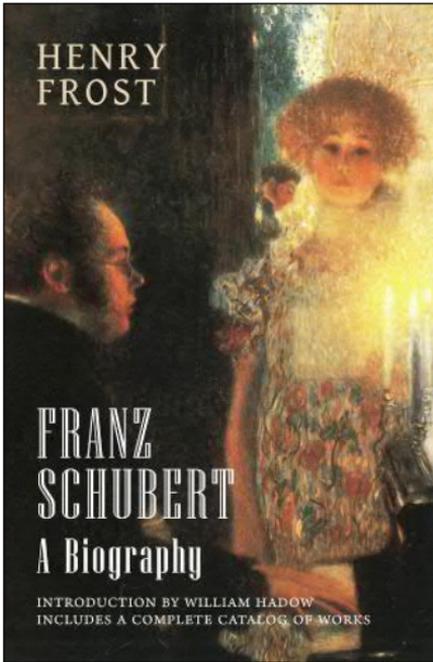
George Oliver

The author returns the reader to a time and methodology where people took responsibility for what they did and what they produced. In this world of spiraling food prices, huge landfills, diminishing food supplies, loss of topsoil, and water pollution, the reader is reminded that the world's most important animal could well be the humble earthworm.

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Henry Frost

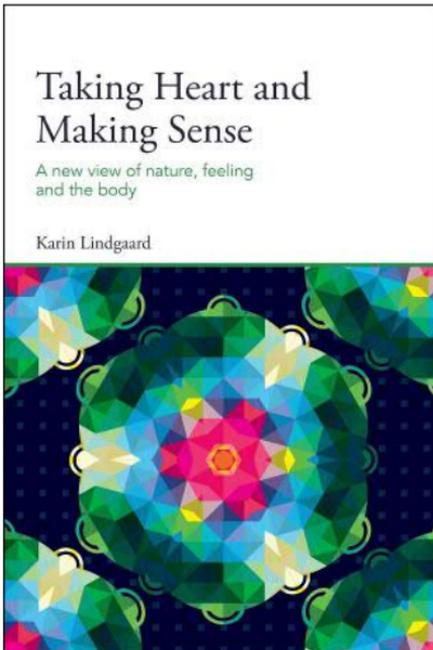
“With faith man steps forth into the world. Faith is far ahead of understanding and knowledge; for to understand anything, I must first of all believe something. Faith is the higher basis on which weak understanding rears its first columns of proof; reason is nothing but faith analysed.”

– *Franz Schubert*

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Karin Lindgaard

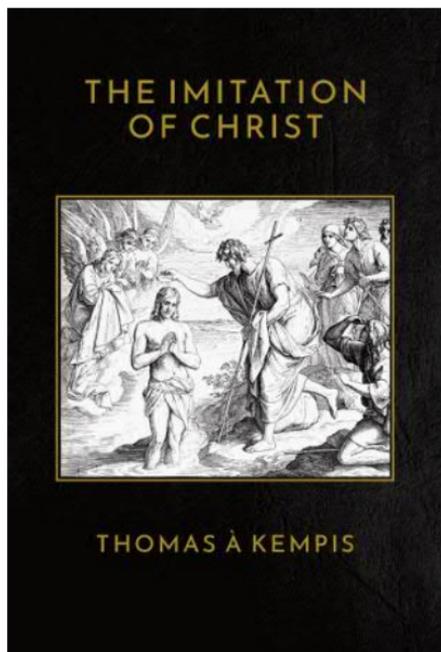
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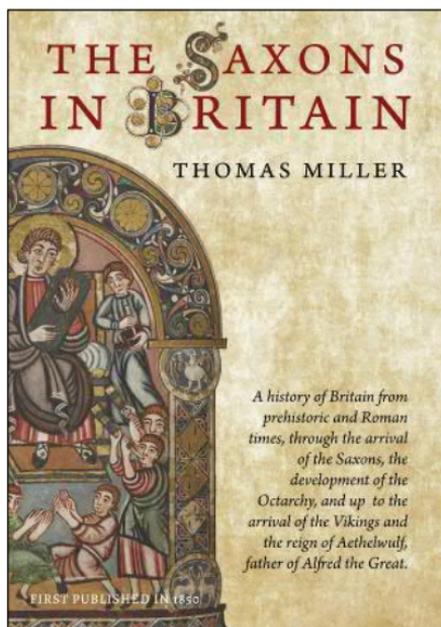
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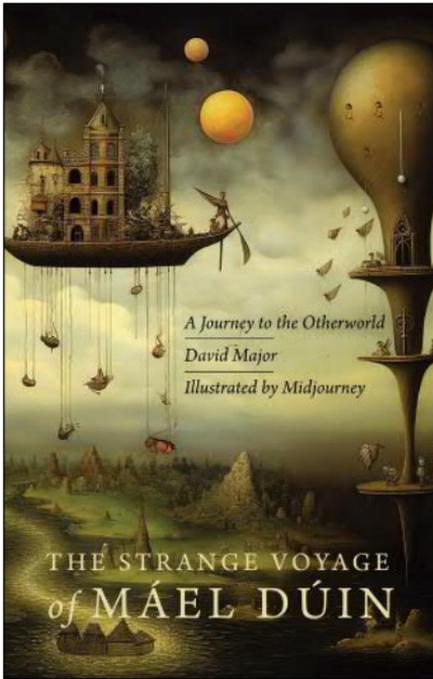
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