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 seemed to be a catalyst for the delusions she was having.

“Miriam, why don’t we pay a visit to the library. Perhaps the librarian can help. We can talk to him then take a drive, I have a car, get your mind off things. What do you say?” He offered in as comforting a tone as he could muster.

“Yes, I can see you think I’ve gone batty, but he will clear things up. It was the librarian that showed me the old research. From that I was able to pull a key piece of information. Then when I saw your paper in the journal, the one regarding the map of Pangea you found in that Nazi bunker. I knew I had to contact you, you I could convince, I thought.” Her eyes lowered as she moved to another section of the room to collect her sweater. “Let’s go.”

They made their way to the front door in silence. Belkin was at a loss for words. He could not think of a single comforting angle with which to ease the obviously broken woman. Perhaps humoring her delusions was the best he could do at the moment. They left the house and walked the two blocks of neighborhood streets still in silence. The air was cool and a slight breeze was coming from the north east. It was oddly silent as if the entire town was surrounded in a soft blanket. He saw two other denizens of the town as they went. One was just two doors down from Professor Clark’s house, standing silently watering her flowerbed. The other was sweeping the entry way of the gas station, also silent. Both were staring uncomfortably at the pair as they walked purposefully to the library. There was an ominous pursuance to those stares especially after the unnerving tale the Professor had just related to him.

Belkin glanced around the street when they arrived at the library and found that there were in fact at least two persons within visible distance of Professor Clark and himself. Still maintaining it was a simple coincidence he reached for the knob of the library door. The door to the single-story brick building attached to the City Hall was locked. The cracked faded green paint on the door and lack of an open sign or library hours for that matter made him question whether Professor Clark was correct in believing this to be an occupied building. Above the door an old yellowing sign indicating this to be the library looked as though it were about one strong gust from falling to the un-swept moss-covered sidewalk below it.

“Are you sure there is anyone here Miriam?” he asked tentatively.

Moving in front of him she hammered on the door with the bottom of her fist. “It’s me William, let me in.” She called out loudly into the air.

A few uncomfortable moments passed, as he watched her casually annoyed expression, finally the click of a lock prompted her into action. She quickly moved to the knob and turned. The door creaked ominously as she proceeded through nagging him to hurry all the while. As soon as he entered the musty dimly lit interior she quickly slammed the door shut and locked it. The air of tense fear she had been exuding since leaving her house melted away. She lingered a moment leaning against the door an audible sigh of relief could be heard. In the sickly dim yellow light, he could make out the shadowed outlines of some esoteric symbol scratched crudely into the wood of the door. There was something vaguely reminiscent about the arcane looking sigil made of unpleasantly asymmetric geometrical shapes and lines. He was starting to feel as if the librarian might be in the same unstable state as the Professor. Following her out of the foyer and into the library proper he was oddly surprised to find that it was in fact equipped with hundreds of books lining the walls and nestled into four twenty-foot-long stacks in the center of the open area.

A disheveled man with wild grey hair and beard dressed in what once may have been a decent suite but now was unwashed tattered rags stood motionless between the first set of stacks. He seemed poised to run at any moment staring at them as if they were aliens from another world. Professor Clark moved to the front holding her hands before her in a calming manner. “It’s me William, Miriam Clark, I’ve brought a friend. He may be able to help us.” He surprisingly calm voice seemed to have an effect on the man as he shifted his weight from side to side.

“Who are you?” He brashly addressed Belkin.

“My name is Theodor Belkin, I’m a geologist from Massachusetts. Professor Clark and I knew each other years ago when she taught at the same university I was a research scientist for. She asked me to come here.” He tried to keep his voice calm and soothing unsure what the man’s reaction might be.

“When did you get here?” William asked in the same short accusatory manner.

“I only got here last night. I stayed in the motel up the street and visited Miriam today. She said we should come here.”

The filthy man softened a bit and moved over to a doorway on the right motioning with his hand for them to follow. He led them into a small office which was neatly kept and who’s most striking feature was a wall directly opposite the desk covered from floor to ceiling with newspaper clippings, maps, pages torn from books and photographs. Pieces of paper with handwritten notes were plastered haphazardly throughout the puzzling and eccentric coilage. He sat down behind the desk, opened a drawer and withdrew an unlabeled bottle of some brown liquid. He produced three mildly clean glasses and pored a small amount in each. He motioned for each to take a glass then took a small drink from his. “It’s not often that I get company.” He said plainly before beginning to laugh hysterically. Miriam was overtaken by laughter as well, after a few moments Belkin couldn’t help but to laugh himself.

William regained his composure and draining his glass he looked to Professor Clark and asked “Do you believe he can help? Or will he be trapped here like us.”

“I pray that he can.” Replied the professor.

“What do you mean trapped?” Bilken added genuine concern creeping into his dismissive tone.

“It’s all there.” William waved his hand to the collage of photos, news clipping and random notes covering the wall opposite his desk.

“I’ll take you through as much as I know. Not sure how much Professor Clark has filled you in. Best to start at the beginning.” Draining his glass and poring another for himself he continued. “I took a job here three years ago, as the new librarian. I had retired from my job as a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. I’d been there since it opened in 35. I moved to the west coast from Boston. I used to write for the Globe which is how I got my foot in the door at the Times. Anyhow I was single and nursing a pretty serious drinking problem. I had a decent nest egg built up. Working late nights, drinking your meals and wearing the same old suit till it starts falling apart lends itself to the saving of money it turns out.” He gave a half smile staring into his glass. “So, I didn’t need much money and I figured this would be a nice quiet place to settle down, dry up and live out my remaining years. I figured being a librarian would keep me busy and help me meet the locals. I should have stayed in LA and drank myself on an early grave.”

“I showed up to find the library abandoned. There was an envelope addressed to me and left at the post office. In it I found the keys to the library and an explanation that the last librarian had left without notice and that I would have to figure things out for myself. There is a small apartment above the place which was all cleared out, so I brought my stuff in, which wasn’t much mind you, and started my new life. It only took me about a week to clean the place up and get the library setup for the public. I asked around town but nobody seemed to have known the previous librarian. I was told that the city had contacted various major papers up and down the coast looking to fill the position. I was the doomed soul who took them up on the offer. So here I was in a nowhere town working as the librarian of an abandoned library. Lucky me.”

“It came pretty clear once I opened the place up to the public that the locals weren’t big readers. I sat here for days on end waiting for anyone to drop in but not a soul darkened my doorstep. I was having difficulties with the locals as well. I would call myself a fairly social person, but I couldn’t make any real connections here. Everyone I talked two just went through the motions, small talk ya know, nothing of substance. When I would begin to dig deeper I was met with blank stares and silence. I know some of these rural folks like to keep to themselves but it was more than that. The blank expressions on their faces. As if they just didn’t understand what I was talking about. They kept asking me if I had visited the park on the outskirts of Old Town. I finally gave it a go but turned around before I got to the park. It was getting late and to tell you the truth I got a bit spooked wandering through the abandoned buildings. I could swear there was something watching me. I figured maybe it was some animal from the mountains that came down to the town looking for food. Either way I never made it to the park. Once I got back though I was intrigued.”

“I started going through what I had here at the library, looking to find out what had cause the abandonment of that section of town. There were articles written in the local paper starting in 1932 which described an earthquake that hit the town late one night causing considerable amounts of damage.” He motioned to the various news clippings pasted to the wall. “The town lost power and water but being such a small close-knit community, everyone banded together to help those who were injured or in need. Within a week’s time however the news articles began to turn dark. There were people going missing at night and reports of a strange sound emanating from an area with Stone View Park at its center. Then, nothing. When I say nothing, I mean nothing. The paper itself stopped circulation and the town when completely dark to the outside world. I found a locked metal box behind the radiator which was left by the previous librarian. There was a journal in the box and a few loose pages of hand written notes, the most recent of which was dated seven years before I got here. It was clear from what I read that the library had been vacant for a long time. In the journal I found that after the earthquake many people went missing and the rest of the town abandoned their damaged dwellings and started building on the outskirts of what is now Old Town. The librarian seemed to believe that some sort of predators had taken up residence in the Old Town buildings. He believed that these were responsible for the missing towns folk. He also laid out a theory that something related to the sound emanating from the park was affecting the populace. His final writings were highly erratic and paranoid. He believed that after a time the entire town had succumb to some kind of mental control. He tried to hide in the library locking himself away. He sighted certain ancient books of which he was a collector which had vague references to this phenomenon. In his possessions I found among his other rare books a certain volume which was identified by only a single symbol burned into the leather on the cover. He carved that symbol on the door then disappeared.” As he said the last he looked to the strange symbol carved into the door.

Belkin realized at that moment that all of the entrances to the building had the same symbol displayed on some portion of them. He could see where this was going and interjected. “Are you trying to say that the town is controlled by this noise you two are hearing? That’s is preposterous.”

“I thought the same thing when he told me.” Professor Clark chimed in swirling the brown liquid in her glass. “I came here for several days before he let me in. Apparently, I seemed rational enough for William to decide I was not yet assimilated. I had already decided something strange was going on but had no clear hypothesis of what it could be. He laid it out for me and it made sense. Then he showed me the photo.” She pointed to a single aged black and white photo pined to the wall. The photo was of a man, standing on the sidewalk in front of the library, smiling and looking extremely proud. “That man, the previous librarian who is supposed to have disappeared, we’ve both seen him around town.”

“I’ve tried to confront him,” Said William, “but he would elude me. After several such attempts the rest of the town became highly aggressive toward me. Where once they were content to wait for me to become like them, now they are out to kill me.” His hands were shaking. “There is something, something connected to that sound, something that comes from the stone in the park that is brainwashing these people.”

“The book I mentioned hints at an extremely fantastic theory. It speaks of civilizations which thrived on the earth millions of years before the first sign of man. It speaks of great cities erected by these beings. From what I can understand they came from unknown parts of the universe either by design or by accident they ended up on earth and created their civilizations here. One such civilization is named Illethguwa. They are described as formless conglomerations of cells which would consume and assimilate other organic matter according to a desired trait which would then be absorbed. For instance, if, in our terms, we wanted to breath under water we would consume and absorb a fish possibly and from that point on we would be able to breath under water. From what the book states these beings were very powerful and had created great cities on earth. Once such city was called Cellistes and is said to have been destroyed by some unknown force which came from beneath the foundation of the city. The book warns not to enter the doomed city of Cellistes or one will become part of the city and lost forever. It goes on to say that the city was built atop something more ancient than the Illethguwa themselves, something alien and dangerous.”

“You are mad.” Bilken said raising from his chair and putting his half-finished glass of whiskey on the desk. “This is a child’s fairy tale nothing more.”

“Wait Theo, that is not all.” Professor Clark stood and put a restraining hand on his shoulder.

“The image of the map you retrieved from the Nazis, the one you included in your paper, the location marked on the map, it’s the same, in the exact spot depicted in William’s book. A location on Pangea that drifted over time eventually coming to rest here, right beneath our feet.”

“Is that why you asked me to come?” Bilken looked dejected.

“I would not have believed that there were any civilizations thriving over one hundred seventy-five million years ago but the map you found and the book, they tell a different story.” Professor Clark began in a scholarly tone. “What can you tell us about the map. I have examined the book extensively and I can attest to its authenticity. It is a Greek translation of a Sumerian work and is nearly three thousand years old. The original Sumerian text was once again a translation of an even older manuscript, the language and origin of which is unknown. From passages in the book we do know that the Sumerian translation was of a work considered ancient at that time. If we believe that there was no human written language that predates Sumerian, then we must begin to consider that the original was not written by humans at all.” She paused letting her words sink in.

“You must tell us everything about the map and where it was found Theo. It could be the piece of the puzzle we need.” The professor looked much older than her years, hair disheveled and the wild look in her eyes frightened Belkin.

“As you know I helped the Allied forces by providing expertise in sonar technology.” Belkin began. “We used it to discover if the enemy were dug in before sending our forces. Because of my capacity as a scientist I was also brought in whenever the men would find research equipment or documents. Most of the time I had no idea what it was we had found but could at least identify the field of study represented. Generally, we would find blue prints and plans which dealt primarily with various machinery or weapons. Much of it was rocketry, various journals on physics or biology, some truly terrifying research actually. Occasionally though there were studies on the occult and ancient civilizations. In one particular instance we found a cache of research work and original manuscripts dealing with Alfred Wegener’s work on Pangea. However, these were not theories and explanations of continental drift, these were cross referenced from ancient tomes which claimed the existence of non-human civilizations which existed millions of years before recorded human history. The map came from that research, it depicted several locations which were noted as cities of some sort existing on the great continent. One of which was located on the western side of what is now North America. So yes, that city depicted on the map from my paper could very well be beneath us. But the idea that a theorized city from millions of years ago could be responsible for the strange behaviors of people in this town is… well, just preposterous.” The look on his face was one of puzzlement, dark circles more pronounced around his eyes. The day’s events were weighing on him and though it was only midday he felt tired and drained.

“Preposterous you say?” William voice was weak but menacing. “Come with me.” He rose from his chair and opened a door opposite the one they had entered through. Not waiting to see if anyone was following he continued into the dimly lit hallway beyond. Belkin briefly looked to Professor Clark then stood and followed. William led them down the hall to a locked door. Producing a set of keys from his pocket he fiddled a bit for the proper key and inserted it into the lock. “What is beyond this door is shocking but please let me explain before you jump to any conclusions.” With that he turned the knob and opened the door.

Both Bilken and Professor Clark issued audible gasps at the scene laid before them. On two office desks in the center of what looked like a storage room lay the corpses of two individuals. Both of whom had the top portion of their skulls removed exposing pinkish grey brain matter which looked oddly corroded as if some form of mold had been growing there. The rest of the bodies were covered with tarps and buckets were placed beneath each corpses head apparently to collect the blood and fluid issuing from the skull. Glancing to a corner behind William Belkin could see the discarded top of these unfortunate soul’s skulls. Thrown in the corner like simple trash to be discarded unceremoniously. “You’re a madman.” He whispered almost to himself.

“Please hear me out!” William pleaded, his hand stuffed quickly into his pocket where Bilken knew the gun he brandished earlier must be. “These men attacked me, when I was removing my garbage. I have to go out under cover of darkness to remove the garbage, I do it in secrete and quickly so I do not get waylaid by the infected. I change my schedule daily so they do not know when to expect me. I suppose they had been lying in wait for me. They attempted to take me and so I had to use my revolver, trust me, I did so with great remorse. It was me or them.” He paused, letting his words sink in. Once he could see Bilken’s eyes soften he continued.

“Look, I need to both to see this.” He said hastily as he moved to a workbench near the bodies, putting the table where they lay between himself and Bilken. He drew a small vial from a holder that contained several others or its like. The vial contained a black liquid with the consistency of aging ink. Holding it up so that the others could see he moved back to the exposed brains of the bodies on the table. “This substance is some sort of conduit for the fungus like growth you can see on the brains of these unfortunate souls.” Looking down Bilken and the Professor could see a purplish grey mold growing throughout the brains of the corpses. It was prevalent on the outer exposed portions of the brain but was also evidently marbled within the brain as shown by sections that William had already cut away. Cautiously William moved to the bodies and uncorked the small vial he carried. A single drop of the pitch-black liquid that looked like a mixture of blood and oil was administered to the brain of the furthest body from Bilken. Suddenly the body attempted to bolt upright. It was only then that Bilken noticed the restraints on each of the corpses. The body struggled against the restrains turning its head to the Professor and himself and stretched its neck in an attempt to use its teeth to attack them. They stepped back in horror as the body began an attempt at what seemed to be words. Dry croaks emitted from the things mouth as deflated dead lungs attempted to push air through decaying vocal cords. After a minute or so of the hideous display the thing fell motionless.

“What…” was all Bilken could muster as he stood in shock transfixed on the corpses before him.

“This liquid seems to nourish or activate the fungal substance you see entwined with the brain. The skull cavity was full of it when I removed the skull cap. I have been studying the substance but my knowledge and tools are rudimentary. I believe that something released from the stone at the park in Old Town infects the brain. Once it has taken ahold the infected act as one, a sort of group mind. To what end I cannot say but they are adamant about assimilating anyone who they come in contact with. They have been trying to get me out of my fortress here for years. The symbol seems to be the only thing that stops them. They are after Professor Clark now as well.” William looked even more disheveled than before.

“But they have not tried to physically attack her.” Bilken was grasping for anything that would debunk what he could now see plainly in front of him.

“They start very slowly. It seems they prefer a person to come willingly. She has been lucky so far but I fear your presence and this visit will quickly ramp up their aggression towards her.”

“But why would the hotel clerk send me here if he knew you were an adversary? I asked him what happened in Old Town, he said to ask at the library.” Bilken floundered.

Williams expression changed suddenly as he raised his revolver in Belkin’s direction. “They sent you.”

“No, I came on Professor Clark’s request. I had no idea.. I… it’s. Well how do you explain my getting past the symbol? I swear to you, I am here to help.”

“When did you arrive?”

“Yesterday evening. I came here, made a preliminary examination of the park that Professor Clark told me about in her letters. Then I got a room for the night. This morning I came here first but the sign out front showed you were closed so I went to visit the Professor.” Bilken said holding his hands up in surrender. “I swear to you I knew nothing of this madness.”

“You went to Stone View Park?” A look of horror shown plainly on Williams face.

“Yes, I wanted to get some initial measurements and some readings with my equipment. Miriam related that her troubles in town centered around this park in the abandoned section of town. I believed that her troubles with sleep were centered around some geological event which was causing subsonic emissions and.”

“You’ve been infected.” William cut him off.

“What, no I’m fine, put that gun away, your mad.” Bilken’s raised hands began to tremble.

“Put the gun down William.” Professor Clark said stepping in front of Bilken. “We don’t have time for this. If he is infected we need his help before he is completely lost to us. I need his help to properly calibrate the machine.”

William lowered his weapon but his hand remained upon it in his pocket. Bilken took special notice of that. The dark circles under Professor Clark’s eyes seemed deeper and more pronounced as she rounded on the pair. There was an air of her old self in her voice. A confidence that commanded the room. The two men traded sideways glances as they listened to the professor. There was a desperate feeling that was nearly tangible in the air. The plan that Professor Clark was laying out might be their only chance at survival, or the ravings of a mad women, that remained to be seen.

“The machine, which is the culmination of my life’s work, now lays under a sheet covered in dust in my garage. I thought it would never again see the light of day. It’s funny, since its creation I have moved heaven and earth to not allow it to be used as a weapon, and now I wish to use if for that exact purpose. It was Mr. Bilken’s revelation of the maps found in the possession of the Nazi’s that sparked the idea. Could the malady that preys on this town be coming from something forgotten and buried. An ancient city, a civilization that either created or was itself doomed by some long-forgotten organism which uses sound to lure its victims close enough then release this,” she waved her hand toward the corpses on the table, “fungus, for lack of a better term, that grows inside of a hosts brain and beings to bend them to the hives will.”

“There are examples of this type of behavior in the natural world currently. The Ampulex Compressa or emerald wasp uses a neurotoxin which it injects into the brains of its host, a cockroach, turning it essentially into a zombie under the control of the wasp. It lays its eggs in the cockroach and once they hatch the larva feeds on the roach. There are other examples as well of certain funguses that effect the brain functionality of their hosts. Could this be the same general principle on a larger scale? If so it could be that this organism has been buried for millions of years and was only recently released due to seismic events. With Mr. Bilken’s sonar technology we can determine where large chambers may exist beneath the town and use my machine to cave them in on themselves.” She paused and lingered on Bilken silently, tears welling in her tired wild eyes. “Possibly we can cut the thing off from its… hosts.”

Bilken could see the look from both of them. They feared the possibility that he would turn. He did not want to believe this was real, especially that is was not happening to him, but he had to face the facts that he was presented with. Professor Clark’s plan was sound. If they could only make it to the park before he became a mindless minion of the unknown blasphemy hidden beneath that decrepit park. He looked at each of them in turn, stealing his resolve he tried to hold bac the desperation and fear in his voice. “So, what do we do first?”

“We need to get my machine out of the garage. It still rests atop the trailer it was delivered on so we need only get a vehicle that can pull it to the house. The gasoline for the generator which powers it is in the garage as well. We will also need to collect Mr. Bilken’s equipment so that we can get the measurements which to point the device at. If we can do all of that without being overrun by the townsfolk we may have a chance. We need to move quickly however if we hope to complete our work before Mr. Bilken is… assimilated.” Her eyes lowered avoiding his gaze as she spoke the last.