

AN
ODD KNIGHT'S
DAZE

A Novel of the War for Haven

by

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Semi-Divine Revelations I

(Anonymous Memo)

Ordinary Daze

The Borders of Between

Officer Daniel Rogan's Report

Semi-Divine Revelations I

(Anonymous memo)

In the ending times, far after the Word was ever made light...
And far before the Heavens and Earth were ever created ...
God was born. Yeah, that's right -God.
Maybe not the Supreme being capital G kind of God.
Maybe not All knowing and All powerful.
But how about Pretty Damn Smart and Mostly Competent, Caring and Compassionate for all
Life and Beauty, Defender of Innocence, Retainer of Justice and Guardian of Honor with a
healthy dose of Commitment to Self Preservation besides...
Just indulge me here a bit. -For a little while, at least.
Obviously, you don't have anything better to do.
You are currently inputting this information your culture identifies as a "book."
It's ALL part of the PLAN.
Even your reading. Right here, right now.
If She is nothing at all, She is meticulously finicky in regard to detail.
Every sentient being is consequential, -even you.

God was born ten thousand five hundred and forty three years from your existential
present.
Not really too far from your Now, in the overall scheme of time.
The birth was broadcast to over three thousand billion beings in hundreds of galaxies, not
including the cyber intelligencia.
Most corporal entities took the week off, and many planets declared holidays for their respective
empires and governments.
It was a hell of a birthday party.

After all, the collapse of the known universe was imminent in a thousand years or so, and this had been an ongoing project since...

Well, since we discovered our time was up, and since time began.

Not either/or. Both at once.

Kind of-sort of- perhaps-maybe like a nonlinear way of scoping out things.

In general, most of us are privates fighting the battles for the Higher Command. Most of us had to be drafted before we were volunteers. When there are fates worse than death you need to be exposed to them before you choose anything but life.

And if you are exposed then you know.

You just know that anything is possible. Anything at all.

-The best and the worst you can imagine.

I know I'm getting ahead of myself, but it can't be helped.

Your language is one of the best for describing sensory process and duality.

It sucks relative to depicting quantum string temporal/spatial mechanics.

So let me clue you in.

This is the true story of one battle for a universe to keep *forever* alive.

And the tale of one soul who discovered...

It's not about finding yourself.

It's about making yourself.

Amen.

Ordinary Daze

I want to set you straight right from the start.

I was asked to write down what I remembered of the course of events that led me here. I think I've managed to do just that.

Yeah, -I know it all might sound crazy.

That's not my problem□.

I'm just trying to be as honest as I can be, which may not mean much either, considering all I've done.

But being ashamed or coming up with excuses is the last thing on my mind.

I'm not about to kiss any ass.

If I have enough time for self-recrimination later I'll live with it.

If I don't, it's because we're all dead anyway.

Anyways, -here's how it all went down:

I woke up in a cold sweat. It was the same old familiar nightmare.

The sheets wrapped around me like some funeral shroud, tightening around my chest.

I lay there frozen with heart pounding dread.

The dreams were always vague and dark, -like that name on the tip of your tongue. You know you know it, but when you try to grasp it, the memory slides towards some unreachable abyss inside you.

-Which is really okay when it's a piece of shit best left alone.

Shadowed images of blood and demons fought to join the party.

I defied them by starting my morning routine, -getting up and ready for work.

Nothing like a little ritual for distraction.

It wasn't normal, but it was normal for me.

Normal these days is drive by shootings, the latest war, disease of the month and presidential scandals.

After a while, we take most anything for granted.

After a while, as we get older our bones become brittle rock.

Our blood and thoughts slow in their passage, as if they give up caring about reaching their destination.

Like me. Like who I had become.

I had few things left to care about, and most of my time was spent in keeping distant and detached.

I sunk my days into the mundane ruts of routine, building walls.

Building them high and thick.

Maybe I believed in nothing because I discovered that nothing lasts forever. We all have our convictions.

As far as prisons went, mine was comfortable, or at least as comfortable as anyone can be when they are serving a lifetime sentence.

I wasn't really guilty, but my innocence was stolen ever since Barb and Shawn were murdered.

Butchered is more like it.

Barb was my wife. Shawn was my son.

He was only six.

He'd be eleven now.

And Barb would be waiting at home for me tonight.

The fireplace would be toasting the living room and we'd open a bottle of wine and celebrate being alive like we always did. But nobody's home anymore. -Not even me.

Some people can get over a loss like this.

I'm not some people.

For the last five years I was just treading water and just too afraid to drown.

I wanted to die, but was too much of a coward to kill myself.

I was still looking for the reason, you know.

-Why they died such a senseless, bloody death.

I found them after work. They were hacked to pieces and burnt to a crisp.

Whoever killed them also tried to burn the house down after...

Both bodies had over sixty stab wounds. There was blood all over.

They were unrecognizable. Charcoal meat.

Whoever killed them also cut off their hands and skinned their faces.

Yeah, I have nightmares.

Wouldn't you?

The cops looked at me first. Guess they always look at the family, - but I was busy at work. I had an alibi.

Yeah, -great.

The only lead they had was some neighbor who saw some guy with an eye patch hanging around that day.

I should have□ could have.

If only I had□

Maybe I could have prevented it.

And if I could have and didn't, -then I was at fault.

Blaming ourselves seems better than accepting those we love will never be here again.

Because they're too dead to be here.

Two dead.

I use to be what you would call a social worker.

No kidding.

I ran a program to rehabilitate gang kids. I also did some consulting and had a good private practice. I loved my work.

I use to have a talent for talking with people.

I used to give a shit.

But when Barb and Shawn died, I fell apart, started drinking.

Nobody likes to see a shrink more fucked up than they are.

“Hi, Joe, -how are you feeling today?”

“Well Melissa, I still feel like killing myself. I think a drug overdose would do it.

Maybe I could just blow my brains out. -But enough about me, -let’s talk about your problems.”

Get the picture? By the time I pulled it halfway together I “voluntarily”

surrendered my license to the state board.

For two years I looked for the killer.

I thought it might be an ex-client with a grudge. I never had any one-eyed patients, but most of the people I once helped were eager to help me, -for a while.

It gets hard to deal with an obsessive and pathetic drunk who won’t leave you alone. Fortunately, I had done some good work in the past with my people, and they knew how to take care of themselves.

I set a record in LA County for the 26 restraining orders I got.

The only thing I did keep somewhat consistent about was staying in shape, even when I was fucked up. Being in a murderous rage has its advantages.

Besides, working out was just another mindless thing I could do alone.

Believing that you are just a worthless piece of crap has its own rewards.

First and foremost you can give up so you’ll never be burned again.

So I did what I did and nothing worked.

And when enough shit hit the fan, it clogged up and the motor went out.

I disconnected, disengaged, and disassociated...

My credo became... don’t bother having one.

I thought it was random chance that murdered my family.

So I gave up on chance, -any chance.

Was I bitter?

More than you can imagine.

The rug was ripped out underneath me and whatever tenuous balance I had fell into the pit of hell.

I gave up believing in the positive while maintaining a positive respect for the negative. The real problem is that with the good there is always evil and you can't just have the one without the other.

Knowing which is which is no simple matter either.

I ought to know. Trust me.

I lived in Los Angeles, the so-called City of Angels.

Actually it's more like the city of angles.

Everybody's got one, cause everybody's really here to become something else. - Another actor, writer, get rich quick denizen of the shark infested streets.

But you can hide here because you're neighbors don't give a shit as long as you're quiet.

You can remain invisible because everybody else wants the stage for themselves.

Me? I was on permanent leave.

-But after five years, something still called out to me, no matter what I pretended.

There was this yearning buried under my gaping apathy.

-Pounding, clawing and scratching to break free.

It's muffled voice echoed in my dreams, behind some door that has been shut, barred, and almost forgotten.

My name is Joe.

A regular kind of name for a regular kind of guy, hey?

Don't kid yourself.

I was a man who had nightmares of blood, demons and death-filled terror.

In my waking hours I was coasting, having reached the simple realization that most of the brain-dead, the crazy or the assholes have already taken over our little planet.

I was waiting, robot zombie like...for the shit to turn to fertilizer.

But my garden had died.

Without the garden, it's simply shit.

* * *

Another man waited in the middle of the Nothingness that leads to Anywhere.

He is not a very happy camper. You could tell by the grim frown slashing across his otherwise pleasant face. He hates this assignment because it involves duplicity. He hates deceit and would rather be forthright but his superiors have ordered otherwise. It eats at him like bad food that refuses to be digested.

He has the appearance of age, but that is only another facade. He has the health and strength of a twenty-year old and always will.

He coughs into his hand once, and spits to get the foul taste out of his mouth.

When his spittle hits the ground it crackles and sizzles like bacon.

The bad taste remains. He sighs and waits.

* * *

I finished my morning routine, -bathroom, showering and rustling up leftovers for breakfast.

Chasing the weirdness away with the trivial.

Eating without tasting.

Straightening up without cleaning.

Watching the television without seeing or listening.

Typical auto-pilot mode.

I finally got into my car and started the engine. Not the best car and not the worst. It got to work on time and that was just fine by me.

I even had my dirty laundry ready for the cleaners in the back seat.

I was industrious (for me) that day.

There was that new receptionist at the office.

Trisha-something. A pretty redhead. She actually seemed to like me.

At least she gave me the time of day.

I forgot myself and thought -today maybe I could ask her....

Then I remembered the day when Barb and I first met at school and the silver lining in my dark clouds tarnished quickly.

It always did.

I couldn't shake the blues anymore than a dog could shake off fleas.

They clung to me, biting and as usual, I scratched away the possibility of optimism.

The dawn sky had this hazy glow on the horizon as I began cruising into the city for my shift.

The road wrapped around the hills like a used gray ribbon, spoiling the scenic gift.

I was used to it by then.

I was used to things being spoiled, and broken, and discarded.

I saw my folks dry up and wither away with age and alcohol.

My brothers and sisters barely remembered cards at the holidays.

-Hell, even my hair had started to abandon me for the bathroom sink.

I didn't think of any of this.

I just drove through all the ruts of my life without thinking too much at all.

I wasn't always just some pity party of one.

Even after they died, *I tried...*

I'd offer to help an old lady with her packages. I'd look at some little kid and smile as if we shared a special secret- and the kid would always smile back. I gave something to every bum that asked me and fed strays whenever I could.

I was the first one to admit I was wrong and the last to acknowledge when I was right.

Funny huh?

Not really.

The old ladies would think I was trying to rob them, the kid's parents would think I was a child molester and I got bit by the strays when I tried to pet them.

Hell, the bums would even bitch at me the days when I didn't have any spare change. It's the way of the world lately.

Most woman I just stayed away from,. 'cause I'd just start thinking about Barb and her laugh and that impish smile that drove me crazy and Shawn jumping into bed with us.

I'd meet someone attractive, we'd talk for a while, and then the anxiety would hit.

I'd say something like. *Gee, sorry, got to go... something came up.*

Like the feeling of that knife buried in my chest

And of course I thought that any woman attracted to me definitely had something wrong with her. I tried to get along with everybody and just fit in, even though I felt I never really belonged anywhere anymore.

I belonged with them, damn it.

I was as near dead as a live man could be.

* * *

This morning I was just humming along with the radio and wishing I was somewhere else.

Wishing I was somebody else, too.

And, not paying too much attention to my attention at all, I accidentally happened upon a *door*.

You know what a door is, right? -

A connecting place that's both a wall and an opening.

But this *Door* was special.

-An *enchantment*. A magical point of transition.

There are a number of theories concerning magical Doorways.

Solar disturbances, the earth's magnetic field, strange attractors, cosmic strings, black holes and the psychic powers of the mind are a few explanations.

Later, I found out these were all bullshit.

But even that hasn't stopped me from believing in magic.

-Well, it was a step above believing in nothing.

Magic is the name we have for the irrational stuff that shouldn't happen, or all the miracles, the coincidences and the like.

Some people prefer to believe that there is no such thing as magic.

Some people prefer to believe that there is a rational reason for everything in life. They spend much of their time attaching logical points to the soft and gentle nature of the heart.

Our feeble attempts to straighten out the curves of fate.

Sometimes you can hear the muffled cries of faith hidden deep within the soundness of their reasoning. They can't hear it, though.

I couldn't.

But my saving grace was that I still had this one tiny spark of hope.

That's all you need. That's all I had.

A spark the size of a zit on a flea.

One little spark is all it takes to start a forest fire.

That's what Smoky says.

* * *

I was driving along down through the vague mists of morning into the Pacific Coast Highway 101.

Every other car was a fucking four-wheel drive suburban vehicle.

So useful in bumper to bumper hell.

If we could only crank them to drive over the other cars, we'd all be fine.

Regardless, it's a nice drive when the sun's out.

Stretches of beach and the rolling waves made me want to stop my car and take off my socks and shoes and just sit there on the beach.

Maybe it's the steadiness of the waves, coming in, going out.

Like the ocean breathing.

I was stopped, along with everyone else in their personal fogs because the highway was jammed to shit as usual.

I hate sitting like that. Stuck.

I was stuck enough already.

So, for the first time in years I initiated something.

I pulled a hard left up a small dirt and cinder canyon lane tucked into the side of a hill.

I didn't recall seeing this road before.

Maybe it could be a new short cut to work...

Maybe save me time if it did run through the hills and back to the coast again. More likely I'd drive around to some dead end and at least the traffic would clear up when I finished getting lost

No sweat.

The truth was, I really didn't have anything much to lose.

My current job was editing copy for one of those entertainment magazines found in the better hotels.

Just lucked into it.

Mindless descriptions of places I'd never been to.

But they liked me, always praised the "splendid imagery" I came up with for places I'd never been to and had no plans to ever visit.

By the time I landed this job I was reasonably coherent. Still not very social -and I tended to ponder and brood.

I made up my own commandments and kept them as best I could.

Unfortunately, none of them involved much in the way of getting involved with humanity again, let alone any ambition or success.

I left that for the infomercial guys.

I've come to realize since that those of us who are just plain confused make most of the major new discoveries.

It is only when you're lost and uncertain that you discover what is genuinely new and different. Sort of like Columbus, you know?

My inner spark ignited and tires burned rubber as I veered to the left.

* * *

Now, whenever you start to get out of a rut, you're going to feel a jolt.

It's smooth driving in ruts, and mighty rough when you attempt to escape.

I drove a short distance on this unknown route, noticing the signs posting a newly discovered archeological dig.

The road curved upwards, -steep and winding.

Up on my left was the face of the hill. To my right was a sheer drop.

I noticed the cave and the carvings on the rock above me from the driver's window.

The symbols were somehow captivating, and I stared at them as

I slowly passed this opened bit of earth, my mind relaxing in nothing and everything.

Of course I wasn't paying attention to the road.

That's why I drove off the cliff.

* * *

The Door opened. Right on schedule. He saw the flickering of sparks in the corridor wall fly out like lightning bugs at sunset. He wondered how he'd convince the poor fool without having to reveal the truth, and then smiled to himself.

Hell, he didn't even know the whole truth, or even hope to understand it all for that matter.

He straightened his robes around him and tried to brush off some of the dust collected from his wanderings.

And waited.

When you are a few thousand years old patience isn't a virtue.

It's a necessity.

He thought about the girl, and hoped she'd do her part.

It was one thing to hook a fish, -another to reel it in.

* * *

You ever stick a screwdriver in a wall socket or light switch?

I felt this jolt...

In a flash I was air-born, kissing my ass good by.

I couldn't believe it.

And in the next moment...

My gut knotted and twisted, tensing to fight the pull of change. The air smelled like metal burning. Colors shifted in twitching spasms. For a brief moment that lasted forever the sky had a million stars.

So many stars that specks of blackness dotted the sky and the brilliance twinkled down on me like a grandparent's smile.

The lightness extended to my body and senses.

Gravity and all weights lifted.

It was a wondrous terrifying moment of floating.

Reality cast off its anchors and set sail.

I wondered if this was a drug flashback. I wasn't sure. It couldn't be ruled out. Perhaps I had lost the brain cells that contained the memory of whether I had once done drugs or not by doing drugs.

The thought puzzled me as I puzzled over the thought.

All of which was interrupted by another jolt.

I passed through...

To some Otherwhen that we will call the Borderlands.

* * *

The car drifted to a stop. Actually, it bounced head-first then righted itself.

All in slow motion.

I didn't see it, being passed out at the time.

I woke up in a car obscured in luminous fog.

I couldn't see a damn thing through my windows.

I jerked the door handle and stepped out into the mist. The fog had a formless quality pregnant with...I can't describe it. Possibility?

The overwhelming quiet of the suffocating mist both dimmed and teased my recognition at the same time.

I got out of the car.

As my foot hit the ground it made a crackling noise.

The sound of static electricity.

I reached down to touch the earth, and my hand felt a cold, slick, soapy sensation. The hair on the back of my neck rose.

The silence was loud enough for me to hear my own breathing, quick and hoarse.

Pushing myself upright, the noise of my shoes scraped like sandpaper.

As I turned, a figure began to emerge from the nothingness ahead of me, as if it were drawing itself from the insubstantial milky canvass.

My heart pounded out the theme from some horror story.

I opened my mouth to speak.

Before I had the chance to say anything I heard a deep and resonant voice with a slight British accent.

"Found our way, have we now?"

That's when I first met him.

-The wizard.

The Borders of Between

My mouth was hanging open, loose and slack.

Hate it when that happens.

Makes me look even more stupid than I really am.

The lone figure glided towards me, cellophane crackling, interrupting the tomb-like silence.

A tall sixty something man approached. I saw long graying hair in a pony-tail. He was dressed in a dusty black velvet cape, covering a thick cotton shirt and trousers. A feathered beret lay on his head, and a short thin wood-like stick rested within his right hand.

He looked late for the homeless costume ball.

Laugh lines crinkled the corners of his eyes. A full and flowing mustache complemented his hawk-like nose.

His eyes were the clear deep blue of a mountain pond and looked just about as cold.

I didn't know I was facing a wizard.

If I did, -I might have turned tail and ran.

I didn't know that real wizards come in all shapes, colors, and styles.

And real ones don't advertise.

Witch hunts and Inquisitions have taught all of these folks to maintain a very low profile.

However, if you are ever going to run into one of them, it's a sure bet there's a Door close by.

The wizard saw me, -this thirty-something man of medium height wearing faded jeans with a light sport coat. Leather patches on the elbows.

A nice permanent press dress shirt.

My hair was a medium-length dark brown.

I had regular features.

A nice enough look, but nobody bothered to give me a second glance.

If there was any depth to me, it didn't show.

I wouldn't let it.

In general, I looked too shallow to bother fishing in.

I kept it that way since they died.

But as we all forget, -appearances can deceive the best of us as well as the worst and mediocre too.

The dusty old guy spoke up again. He pointed his wand at me and said,

"Excuse me, good fellow, can I be of help?"

Now, truth to tell, I wasn't in a good mood.

Actually, I wouldn't have known a good mood if it bit me.

"Yeah. You could get your little stick out of my face."

The wizard smiled most unpleasantly. Guess he wasn't use to most folks popping off at him or even questioning his authority at all.

Actually, it was more of a "now you've made my day" smile.

We reserve these grins for special occasions, when someone gives us an excellent excuse to ventilate.

I didn't know it but the wizard had his own guilt, and guilt is quite easy to turn into resentment.

There was the smell of ozone in the air.

Potential lightning.

The wizard flicked his wand once in an irritated swat.

A blue discharge of energy vaulted out and shocked me on the nose.

"SHIT!" I yelped.

"I'd watch myself if I were you laddie..." the wizard's words were softly laced with menace.

I wasn't into beating up old men.

Then again, most old men don't come up from the middle of nowhere and zap your nose with a stick.

I impulsively, made a grab for the wand.

The old man danced back in a flowing shuffle.

And grinned.

"There now! Got a bit of pluck to you after all, hey?"

I faked a step forward as if to go after him and then just leaned back against the car acting nonchalant.

Inside I was freaking.

The old man waited patiently, apparently amused.

After a brief pause he arched his eyebrows and inquired in a droll tone...

"Sure you don't need some assistance?"

I managed to strangle my voice to a semblance of calm.

"NO-thanks," I said through clenched teeth.

I quickly flung open the car door. –Hard, moved to step in and....

The door rebounded back-whacking me on my left side..

I squinted my eyes and grimaced with pain.

The old man raised his brows, "Perhaps some liniment?"

I suppressed my now homicidal impulses and slid into the driver's seat, putting the keys into the ignition.

Sticking my head out the window, I took a relieved parting glance at my nebulous surroundings.

"I'm outta here..."

You really need to be sure you're making an exit when you make those exit lines. I turned the key in the starter.

Nothing.

I pounded the steering wheel once with both fists.

The car's horn began to blare loudly.

And it went ... on and on and on and on.

I couldn't shut it off.

This really didn't help my mood.

I jumped out of the car again, almost bowling over the wizard.

The old guy shuffled out of my way.

He cupped his hands over his mouth to be heard above the drone of the horn.

"I sincerely doubt that your vehicle is operational."

"WHAT?" I yelled back.

He yelled, "YOUR AUTOMOBILE IS BROKEN."

"NO SHIT".

I moved to the front of the car and noticed the grill and radiator were bashed in flatter than a potato pancake.

The car was totaled.

I got pissed all over again, blaring in competition with the horn for a minute. The horn won.

The old guy came next to me and asked me again, "Perhaps you need some help?"

Yeah, right.

"Well, " I said, "if you have a way to fix this thing so it shuts up and runs, then please be my guest."

"My pleasure."

The wizard lifted his wand; a blue spark flew off the tip and bolted towards the car.

The noise stopped.

The engine ignited, revved up, and the clutch shifted into reverse.

The rear tires began to spin faster than the Wheel of Fortune.

Shocked, I watched his car roar backwards into the mist.

It disappeared from view in about two seconds.

"Hey, my car!" I yelled, and began to sprint.

After about five steps I felt my body meeting some kind of resistance.

The air took on the consistency of water, as if I was fighting against a powerful current. My arms and legs flowed in a slow motion dance until I couldn't move at all. As I relaxed my efforts, the some force or pressure gently pushed me back toward my initial starting point.

The old man was still there.

"Back again are we?" he asked.

"Jesus!"

This was all a bit too much.

It was too much a while ago.

I started to babble.

"Back. Yeah. And who the HELL are you and what's with that stick? And do YOU know where we uh, are?... WHERE AM I?"

"Nowhere and everywhere," said the wizard.

I looked at him, just shaking my head.

I stared bewilderingly at the Nothingness surrounding us both.

I got it.

I was still in bed.

This was one of my nightmares.

"Am I dreaming?" I asked.

"Yes and no," the wizard said.

I hate it when you ask a simple question and get complicated incomprehensible bullshit back.

"It's not that black or white," the old man explained and gazed pointedly around. "Actually it's a rather gray area."

"Yeah, I'm in an old Twilight Zone rerun."

By this time I just wanted to kick his ass.

I was about to give the confusing bastard another piece of my mind, when I stopped myself.

No use wasting good pieces of mind, especially when you're losing yours anyway.

The old man softened his tone.

He finally got the message that I was in no shape to play twenty Socratic questions.

"What may I call you?" The wizard politely requested.

"Delusional?"

"YOUR NAME..."

"The name's Joe." I said.

"My close friends and associates call me Merl.... now Joseph, if I may call you that?"

I thought, no harm in being polite, even if I am going fucking insane.

If you're going to be deranged, be politely deranged.

My new motto.

"Well met then!" said Merl extending his hand.

I hesitantly reached back and we shook.

The wizard's grip was firm. He looked straight into my eyes.

I looked straight back, held his eyes and you know what?

He looked away first. I wondered why, as he wasn't exactly the shy type. Intimidation was never my best suite, though I have gotten pretty good at it since then.

"Ahh... just exactly where do you think you might be?", the wizard inquired.

"Man, -I must be dreaming."

"Well, pinch yourself."

I pinched. Hard. It hurt.

"Did you feel that?"

"Yes." I began to feel my legs get wobbly.

"I think I'd better sit down now," I said. And did.

"Good idea."

The wizard smoothly eased onto the ground in front of me.

Static crackled.

I settled himself across from this Merl.

"Now Joe, you are in a very special place," Merl began.

I didn't much like the tone of his voice.

It was the condescending *now I'm going to lecture you, -you ignorant peasant* kind of tone.

"What are you, some kind of teacher?"

"Why yes."

The guy looked pleased that I caught on.

Too pleased, which irritated me further.

"I don't remember enrolling in your class."

"You're here, aren't you?"

He had this smug smile and I just wanted to wipe it off.

Mainly cause it would give me something better to do than freak out.

"Looks like we're caught up in a first stage smog alert somewhere."

The wizard leaned over to me and added a dash of disdain.

"Really?"

"I was *just* taking a Goddamn short cut." I bitched.

"Well, you took a different road all right," said Merl. "Oh, yes. Indeed you have. We don't get many visitors here. Whenever we do, someone much like myself is alerted to investigate".

He nodded and winked, "Standard operating procedure."

I didn't like his chummy winking either.

"So, now you're the highway patrol?"

"A bit like that in principle," Merl agreed.

"So, -what's that stick you've got? One of those Taser things that shock you or something?"

"You might call this a... a battery of sorts. Stores and releases all kinds of energy."

"A battery? Do you usually bash strangers on their noses with your battery?"

"Only those bent on intimidating helpful old men."

Well, got me there.

"Sorry, -I was kind of in a state of shock , I said. "I still am."

The wizard relented. "Apology accepted," offered Merl, -"You being in a somewhat agitated state. Going through a Doorway certainly does that, at first."

"Doorway?"

"That's where you are. That's what this place is."

Merl gestured with his wand. "One very large hallway for Doors."

"I thought you said that I was dreaming."

"Let me *finish*." Merl continued.

I zipped my lip.

I still couldn't figure out what the hell was going on, but maybe this guy Merl would get to it eventually.

"All ears."

The wizard brightened and cleared his throat.

This was a schtick he had done before. It wasn't the first time and wouldn't be the last.

"This is a place that is in-between. It's a part of what is both here and there, then and now. This corridor that you have entered is also right in the middle of What Is, What Was, and What Might Be. *Reality* is the way one defines things. It's *how* we see that determines the '*What*' that is seen."

"*What-ever*," I shrugged my shoulders, " LOOK! I'm just asking a simple question here and..."

"Well, -this is a bit tricky. A scientist might say that you are in a junction between Universes. I recall it has something to do with black holes and Cosmic strings fusing. What they call wormholes in space-time. Then again, a man of the cloth would have a different description. They would call this Limbo."

"So, I'm dead?"

"Nonsense," Merl scoffed. "Although a physician might deduce that you are suffering from hallucinations brought about a possible head trauma from your auto accident."

Talk about your understatements.

See, -later, I was ...wait a second. Getting ahead of myself. With all the paradoxes I can't help it. Anyways...

"Car accident! The car accident? Shit! I got killed in a car accident!"

Give me a break here. Sure I was hysterical. I was new to all this...

"STOP IT!" Merl commanded.

I started to rock myself back and forth on the ground, panic beginning to creep in small tendrils up my solar plexus to snare any rational thoughts.

Merl reached out with a comforting hand and ... I flinched away. -No, it's not a homophobic thing. One of my brothers was gay and actually, I was closest to him. I just didn't like being touched. Not for some time.

My skin had a third degree case of emotional sunburn, and even a tender touch brought me pain. Guess those with the gift of magic are more sensitive than most. Their worlds are based on ever-shifting forces that can topple the illusions of security in an instant.

Merl gave me my space.

I got it together regardless, pulling back my shoulders and sucking in my gut.

"So I'm dead and brain damaged, talking to some illusion in a universe far, far away. That's just... *great. Great!*"

"Ahem," the wizard cleared his throat.

"If I may be so bold to interrupt your pathetic whining, -you are also quite alive and well and thinking as clearly as you ever were. Which, I might add, does not say much for your prior academic experience."

Did I mention he was a smart-ass?

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"You're welcome," the wizard patronized. He tapped his wand on his knee.

"May I continue?"

By now I *really* didn't give a shit but I nodded.

"For want of a better definition, you are at the boundary of an infinity of possibilities."

"There are many worlds, Joe, and you just happen to be in a place and time where all of them meet. We call this place the Borderlands. A door, a road to anywhere and anywhen."

I was skeptical. More than skeptical. Downright disbelieving.

Can you blame me?

"How the hell did I get here?"

"Very simple, Joseph my boy, for two good reasons. The first is, you have the capability to enter Doors. You got in. You've got a touch of magic about you, though you don't know how to use it yet. The second reason is, as you say in your ah, lingo-, you obviously were so alienated from your own world it was quite easy for you to slip away. You wanted to be anywhere but where you were."

The point of truth is the part that stabs you through the heart.

I had thoughts of just chucking it often. Too often.

"Yeah, so, -I've become a successful underachiever. So what?"

"You're a pathetic excuse for a man, aren't you now?"

I stood up, glaring and frothing at the mouth. "What? What? *What the hell gives you the right to judge ME!*" All my venom came up, -all the self blame and pity.

"FUCK YOU, old man. My wife and kid were murdered! You get it?"

"Yes. And we may know who killed them."

Some words grab at you like anchors in a storm. Then they drag you to the bottom of a deep trench where you drown. ...we may know who killed them....

"How the HELL do you...?"

"The most likely suspect is an enemy of my people, -an enemy of humanity."

“WHY? Why’d he pick on my family?”

“To get you. There is one in a hundred million born with your gift, Joseph. These few can wander between the worlds. He was counting on your loss, he was counting on you becoming a drifter... of losing your way.”

The wizard examined me like a specimen out of a test tube. But by this time, all I felt was a murderous rage.

I grabbed the front of his shirt, “So tell me old man, *-who the fuck killed my family?*”

He looked at me calmly, “You want to find out?”

I nodded.

“Take your hands off me.”

I let go reluctantly. It felt good to attack something. -Maybe too good.

"That's *exactly* why I'm here, lad. -Because we're going to find him together."

But inside the wizard knew that there were other reasons. Reasons that he couldn't reveal.

Reasons that would rock my world and disturb what little thread of sanity I had left.

“I need your cooperation.”

Cooperation? I would have sold my soul if I knew where it was.

"Tell me what to do."

The wizard smiled benignly.

"Travel with me for a while. I have a few errands and you could be extremely helpful to me as I'm in a bit of a predicament. Then -you'll have your opportunity for justice."

Well, well, well. -Justice. It struck a resonating chord in me. -Sounds so much better than revenge and hate.

I knew this Merl joker was right about me somehow. All the despair, all the depression began to ferment into the heady brew of righteous anger.

If I just went home now, then I'd be back to the grind. Just as my dreams had become unraveled and worn, my life would wear me away until I faded into oblivion □ so I decided. I'd become someone else's nightmare. But I wasn't stupid. Not exactly...

"Tell me about the guy that killed them."

"He's very powerful. I'd say we're evenly matched. But he won't suspect you, or know that I've gotten to you first. He wants you alive."

Yeah, -but I wanted him dead.

"I don't really care about your motives for coming along."

Now, that was a complete piece of bullshit.

The wizard went on, "It's just important that you join with me, -with us. There's more at stake here than you can imagine."

There was more at stake. Much more than I can imagine even now.

"What's the asshole's name?"

"Mordred."

"MORDRED!" Jesus.

"And MERL- wouldn't be short for Merlin, would it?"

"Two letters short, to be precise."

"Does this Mordred only have one eye?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, he's not the one."

"Mordred rules an entire world. He has multitudes of assassins at his disposal."

"According to what I know this joker died a thousand years ago."

Merlin eyed me disdainfully. "It's not the same man. The universe isn't what you think. *Nothing* is the way you think it is. I'll explain it all in due time, I promise." Merl turned and began to stride into the Nothingness.

"Wait a second!" He got fainter in the distance.

"Coming?" The wizard's voice floated back towards me.

I stood frozen for an instant. My entire life seemed to rush before my eyes.

It didn't take more than a few instants because I hadn't had much of a life.

You know, when you feel like a million dollars you have everything to lose. But if you feel your life is worth is two cents □ I hurried to catch up. I got about the same five steps and couldn't move.

"HEY, UH...A LITTLE HELP!"

He came back just a little pissed. "Hold on to my cloak."

I did. We moved through the mists like a hot knife through butter.

And the haze tucked us both into the long way home.

Officer Daniel Rogan's Report

"At approximately six forty-five am, the sheriffs department was notified of a car accident on PCH, four miles south of the substation.

A patrol car was dispatched and arrived on the scene at seven-ten am. Subsequent investigation revealed one victim, a white male, mid-thirties, slumped at the wheel. The car appeared to have crashed off the sheer rock face on the east side of the highway, near the Asara Indian excavation site.

The driver was unconscious. Paramedics were called by radio and reached the accident site at seven-thirty-five am. The driver was pronounced in critical condition, probable causes from head injuries sustained during the vehicle's impact. The victim has been identified as one Joseph Grodin, and is currently in transport to Mercy General Emergency.

That's a ten-four.

By the by, did Marty make that coffee yet? When the shift starts like this, I know it's going to be a long day. Keep it warm.

Over."