They call America the new world. You would think that it just sprung up overnight instead of having existed along with the rest of the continents, slowly drifting apart from their original positions on great Pangea. The western world calls it new but only because they know nothing of what came before. Natives to this land had oral traditions that manifest destiny took care of, stamping out any knowledge we could have gained from those noble peoples. As for what came before them, we may never know, especially since no one bothered to ask. So, it may be that we deserve anything we receive, for our own ignorance and arrogance are to blame for the lack of historical context. Can those people who experience a thing, simply by proximity to it, be responsible for the lack of investigation done by those who came before them. This was the case for the poor souls who had the great misfortune of putting down roots in the town of Wyatt Falls. Don’t bother looking it up on a map, it’s no longer there. Can these simple folks be to blame for not knowing, for not searching through the past to find what came before? For not knowing what was there before man himself walked the planet? What came before, was important. What came before was crucial to the survival of life as it evolved on this planet, and we should never have forgotten it.

Wyatt Falls was a fly spec on the map of Oregon. A nowhere and nothing town whose only significance was a gas station and its presence on a mildly used route to Crater Lake. If you blinked your eye you might miss it, but for those who lived in this little town there was no other place they’d rather be. Everybody knew everybody, from Pastor John Clark to the town drunk Tom Douglas. Everyone and everything had its place. No real crime to speak of, at least nothing that Sheriff Dean Murphy couldn’t handle. Everyone was greeted with a friendly smile and a hello. The town square was decorated for every notable holiday occasion and those that left to see the world generally ended up right back where they started after a while. It was a picture-perfect town that could have come right out of a Norman Rockwell painting, with one exception. Nobody, I mean nobody was ever set foot in Stone View Park.

Stone View Park was as old an anyone could remember. Folks in Wyatt Falls said it existed even before the founding of the town. The park consisted of a small patch of flat ground in the northern most portion of town. It was in the oldest and least used portion of Wyatt Falls, no one lived around there and the structures that still stood were considered historical landmarks, though nobody visited them any longer. The dilapidated old buildings and unused fields gave a sorrowful ambiance to the area. Folks stayed clear of that part of town, and most hoped that everything there would be torn down and built over one day. The park was surrounded on the east and west by thick forest and the approach from the south, which provided the only clear access to the neglected landmark, was a single dirt road that extended a quarter mile from the last forgotten structure in old town. North of the park was its namesake. A single stone protruding from the ground surrounded by a small clearing, twenty feet in diameter, where nothing ever grew.

The stone was unremarkable in its appearance. Rising a mere three feet from the ground and made of a mineral that could not be found in the surrounding area, it was clear that it was only the tip of a larger mass buried in the barren cracked soil that comprised the clearing. To the north beyond the dead clearing was the steep foothills of Mt. Thielsen. Weathered by centuries of incessant Oregon rain the stone had no markings or visible shaping. Its purpose was unknown and of even greater vexation was the reason why a park had been erected in an obvious capacity for viewing the thing.

The park had obviously gone through renovation throughout the years in an attempt to make the place more desirable to the local denizens. A few haphazardly placed and dated children’s toys were installed overtime which looked as if they were as weathered and forgotten as the stone itself. An ancient teeter totter made from logs, a wooden merry go round with rusted components half buried in the dirt, a precarious looking set of swings and several other deteriorated items that, in their current state, one could not recon what they had been when originally placed there.

The locals believed, not only the park but the whole section of old town that surrounded it was haunted. Every misfortune that befell the good people of Wyatt Falls was blamed on the place, from crop failures and missing animals to a string of unexplained missing persons cases that stretched back as far as anyone could remember. The town motto was “Live Life Better”. It was written in bold cursive letters on the welcome sign posted at the outskirts of town. What it should have said however was, “Live Life Better and Don’t Ever Go to Stone View Park”.

This was the status quo for the little town of Wyatt Falls and generation after generation lived there without questioning the abandoned part of old town or the strange park whose purpose seemed only to be to focus attention to the oddly placed stone that was the parks namesake. Plans were often made to tear down sections of old town to allow new business to take root however the projects always soured during the planning phase. In fact, there were cases of larger businesses from out of town coming in to snatch up the real-estate at dirt cheap prices only to abandon the project after the initial inspection of the area. So old town and the park fell to disrepair giving it a visual representation of the town folks sentiment regarding the place. Old, run down, abandoned and haunted.

Things changed in the early summer of 1946. The country was putting the pieces back together after the second world war. Men and women returned to their normal lives trying to bury the horrors of war. Some succeeded and some did not. In Wyatt Falls a large portion of the men had gone off to war and left their wives and children to carry on waiting for their eventual return. Many did return, but many did not. In a small town like Wyatt Falls the loss of so many had a profound effect on the emotional landscape of the place. A sadness prevailed around town that was almost tactile in its oppressive presence. The happy families who welcomed their war heroes back home living side by side with those who had lost someone or had no word at all.

It was June of 1946 when Theodor Bilken arrived in town. Bilken was a professor from an ivy league university on the east coast who had helped the war effort by inventing some of the most advanced sonar equipment ever made for the Allied forces. Spending most of the war travelling to various exotic locals to install his equipment and train soldiers in its operation, he managed to see quite a bit of the world. Though he never managed to see active combat, he had been evacuated several times narrowly missing engagements with the enemy. He was considered a precious commodity which could absolutely not fall into Axis hands. As a result, he would be spirited away by very capable men, escaping capture, the result of which kept him from seeing any real combat with the exception of two very close calls in which his protectors applied liberal use of their firearms to whisk him away to safety.

Arriving in the town of Wyatt Falls unnoticed on the morning of June 6th 1946, Bilken drove directly into Old Town and stopped at Stone View Park. He spent a few hours surveying the land around the park and examining the strange stone. He brought a wide assortment of equipment used in geological experimentation. By noon Bilken had the site roped off and marked with grid lines similar to what one would see at an archeological dig. Since the towns folk shunned this place he completed his work uninterrupted and by four that afternoon, sweat soaked and covered in dust, he packed up his gear and headed to town to find lodging for the night.

The Pinewood Inn was a five-room establishment off the main road, situated between the only gas station and the only diner in town. Bilken was pleased with the location owing to its close proximity to the city hall which did double duty as the towns public library. In addition, the local newspaper had an office on this small strip which was, for the lack of a better term, the town’s main street. Surprising the elderly man sleeping behind the Inn’s front desk, Bilken cleared his throat.

“What can I do sir.” The man said groggily as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

“A room please, something with a window that opens to the east if you have it.”

“They all do. Wonderful view of the mountain. Just for the night?” Moving to a wooden rack with five keys hanging on it the old man added. “You heading to Crater Lake?”

“No, I have interest in the park up past the deserted section of town. Do you know anything about it?”

The aged Inn keeper gave a shudder dropping the key he had liberated from the rack onto the desk below it. He turned scooping up the key as he did. There was a look of worry that made the wrinkles seem deeper on his ashen face. Picking up a ledger and opening it he pushed it in front of Mr. Bilken and handed him an expensive looking fountain pen. He placed the key on the counter next to the leather-bound ledger with its aged yellowing pages.

“Five dollars per night.” The man’s glassy eyes stared into Bilken’s. “Nothing of interest up at that park Mr. You’d do better driving on to the lake, lots to see there.”

“I came specifically to see that location, I did not expect there to be anything there, much less a park. Have you been there?” Bilken could sense that the old timer was holding back and was determined to pry it out of him.

“Why would you come to see that? It’s just an old park. That part of town has been abandoned for years. They gonna tear it down soon as someone comes along who can buy the land. There have been a few interested but they always get cold feet.”

“Why is that do ya think?” Bilken proded.

“Dunno, they musta decided that there aint enough commerce comes through here. It’s a chicken or the egg situation. If they build something there we would get more traffic and commerce through here but they won’t build until we do. I wish they would just tear those buildings down though. It’s dangerous.”

“Dangerous how?”

“Kids messing around in the old buildings, drifters and what not. Everybody in town stays clear of Old Town, it’s been that way since I can remember.”

“How long has that part of town been abandoned?”

“Long time, when I was a boy there used to be shops there and what not. I was pretty young then so it’s hard to recall but if I remember correctly there was some sort of accident. Several people lost their lives, some kinda gas or something seeping up from the ground. They evacuated and that was it. Volcanic activity all around here ya know. There have been government men come in to check the safety of the place and all. They gave it a clean bill of health but now nobody wants to buy any property there. How long you staying…” he glanced down at the ledger, “Mr. Bilken?”

“A while.” He replied laying down a twenty-dollar bill on the counter.

Keeping his hand on top of the bill he added. “Do you know a Miriam Clark?”

“I recon I do. She’s a big-time professor from back east, gotta be the smartest person for miles.”

“Can you tell me where she lives?”

“Yup, just go up the street here toward the gas station. Second street is just beyond that, make a right and head to the end of Second. Hers is the nicest house on the block, you can’t miss it.”

“You mentioned an accident that happened in the “Old Town” when you were a child. Do you remember anything else?”

“Nope, and I gotta be the oldest coot in town. You outta check the town library. The librarian prides himself on his collection of historical documents about the town. That’s where I’d go.” The old man wheezed putting the tips of his fingers on the twenty-dollar bill expectantly.

“Thanks for the tip” Bilken mumbled as he released the bill and scooped up the room key. “Is there a phone in the room?” he added.

“Nope, just the one there.” the old man said pointing to a wall pay phone hanging by the stairs.

Bilken turned to give an unexcited look at the phone on the wall and continued up the stairs. He glanced at the number on the key he was given and found the room of the same number. The room was dim in the fading twilight and smelled of stale cigarettes. Flipping the light switch he moved toward the bed setting his suite case down beside the dresser which dominated the wall opposite the bed. He sat for a moment on the bed, listening to the springs creak as his weight pressed down. The curtains were drawn with darkness fast approaching, he laid down on the bed and folded his arms across his chest. He was asleep the moment his eyes closed, face still and expressionless like a wax statue in a cheap carnival side show.

Waking before dawn he felt a pang of regret at losing several evening hours, however his revitalized condition was a welcome change from the weary walking sleep he had been living for the last week. He thought it may be too early to pay a call to Professor Miriam Clark and so resigned to head to the dinner for breakfast and to plan his tasks for the day. He needed to visit the town library and see if there was anything in the historical records that could shed some light on what this “accident” the old hotel clerk was speaking of. Hoping that the reality was not in line with his suspicion, Bilken donned his dusty fedora and headed through the creaking door of his room.

Dismayed to find the hotel clerk not at the front desk he scanned the room for a light switch and flipped it on. He glanced at his watch, seven in the morning did not seem unreasonably early, where could the old clerk be? Standing around impatiently with his arms crossed and an ever-tapping foot he began to realize that the clerk was not simply on break or in the bathroom but instead had not started his day yet. He gave up after only a few minutes of waiting and headed out the door onto the slowly warming sidewalk. The nights chill was still in the air but the cloudless sky promised to make sort work of it before mid-morning. With his bearings firmly intact, he turned on his heels and headed for the greasy spoon four doors down with the blinking and sputtering neon sign reading “Hawks Diner.”

The expected bell rang as he opened the door to the diner, causing both the elderly woman in a short sleeved pink dress and the middle-aged man clad in a white grease stained apron standing behind the order window to glace casually up at him. Giving a slight node he strode across the black and white checked floor to a stool at the counter.

“What can I get you?” the woman inquired with a gravelly voice that was a perfect finishing touch to her near perfect, small town waitress archetype.

“Coffee for starters.” He replied turning over the upside-down coffee cup on the counter.

“You are hungry for only coffee?” She said as she moved to the set of two full coffee pots resting on a warmer.

He smiled slightly at her choice of words and pick up the menu in front of him. I few seconds of scanning the contents revealed his query. “Number two please. I’ll have the eggs over easy.”

“Number two.” She loudly directed at the man behind the order window who unblinkingly began moving around the kitchen without a word.

The waitress stared at him and smiled filling his coffee cup but said nothing. He caught a glimpse of her crooked name tag as she turned to return the coffee pot to the warmer. Agnes; he thought it couldn’t be more typical. The slight crackling of dripped coffee burning off on the warmer and the muffled sizzling of something cooking on the grill were the only sounds to break through the dead silence of the diner. Agnes slowly moved to the swinging door between the front counter and the kitchen. Without a word she disappeared into the back. Bilken was happy to be left to his thoughts while he drank what must have been the worst cup of coffee he had ever had.

Regardless of the taste, the coffee was welcome after his restless night’s sleep. Looking around for a local paper or something to read he noticed Agnes staring at him through the order window from the kitchen. She did not avert her eyes as he raised his coffee and smiled. There was a very off-putting feeling about the diner and its employees which he chalked up to his lack of sleep and foul mood. It wasn’t too long before Agnes returned with his food, placing it down in front of him and immediately blurting out “Your welcome.”

“Thank you.” He replied.

She smiled again and headed to the back. Glad that the odd waitress had left him alone to eat he took a bite and was not surprised to find the eggs were worse than the coffee. He ate in silence as Agnes continued to stare from the kitchen. Eating what he could of the horrible breakfast he laid down enough money for the breakfast and a good tip.

“Thanks, have a good day.” He said to the staring Agnes through the order window.

“Your welcome.” He heard her reply as he moved out the door onto the street.

Happy to be outside of the diner after his awkward encounter with Agnes he moved as quickly as possible toward the town hall which doubled as the public library. His mood turned as gloomy as the weather when he reached the building and found that it wouldn’t be open for another hour. Giving a mournful glance at his watch he headed in the direction the hotel clerk had given him to Professor Clark’s home. He couldn’t see anyone through the windows of the gas station as he passed. It seemed that the town was deserted. If he hadn’t just seen the waitress and cook at the dinner he might have thought this was a ghost town. Reaching Second street he turned right and started up the gently inclined tree lined lane. Small traces of the towns inhabitants revealed themselves as he walked along the street toward Ms. Clark’s residence. Curtains swaying slightly when he turned in the direction of a window here and there betraying the owners snooping. He could feel an almost tactile sense of being watched as he plodded along.

At the end of the street in a small cul-de-sac with only one other home beside it was what must have been Miriam Clark’s house. It was a modest two-story Tudor style dwelling which was markedly cleaner and better maintained than the rest of the houses on the street. The grass and landscaping was slightly overgrown but not nearly as much as the other houses whose foliage seemed to have never known the touch of gardeners tools. He opened the waist high gate and walked up the red brick walkway to the porch. The second step creaked heavily as he ascended the front steps then knocked purposefully on the carved oak front door. Silence was the only reply as he shifted from foot to foot. He spotted a slight movement in the window to the left of the door then a few moments later the sound of locks being released, three in succession, prompted him to prepare to greet Ms. Clark however the door remained closed. A few moments passed before he tried the knob. It turned without a sound allowing him to open the door slowly. Stale air rushed out as it did, he could tell the place had not be opened up in some time. Staring into the dim interior of the house he could make out a shape standing across the room in the dark hallway.

“Come in Mr. Bilken, hurry.” A nervous voice called to him which he recognized instantly as Miriam Clark’s.

Startled into action Bilken quickly moved into the entryway and closed the door behind him. As last ray of light was extinguished by the closing door he couldn’t help the feeling that he was being close into an ancient tomb that hadn’t felt the touch of fresh air in centuries. It was dim and stuffy in the room, he could see less of the figure in the hallway than he could when the sunlight was spilling in through the open door. She moved toward him quickly enclosing him in an unexpected embrace.

“Thank God you’re here.”

“Your request was quite clear Professor Clark. How are you feeling?” he inquired easing himself away from the unkempt figure before him.

“They are always watching. We are not safe.” She whispered.

“Who is watching? What are you saying?” He took her by the arm and moved her slowly to the sofa, motioning for her to sit down. He took the easy chair next to the sofa and slowly sat never losing eye contact with the fragile woman before him.

“Just see for yourself. Look out the windows, you will find them, somewhere. Sometimes it takes a few minutes before you see one of them but rest assured there is always someone there. Walking a dog, watering the yard, sometimes just standing aimlessly. All hours of the day and night, there is someone, watching.” She motioned with her head toward the curtained windows.

He noticed that the windows had their curtains drawn tight blocking out all light from outside. He moved from window to window by the dull orange light of a single lamp on a small round table against the far wall. Using a finger to pull back the curtains only slightly and surveying the street. Sure enough, there was a man two houses down in the process of getting his mail lingering for far longer than one would expect and staring towards Professor Clark’s house. He watched as the man stood frozen staring, mail box open but never attempting to reach inside.

“There is someone, staring. But\_”

“Move away from the window.” She interrupted him in a frantic tone.

“Are you alright Miriam?” He asked moving away from the window.

“They’ve already seen you come in, we can’t let them know I’ve told you.”

“Told me what, you haven’t told me anything.”

“This town, these people. They are being controlled.” She paused and cocked her head slightly to the side like a dog listening to a distant sound. Moving slowly to the dark hallway motioning with her hand for him to follow she faded into the murky darkness.

Following her to a room toward the back of the house he called after her “Miriam, what do you mean by controlled? Curious neighbors are common enough. Where are you…” before he could finish his thought, he was struck by the scene before him. She had led him to a room with no furniture save for mattresses that had been propped up against the two windows. A pile of blankets in the far corner next to an overturned fruit crate doubling for a night stand indicated that Professor Clark had been sleeping here. The room smelled stale and dirty with the hint of Professor Clark’s unwashed body hanging heavy in the air. It was clear she had been spending most of her time in this room judging from the cast aside dishes with half eaten scraps on them strew about the floor.

“Miriam, are you okay. I want you to come with me. We need to get you some professional help.”

“Don’t talk to me like that Theodor. I’m not a loon. You will understand once I explain. This…” She said casting a glance around the room. “… is necessary. I know what it looks like, but I needed to safeguard against… them… they can’t hear us in here.”

He looked around and noticed that the vents of the room had been stuffed with linens. Any possible escape of sound had been considered down to the electrical outlets. He was sure that the Professor had lost her mind in the isolation of her new residence. Perhaps she had gone mad even before she reached Wyatt Falls. Her letters had presented her as the steady intelligent woman he had known from the university. She had spoken of her new home and of her curiosity in the abandoned park near the mountain. The details were vague but there was something in the tone that spoke of urgency. He could never have expected to find the unhinged terrified creature before him.

“I moved here” She began “only three months ago. The price was right and I had always wanted to retire in a place of solitude. The geological make up of this region is… well you know. It seemed perfect for me. Peace and quiet along with the chance of study, I thought I might even write a paper or two about the region without the pressure of an institution breaking my back to get it finished. Property here is a steal, so I bought the place sight unseen. Liquidated my assets in Massachusetts and headed west. If only I had something back east to keep me their… someone…” She trailed off, eyes darting quickly about the room.

“I needed to get away. The government was interested in the research I was doing and the prototype for the machine, you’ve seen it have you not Theodor?”

“Yes” He replied. “It was the basis for much of my sonar work as you know.”

“Yes, well, I didn’t want them to use it for military purposes so I packed it all up and took it with me. It’s collecting dust in the garage. I know it can be devastating if used in certain nefarious applications. At any rate when I got here I was enamored with the place. The town was small and quaint, the people were real salt of the earth types, kind and… they did speak strangely however but I just thought it was by virtue of isolation and lack of education. It was difficult to make any real connections, everyone was nice but very surface in their interactions. All small talk with no substance. I grew lonely with no one to truly talk to. Then I noticed them watching.” She trailed off looking at the ceiling straining as if to hear something.

As he watched her he thought of the odd way the waitress at the diner had addressed him. He reached out to put a hand on her shoulder snapping her back from her apparent reverie. She gazed at him as if seeing him for the first time.

“Yes, they were always there. At first it was the peculiar fact that there was always someone out when I was. Weather it was in the morning while watering my flowers, at lunch, which I would eat on the porch or during my evening walks. There was someone, a neighbor, mail carrier, a random person on the street. Always. I didn’t think anything of it at first but after a while I began to find it unusual that there was never a time that I would be without someone within fifty to a hundred feet of me. Once I noticed it I began changing my schedule, eating lunch early or late, going for walks in the morning instead of at night. Still they were always there. I started coming out to the porch late at nights for a bit of star gazing and to my surprise there was indeed someone loitering around the neighborhood. I began to believe I must be going mad until I started taking peeks out my windows at all hours of the day. They were there.”

“A coincidence?” Bilken offered unable to believe the tale being spun by this deteriorated version of the astute discerning woman he had known.

“At all hours, anytime I looked there is always someone. It could not be mere coincidence, and then the sound came. It was faint at first but grew increasingly distracting as the days wore on. I thought I might have an inner ear problem and so went to the doctor. I had to drive since there is no local physician, and once I left the town behind the sound stopped. I had the doctor look into it in any case and he gave me a clean bill of health. He could find nothing wrong. He suggested that it could be the elevation or some such nonsense but we are at approximately the same level here as at his office. I could see the look in his eyes. He thought I was off my nut.”

“Do you still hear it, even now?”

“Yes, don’t you?” She pleaded.

“No.” His expression was betrayed his thoughts.

“You think I’m crazy, you really can’t hear it?” She implored as she came unglued in front of him, tears streaming down her filthy cheeks.

Bilken was at a loss for what to do as Professor Clark openly wept crumpled on the cluttered unwashed floor. The woman before him was a shell of the determined intelligent force of nature he had known at the university. Now reduced to this huddled mass, desperate and deranged. What could have driven her over the edge. The explanation that the towns folk were watching her didn’t seem to be enough to cause this kind of phycological damage. There seemed to be something more. He pressed her for further details.

“I began to try and locate the source of the sound. By this point it was constant and unnerving. Knowing that it was not a physical malady I knew that it had to be coming from somewhere in town. I walked in grids through town each day further expanding my search. The watchers were there at all times. They never made any attempt to approach me or hamper me in any way. For my part I did not approach them either. My search meandered day by day until I finally came to the abandoned section of town, the place with the park I told you about. The closer I came to the park the more intense the sound became. It was not that the sound grew louder but that it called to me even stronger. It was then that I realized why the sound was so unnerving. Set aside the fact that the constant low hum in my ears was utterly distracting and frustrating it was more than that. It called to me, I don’t know how else to explain it, it implanted a need to know a need to find the source of the sound. I couldn’t restrain myself and eventually set off to find it. As I got closer to the park I cut myself on a protruding nail from one of the abandoned buildings. The pain seemed to snap me out of some kind of trance I had been in. It was getting dark, fearing for my safety I returned home. I have not gone back since.” Again, the faraway look appeared on her face as if she was listening for something.

“Could you not just leave? If this place is weighing so heavy on you why not just leave it behind?”

“They tampered with my car, the buses don’t run unless to bring people into town and the times I have tried to go on foot I find myself walking in circles. It is hopeless, there is another though, that I found.”

“Another? What do you mean?” He inquired.

“The man who runs the library. He stays there, never leaves, he let me in after I convinced him. He has been here for years, holed up in that library.” Her eyes were wide and her shaking hands were clutching Bilken’s jacket.

“The clerk at the hotel told me that I could find more information about the park at the library. Maybe he knows something.” He gently pulled her hands from his jacket.

“Why would he tell you that?” She asked with a worried look on her face.

“I asked about the incident that caused that section of town to become abandoned, he said I could find information at that library. Said he couldn’t remember what happened, that it was some kind of gas caused by seismic activity that escaped from the ground.”

“He’s lying. They go there on nights of the new moon. When it is the blackest. They go there I followed one night. I didn’t get too close but I could see them in the dark congregating at the park.”

Belkin felt sorry for his friend. She seemed to have had some sort of mental break. He could see in her eyes that she believed every word she said, but the validity of the story was desperately lacking. He decided to humor her a little while longer, until he could convince her to come with him. Maybe he could convince her to check into a hospital and get professional help. First he needed to get her away from this town which seem to be a catalyst for the delusions she was having.