

# Chapter 31

## THE SILENCE, NOT THE IMAGES

**L**UKE HELD ME, murmuring till I could stand, then helped me to the futon and fetched washcloths for my forehead. My body was an aching hollow reamed by pain, and sleep came soon enough.

When I awoke, he'd crawled in bed beside me and was lying on his back. His shirt was off and he had one leg crooked so that his jeans were rucked around the crotch. A woody mound at the zipper. He'd left a small light on, and his ribcage glowed with nighttime sweat. I held my palm above it and felt rising heat.

He'd put my sneakers by the door. I took them to the porch and laced up on the steps. The soles squeaked as I walked toward the house, the sound as intimate and anechoic as a whisper.

The stars had vanished while I slept. Misty drizzle made a saffron aureole around the lamppost by the barn. Desultory birds called forth a dawn that wouldn't see the sun.

Cook's domain looked cavernous without the dynamo who gave it life. The kitchen clock said five-to-five. Time enough to get on the computer. I slipped my sneakers off and crept upstairs, past Dr. Colton's study, to my room. The door, though tight, no longer woke the dead.

First thing after booting up, I checked the king-cab's plates. The truck belonged to Mr. Shen. No help there for someone trying to find me. I disconnected briefly from the router, contemplated what

to say—how *much* to say—then settled down to business.

I provided Byron with the router's unrevealing IP address and the equally unhelpful license plate, mentioning the truck was still the only vehicle I'd seen except for Kirin's car and mine. I hypothesized the obvious—it was being used to ferry people from a nearby terminal or station. I avoided saying airport.

Some sort of gathering was taking place, I said, which seemed to coincide with my arrival; I had not, as yet, heard anything about its purpose. As for the Caucus, no agenda had emerged although I'd been informed repeatedly its mandate was protection of its members. Which members I then listed, minus Marion and Cook.

"First names only seems to be the rule," I wrote, "except for Dr. Colton. No one you suspect of having been abducted has appeared.

"Shen's no longer putting me through tests. Instead he's lecturing about my 'gift'. So far I've only had to listen. I have no idea where the talks are headed."

I made general comments about Dr. Colton—his advancing years, that everyone deferred to him, his predilection to stay cloistered in his rooms—but omitted everything he'd told me two days earlier.

Finally, I gave a full description of the Farm: the house, the barn, the cabins, the fields of corn and soy. Detailed, useless information.

Still online, I googled "Dr. Colton". There were lots to go around. I fired off the email, hosed all traces of it and went back downstairs.

Cook was once again in full possession of her kingdom. Coffee burred, big pots steamed, bacon sputtered on the grill.

Luke was at the table eating grapefruit. He raised his spoon in greeting.

"Sleep well?"

Nothing in his voice suggested that the bed I'd slept in had been his. Cook turned from rinsing dishes in the sink.

"Oh, good morning, David. I didn't hear you come in."

She looked from me to Luke and back again, seeing something she approved of. Approved of thoroughly, since she stood there

long, eyes crinkled happily.

She roused herself. "Grapefruit, David?"

"Mmm."

"Broiled, or as is?"

"Broiled. Brown sugar overtop?"

She clucked. "Now how else would I do it?"

I sat across from Luke while she began preparing it.

"Looks like it's going to be a wet one today," he commented. "I'll be working in the barn. Know anything about tractors? The differential lock is sticking. I could use the help."

"I can lend a back but not much more."

"Oh, I'm sorry, David," Cook piped up, her back to us, "that'll have to wait. Dr. C expects you in his study after breakfast."

She placed the grapefruit on a broiling rack and slid it in the oven. Luke looked up and held my eyes a moment.

*What did I tell you?*



The swags on Dr. Colton's windows were tied back, admitting grey-day light. The man himself was at his desk, hands folded patiently.

"David—please, have a seat."

He motioned to the armchairs pointed at the big-screen television set.

"You'll recall," he said as I sat down, "I mentioned Garrett Finnestad decamped from F-RK with footage of their work. Unpleasant though it is, you need to see at least a part of what he stole."

From the corner of my eye I saw him swivel, then heard tapping from his keyboard. The TV hummed and crackled and a Windows-style browser filled the screen. The cursor skittered, double-clicked and navigated to a folder filled with movie icons. Dr. Colton clicked on one and launched a player. *MKULTRA F-RK, Madison Facility* in fuzzy letters filled the frame. The cursor touched the Full Screen button, doubling the letters' size. They faded to a room inside a

fifties-style hospital with lots of chunky porcelain and big ceramic tiles.

“Nice setup,” I commented, nodding at the CRT invisibly connected to his desk. My office in Toronto had spaghetti everywhere.

A toolbar popped up at the bottom of the screen. The cursor hovered over Pause.

“Franklin’s work. You’ve met him. Tall? Grey hair? Brushcut? Our computer expert. ‘Guru,’ he insists.”

A chuckle like the rustling of paper.

I’d dined with them, I knew their names, I’d listened to their views on sports and politics. Yet I knew nothing about any of the Caucus members. The Farm’s no-reading rule required me to ask if I had any interest.

Dr. Colton closed the swags behind his desk, clicked on Play and let the footage roll.

The images were grainy—digitized from black-and-white—but slickly edited. Clinical vignettes crossfaded seamlessly with panoramic shots of rooms and close-ups of equipment.

*A woman strapped down on a gurney with a baton in her mouth and two electrodes on her forehead. Her left leg was in plaster from her heel to her hip. A dial was turned; a switch got thrown. Her back leapt off the table in a writhing arch. A full five seconds passed before a labcoat killed the current.*

Dr. Colton narrated.

“For electroshock, at voltages of seventy to one-fifty, the normal pulse length should be less than half a second. Here they use a lower voltage but a longer pulse. The idea was to re-align magnetic fields in the brain, hoping to confer psychokinesis. Muscular contractions broke the woman’s leg a session earlier.”

*A bald man in a dentist’s chair with lesions on his face and a gnarled growth beside one ear. A black box mounted on a boom trawled back and forth above his head. The nuclear trefoil was clearly visible.*

“What you’re seeing here is murder, plain and simple: irradiation of the brain to stimulate the growth of temporal lobe tumours,

thought to be responsible for ESP?”

*Orderlies straightjacketing a military type who ripped an IV from his arm, leapt from his bed, and started strangling a doctor with his stethoscope. The IV line connected to an apparatus with a row of toggle switches. Looping from the back were tubes attached to phials.*

“The device you see permits the rapid alternation or combining of amphetamines, barbiturates and psychotropics in the subject’s IV catheter.”

“Is that your friend?” I asked. “Garrett Finnestad?”

No answer.

*A room with trapdoors in the floor, their dimensions about equal to a coffin.*

“Sensory deprivation modules. Completely sound and light-proof. No room to move. Subjects stayed inside for up to seven days. Intravenous feeding, elimination through a catheter.”

*Shots of trapdoors being opened, subjects being lifted out. All were swathed in padding, wearing gloves. None could stand up by themselves. Some trembled uncontrollably. Others let their limbs be posed like catatonic zombies. Still others curled foetally and seemed to weep...*



In the end it was the silence, not the images, that got to me, like *The Scream* by Edvard Munch.

“You can see now what we feared,” concluded Dr. Colton as the screen went black. “What we petitioned London with, and when that failed, why we took the steps we did. These days we keep the footage safe in Chancery—”

“Your archives in the basement?” I asked, turning round.

“—and show candidates this video instead.”

“Candidates?”

“Empaths or transmitters who have come to our attention. Once we deem them trustworthy, the video is used to introduce them to

the Caucus' genesis and *raison d'être*. If they're sympathetic, there follows a novitiate—a period of training much like you and Luke received with John. At the end, the candidate is deemed a full-fledged member. An initiate, if you will."

"A Knight of the Hermetic Order of The Caucus, something like that?"

He smiled painfully.

"Nothing so arcane. Someone with the right to have a say in our decisions."

He blipped the TV off and pulled the curtains back. The colours in his study, sober though they were, looked vivid after all the black and white.

"I'm going to have to chew your ear off as I did the other day. Bear with me. It's the fastest way to bring you up to speed. Should I have Cook bring something?"

"Up to speed on what?"

"Coffee? Lemonade? Iced tea?"

"Just answers, thanks. Straight up, with equivocation on the side."

He settled in the chair beside me, crossed his legs and plucked his trouser crease.

"Miss Harper said you'd grown into a wit."

And not the right kind, either. *Wit*, the way he said it, had a *t* in front.

"Our decision to go underground in sixty-two was, perhaps, precipitous. Garrett notwithstanding, F-RK had yet to stumble onto genuine psychism. Nor were they likely to. It took sensitivity and insight for the picture to emerge. Our own grasp in those days, still in its infancy, had come to us one small piece at a time. Their shotgun sadism suggests that even with a glimpse, they were unlikely to have recognized the very thing they sought. Nor to have the mindset to pursue it. Real psychism was not as sexy as the comic book variety—at least to Cold War scientists.

"We were, however, caught up in the spirit of the times. Rumours about CIA abductions were becoming common coin, and

with the narcissism of the paranoid, we feared the Caucus would be targeted.

“In truth, by sixty-four, the CIA had pulled the plug on F-RK, a fact we didn’t learn until a decade later. Ironically, not knowing worked to our advantage, granting ten years’ practice dodging nothing more substantial than our fears.

“That same year—sixty-four—we opened up the Farm as a commune and retreat, which we called the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Alternative Psychotherapies. CISAP, for short.”

“Yes, Marion told me. Some sort of shrinks’ kibbutz.”

The corners of his mouth drew tight. He either found the term distasteful or didn’t care for interruptions.

“CISAP was pure sixties: experimental, optimistic, painfully sincere. We offered therapists outside the mainstream—Gestalt, transactional analysis, bioenergetics—a haven to exchange ideas, write, and even practise their vocation in a rural setting.

“Behind the scenes, of course, our purpose was to unearth psychics and recruit them to the Caucus. As I pointed out the other day, we tend toward careers in counselling.

“As a front, the Centre was a victim of its own success. At any time it might be housing twenty or more visitors, most of whom knew nothing of the Caucus. To deal with this we set up protocols resembling a secret order, whence the terminology you mocked. The paradigm both shrouded our existence and provided structure for the vetting of potential members.

“We gathered often and debated long. Anomalous telepathy, a thorny issue, occupied us till we finally concluded that it was, indeed, anomalous. John amassed statistics on prevoyance, correlating them against a staggering variety of factors. We discovered the disabling effect of neuroleptics. On a gentler scale than F-RK, we investigated ways to augment psychic gifts. And so on. The picture that emerged was not much different from *The Rules*.”

“Rules you say came from a sixteen-year-old’s pen.”

His eyebrows rose.

“And why not? Do you doubt you had the competence?”

He took my silence for a no.

“Have you read through them?”

“Mr. Shen gave me a copy.”

“Good. That spares me some explaining.

“A feature of psychism we uncovered was that empaths could detect psychic ability—the psychic ‘footprint’ mentioned in *The Rules*. We still had much to learn about dissimulating mental fields, and the fact that empaths could detect it worried us. What if, we reasoned, F-RK, whom we still feared, were to change their methods and approach psychism properly? In time they’d happen on the footprint, providing them a way to track down psychics and co-opt them for their purposes. CISAP, with its fluid population, was an open invitation to discovery.

“We dissolved the Centre early in the seventies, though the Farm remained our place of gathering. By then we numbered seventeen, scattered across Canada, with members in the States as well.

“Our timing was fortuitous. Russian psychotronic research had led American defence agencies to see a growing East-West ‘psi-gap’, which they sought to close by funding psychic research out of Stanford University, and at Fort Meade in Maryland.”

“The Star Gate projects,” I cut in. “Grill Flame, Sun Streak, Center Lane.”

“You’ve heard of them?”

“Like anyone who’s ever typed ‘conspiracy’ in Google.”

“So you know what they were after?”

“Psychic spies. Eyes-in-the-sky who never left their armchairs.”

“A colourful turn of phrase, but in essence, yes.

“Controlled remote viewing, as they chose to call it, was their major thrust, but no chimera got neglected in their hunt for psychic tools to turn against the Soviets. The Department of Defence—specifically, the Army Intelligence and Security Command, INSCOM—was particularly eager, spurred by INSCOM’s head from eighty-one to eighty-four, one Major General Albert Stubblebine.

“You mean that army nut who used to host spoon-bending



parties? He's legendary on the Web."

A tight-lipped, millisecond smile.

"The same. Star Gate reached its apogee under his sponsorship, and while most of its initiatives were harmless—at worst guilty of poor science—one of them continued in a line from F-RK, using human guinea pigs to test sadistic 'what-if' propositions. The project didn't have a name, just a number, 2561-G. Outside of those involved no one knew of its existence.

"Except you, the Caucus."

"A member in the States knew Stubblebine through contacts on the paranormal circuit. She got herself a job compiling data at Fort Meade. In effect, a mole."

"Got herself a job? Just like that? At a secret military lab?"

The smile this time was fractionally longer.

"The woman was a transmitter."

*Right.*

"It was from her we learned in the mid-eighties that 2561-G had narrowed their investigations down to two phenomena, which they called temporal displacement sensitivity and partial proximate telepathy."

"Prevoyance and empathy-imprinting."

"Precisely. 2561-G had turned up three primary psychics—from our intelligence, two empaths and a transmitter. 'From our intelligence' because the subjects were sequestered. We extrapolated their abilities from data our insider was responsible for processing.

"Similar to F-RK, 2561-G was focused on enhancing psychic power. Genuine psychism in and of itself was insufficient for the purposes imagined. Its effective range was limited. Empaths couldn't read a person's thoughts in real time. Imprinting didn't guarantee control over their actions. And prevoynance wasn't accurate enough to give an edge. Consequently, those responsible for 2561-G devoted all their efforts to improving what they didn't understand by any means.

"The approach was flawed on nearly every level, with the result we kept the upper hand in *understanding* psychism—cold comfort

when, in eighty-eight, two more subjects were sequestered at Fort Meade.

“To everyone’s surprise, the Berlin Wall came down in eighty-nine. Suddenly, US agencies conducting Cold War psychic research had to justify their spending. An independent cost-results analysis of nearly forty years of psi-investigation had shown their paranormal dabbling for what it mostly was—a twenty million dollar waste.

“Scrambling for funds, 2561-G grasped at straws and finally unearthed one: Garrett Finnestad. Data culled from former F-RK research suggested that his talents had been genuine. From his disappearance back in fifty-six, coupled with the trouble finding others like him since, they posited to Congress the existence of an underground of psychics working to prevent them furthering their work.

“American credulity is hardly news, nor is paranoia in the US government—although ironically, in this case, the story they cooked up was true. At any rate, funds were allocated to a project based on 2561-G and codenamed BRAZIER.

“Centred at Fort Meade again, it had a threefold mandate: to hunt for ‘partial telepaths’, investigate their usefulness in covert operations, and track down the elusive underground.

“Using more sophisticated protocols than those of 2561-G, BRAZIER finally succeeded in developing a picture of psychism very close to ours, including that ‘receiving telepaths’—empaths—could detect the psychic footprint, which they referred to as the ‘psi-constant’.

“We had, by then, worked out techniques to camouflage it. But we weren’t the only ones at risk. Empaths and transmitters not yet in the Caucus, those we didn’t know about, needed to be warned and taught the skill.

“The problem was, we had to find them.”

“Hence Cassandra Island. A summer camp for psychics. Come and play, and while you’re at it join our secret order.”

Another chilly twitching of the lips.

“What better place to hide than in the open? No one at the Island knows its real purpose, which, to borrow from your book of

clever phrases, is to sift among the flakes for gold.

“A single Caucus empath, in rotation—John, of course, is one—is always at the Island. Should a guest prove genuinely psychic, we begin the process of inducting them. In the years Cassandra Island’s been in operation we’ve uncovered six. All have readily aligned themselves with us.”

“With just one member on the grounds, Cassandra Island’s secret remains safe. BRAZIER hasn’t worked out yet that psychism can be disguised. Even if they send an empath to investigate, we always know. And they do send people. Regularly. Not just BRAZIER, but the CIA, CSIS, and others. So far the strategy has worked. The Island even turns a profit.”

From downstairs came the muffled clanging of Cook’s dinner bell. Dr. Colton checked the clock. Like last time, when he’d strolled me round the cornfield, my impression was he’d timed his final sentence to the second.

He stood, a little stiffly.

“No doubt you’re hungry. We aren’t, however, finished, and I have commitments for the next few days. Would you be good enough to come back after lunch? Say in two hours? We’ll continue then.”



Two more members had arrived, the last: Trinity and Eric. The kitchen could no longer hold the numbers. Lunch was served across the hall. The doors between the dining room and parlour had been closed. Little of the day, still overcast, crept through the single window. A chandelier—bronze, with tulip shades, cousin of the fixture in my room—provided warmth instead.

Luke came in from working in the barn. His fingernails were rimmed with grease, even though his hands were pink from scrubbing. He took the chair beside me, brushing me as he sat down. Silence didn’t fall—these people were too good for that—but glances flickered our direction. Luke ignored them, joining in the table

conversation smoothly. His easy fitting in reminded me of Byron.

After lunch the diners drifted off, some toward the kitchen, others to their quarters. I went with the kitchen group. Luke cut his head toward the door, inviting me to join him in the barn.

“Can’t,” I said. “Dr. Colton isn’t finished with me yet.”

“That so, huh?”

His face showed no expression.

Upstairs in my room, I dozed off and got woken by a knock a half an hour later.

“Dr. Colton’s ready for you now,” Mr. Shen called through the door.

I got up and let him in.

“He’ll have to wait a minute,” I said, stripping off my T-shirt. “I need to freshen up.”

He watched me rustle through the dresser.

“That’s quite the tale Dr. Colton’s spinning,” I commented.

“And that’s a telling choice of words. What, you don’t believe him?”

“Let’s just say the jury’s out.”

“It’s all true, you know.”

“But that’s just it. How *would* I know?”

I found a T-shirt that still had a bleachy smell. My clothes supply was getting low. I’d have to ask Cook what to do about my laundry.

“What do your instincts say?”

“My instincts aren’t allowed to function here.”

“No, only your empathy. You still have ordinary intuition.”

“Which tells me that his story won’t be getting optioned any time soon, not even for an LBC.”

“I’m sorry—LBC?”

“Low Budget Canadian. Knock-off sci-fi thrillers shot around Vancouver.”

“That’s good,” he chortled. “I’ll have to remember it. But I understand your feelings. Bad enough not knowing whether anything you’re told is true, but being asked to buy a story so

fantastical—”

“No,” I cut him off. “Fantastical describes my life since seventeen. Clichéd’s the word I’d use for Dr. Colton’s narrative.”

“Clichés aren’t inauthentic to begin with. They only get that way through repetition.”

“Lazy repetition,” I corrected, flattening my hair, “usually by people who underestimate their audience.”

“Does Dr. Colton strike you as the type to underestimate anyone? Come. We shouldn’t keep him waiting.”

He went out in the hall.

“You’re joining us?”

He nodded. “Robert’s asked me to sit in.”



“On some level,” Dr. Colton started, speaking from across his desk, “you must be finding this preposterous.”

Mr. Shen allowed himself a smile.

“Not just preposterous,” he carried on, “but taxing. The quantity of information we’ve been giving you—,” a nod at Mr. Shen, “—must seem like Jello concentrate without the water. We do apologize. You’ll have time to process things after we’re done this afternoon. John?”

Mr. Shen was in an armchair we’d dragged over to the desk. He adjusted his position to encompass me and Dr. Colton both.

“You may have noticed, David,” he said comfortably, “we haven’t spoken much about telepathy. Perhaps you’ve wondered why?”

I shrugged.

“No?” He looked surprised.

“Oh, come on, John. The two of you are masters at the slippery answer, and your ping-pong lectures are co-ordinated to the *n*th degree. You tell me only what you want, and only when you want to. Wondering’s a waste of time.”

The two of them exchanged a look. *The subject’s growing testy.*

“We understand,” said Dr. Colton. “Please—bear with us. You’ll soon have all the facts.”

“Yes, but why the scripted rigmarole? Seems to me you’d save a lot of time, and help your credibility, by doing what you have to do to restore my memories. ‘Re-assemble’ them, according to what Mr. Shen here says. Or is it possible there’s something you don’t want me to remember?”

“Of course not, David.” He sat forward in perfect imitation of the sympathetic shrink. “As I’ve explained, we must go carefully. You need to be prepared, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

The honey of appeasement was spread thinly on impatience. I contemplated pushing him but he would never crack. And, despite what I’d just said, I wanted all the information he and Mr. Shen could give.

“Okay,” I sighed. “Telepathy. Tell me what you think I ought to know.”

The two did more eye-talking, then Dr. Colton gestured with his hand to Mr. Shen, palm up. My former mentor took his cue.

“Of the extraordinary gifts with which the mind can be endowed, the rarest is telepathy. We dignify it with the word, anomalous, but the common term is twin-telepathy.

“You’ve heard of it. Everyone has. Its status in the popular imagination verges on the mythic. Anecdotes abound, though most don’t indicate the presence of telepathy but rather similar perceptions and the heightened intuition of two people with the same genetic makeup.

“That said, valid scientific studies, conducted independently in Russia, Scotland and Australia have demonstrated, unequivocally, that mind-to-mind communication does exist between a tiny fraction of identical twin sets. Only five such sets have been identified in sixty years of research.”

He paused and looked at Dr. Colton with a tiny nod. Apparently, they planned to sing duet, like Byron and MacKenzie when they’d tag-teamed on their story about dead and missing psychics. In my head, I killed the visuals and settled back to listen.

Dr. Colton:

“Telepathy’s infrequency has kept us from exploring it ourselves. What we know, or think we know, derives from other people’s research. We’re still uncertain how, or even whether, it’s related to primary psychism. All the data points toward it being something different, a phenomenon apart.”

Mr. Shen:

“Telepaths exhibit no empathic or transmissive skills except in interoperation with each other. In addition, proto-speech forms part of their communication, permitting the exchange of complex ideation—a feature missing from primary psychism. Furthermore telepaths evince no special tendency toward prevoyance.

“Lastly, telepathy appears to function irrespective of proximity, though proto-speech attenuates with distance. The only real overlap with empathy-imprinting is the crippling effect of neuroleptics.”

Dr. Colton:

“Regardless, if we take telepathy and psychism as aspects of the same phenomenon, we discern the following conundrum. Telepathy is self-contained—solipsistic, one might even say. Two minds know each other, with a shared epistemology going right back to the womb. *Cogito ergo es; cogitas ergo sum*. I think, therefore you are; you think, therefore I am.

“Primary psychism is just the opposite. It gives or takes *outside* itself—inclusively, embracingly. Its focus is the Other. Yet some perverse ontology dictates that it remain disjunct, like two halves of a tantalizing, disconnected whole. John, if you don’t mind—*The Rules*, item nine?”

Mr. Shen:

“Pairing empaths with transmitters demonstrably improves imprinting. An empath’s insights into a subject, communicated verbally to a transmitter, permit a transmitter to tailor and refine some aspects of an imprint’s content, thus potentially improving the effectiveness of behavioural manipulation. In the absence of an empath’s capacity to know a subject fully, though, a transmitter’s ability to imprint specific behavioural stimuli remains limited.”

Dr. Colton:

“In other words, the full potential of psychism can’t be realized unless an empath and transmitter merge, like telepathic monozygotes...”

*Dr. Colton... Mr. Shen... Dr. Colton... Mr. Shen*—one voice dry as wind-blown sand, the other warm, mellifluous. The back-and-forthing was hypnotic, the words themselves selected more for rhythm than for sense.

My mind begin to disengage. I went to interject, “*Catch-22*,” but as when Mr. Shen had dosed my coffee driving out of Tweed, I couldn’t seem to find the strength.

*Sunlight pooling on my legs... road sound humming in my ears... Mr. Shen instructing in his calm, unhurried way... far too much to grasp at once... information planted for the harvest... “With a single known exception, biovulars, or dizygotics—what most people call fraternal twins—never develop the ability...”*

The trance broke like a pane of clouded glass.

“Luke,” I said, startling myself. “You’re telling me that Luke and I are telepaths.”

The heirloom clock ticked fifteen hour-long seconds.

Dr. Colton rose. “Thank you, John. I’ll take things from here.”