

THE  
MONGOL  
OBJECTIVE  
A MORPHEUS INITIATIVE THRILLER

DAVID SAKMYSTER

d|DEVIAION

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*Hermes, before his return to Heaven, invoked a spell on them, and said, O holy books which have been made by my immortal hands . . . become unseeable, unfindable, from everyone whose foot shall tread the plains of this land, until old Heaven shall bring instruments for you . . .*

**-Hermetic Arcanum**



# PROLOGUE

*New Orleans*

1985

The pencil, wielded like a wooden stake gripped in his little fist, speeds over the page, creating details here, shading in areas there, stabbing at the heart of his horrific vision. And as the drawing takes form, emerging from the sharply detailed chrysalis of his young mind, sweat beads down the boy's face. He shakes his head to clear a thick lock of matted red hair from his eyes, awash in robin's-egg blue innocence, as they lose focus, crack, then tremble with inescapable dread.

The pencil point breaks and he absently reaches into a box of sharpened pencils on the rug beside him. He ignores the sounds from the babysitter, the fifty-year-old neighbor with her fingers to her lips, watching over him in astonishment that slowly turns to horror as the lines on his page darken and the images take clarity.

Finally, the boy sets down the pencil, blinks and looks up at the sitter with tears spilling from his eyes, cascading down his puffy red cheeks. He lifts the page, tears it from the pad and holds it up for her to see.

"Help them?" he whispers, but the sitter only bites

the knuckles on the back of her hand. She crosses herself and steps away, dropping the page. It descends, drifting side to side like a pendulum, before gently landing in front of the boy. He tries to look away, but can't.

He stares at it again, at the profile sketch of two people in an overturned car; a man clutching his chest, the woman next to him with her mouth open in a desperate scream, even as flames explode through the shattered windows, melt their flesh and char their bones. . . .

**Minutes pass, seconds** dragging on with both the sitter and the boy silent, staring at each other, without a word. The phone rings.

The boy slowly turns his head, and as the sitter goes to answer the call, he gets up, shuffles to the stairs and climbs. He struggles to ascend, every step an anguished effort. At the top, he enters his bedroom and closes the door before he can hear the cries from downstairs.

He sits on a small wooden chair in the middle of his room, and desperately looks over the walls, trying to find just one bare inch—any small space that could serve as a refuge. But the walls are completely covered. A haphazard assortment of pages, all rendered with his mad sketches, more than a hundred sheets of paper taped over the superhero wallpaper, attached crookedly, without aesthetics in mind. Scribbled drawings from a dozen sketchpads, some pages clearly torn out in haste, many overlapping each other and forming larger collages.

On each sheet are images no six-year-old should ever see, much less contemplate putting on paper. Drawings of men drowning, men burning, falling into deep pits

crammed with long spikes, crushed under huge stones. Fires incinerating entire rooms. Acid chewing away at flesh. Severed limbs floating under water, heads bobbing along the surface. Amidst all this grotesque butchery, almost as background stage art, he's drawn enormous structures: colossal pyramids, crumbling ancient temples, a huge statue, an underground city. And in several frames an enormous tower with a blazing light at its peak, lording over a turbulent harbor. On each of these pages it's as if the wondrous architectural structures are merely a backdrop for death and dismemberment, scenes of extreme, punishing violence.

The boy blinks and his eyes lose focus again. He reaches down and picks up a sketchpad and a pencil lying on the floor. And he starts drawing, even as the footsteps approach up the stairs. Slow, heavy steps.

And what sounds like crying.

He keeps drawing, sketching, shading, using light and shadow, creating . . .

*. . . a crude rendition of what looks like the top half of an enormous head crowned with spikes, peeking out from a landscape of either sand or possibly ice. Tiny human forms are gathered around it, using shovels and pulleys.*

And then the door creaks open.

"Honey, I have to tell you something. There's been an accident. Your father and mother were on their way home, and . . ."

The boy lowers his head, and his eyes focus momentarily, filling with uncontrolled emotion. Then he blinks the swelling tears away. He looks up to the window, the pale light suffusing around his pupils, and again the room loses focus as if he's staring at something a long, long way off.

“Xavier? Do you hear me?”

He directs his attention again at his latest drawing, then glances at the wall in front of him, focusing on one sheet in particular, puzzled as to why this one should pull at his attention. Another depicts a huge seal—an eagle over a star. And there’s a drawing done in colored crayons. A drawing of a woman strapped to a bed while two men are crumpled on the ground around her, crimson splatters on their chests. A third man—a man with red hair—approaches.

“Xavier?”

The boy blinks again and smooths back his hair.

“Xavier honey, did you hear what I said?”

He turns his head and manages a smile. “Yes, but I’m sorry, I still have work to do.”

Turning away from her, Xavier Montross picks up his pencil and flips to a blank page.





# ONE

*Antarctica—Point Nelson Research Station  
September 14. The Present.*

Phoebe Crowe spoke softly into the microphone as she watched the action on three separate laptop screens. “Okay, big brother, we’ve got the link working. We see what you see. Let’s get this show on the road.”

Itching from the heavy cotton sweater worn under her ski coat, she still battled the chill from the two-hour Sno-Cat ride from Fort Erickson. It was the longest two hours in her life, with the exception of that time spent writhing on the tomb floor in Belize. And this was the last leg of a journey that earlier featured a white-knuckle helicopter ride from the *Starboard Ulysses*, which was currently trawling a mile out beyond the ice shelf.

While Phoebe and Orlando Natch, her lone teammate, still shivered, the six other people in the room seemed used to the forty-degree temperature. Point Nelson’s commander, Colonel Eric Hiltmeyer, stood nearly seven feet tall. Bald, with a chiseled jaw and a scar on his left cheek as if he had taken one swipe too many from a sharp razor in a prison fight, he lurked over Phoebe’s shoulder as his staff—two scientists, a

geologist, an environmental engineer and a lab assistant—spaced themselves around the table, observing as Phoebe and Orlando tracked the progress of their other team members.

Phoebe moved the microphone to her left, in front of the man—the boy really—who had made all this possible. At age nineteen, Orlando Natch was the youngest member of their psychic research group known as The Morpheus Initiative. He was their technological whiz kid who, ironically, had never been to Florida, much less Orlando. Jet black hair, curly and ragged, wild blue eyes, and a narrow elfish face, with his 150-pound frame covered with baggy jeans and a black *World of Warcraft* sweatshirt. Orlando had been recruited directly by Phoebe while she was a graduate assistant at the University of Rochester. Not only did he excel at applying cutting-edge technology to the study of ancient relics, but he displayed exactly the type of intuition that indicated he might be a candidate for the Morpheus Initiative.

Orlando *saw* things. Before they happened mostly, but sometimes, given just a little prodding with a picture or an object (or the right question), he'd drift into a trance and then wake up and rush to his iPad, wielding it like an artist, where he'd set about crafting a computer-generated rendition of his vision on one of its graphics applications.

This technique was miles ahead of the old pencil-and-sketchpad method used for years by the other remote viewers, and Phoebe was only too grateful to have him on board—as was her brother Caleb, who had leveraged the value of the group's scanned drawings, uploading them and then interfacing with image-recognition

software to find matches with photos on web-based public databases or in photo-share servers like Flickr.com.

“Lookin’ good,” Orlando said, rubbing his hands together, then directing a joystick, which now controlled the camera on Caleb’s helmet. “Just focusing . . . there. I see it. Holy shit, do I see it!”

Phoebe leaned in, looking from screen to screen, from the cameras mounted on their three members at the dig site a mile away. In addition to Caleb, two other Morpheus Initiative members, Andy Bellows and Ben Tillman, had volunteered for this mission. An hour ago, all three had suited up and left in a Sno-Cat with Colonel Hiltmeyer’s other newly-arrived guest, an anthropologist named Henrik Tarn.

“So you’re getting this?” Caleb’s voice crackled from the speakers. His name was on the third screen in front of Orlando. The shaking screen.

Phoebe whistled. “Yeah, but stop moving so much. You shivering or something?”

“It’s freakin’ cold, in case you didn’t know. Minus twenty and—”

“And no wind chill,” she said, aware of the hypocrisy as she snuggled in her coat. “You’re in a cave, so stop whining and stay still so we can get some clear images of that thing.”

Orlando glanced at the other screens. “Bellows and Tillman, please move around and space yourselves equally apart from Caleb. Let’s get this from all angles.”

On the screens, within the frozen cavern, emerging from the ice-shelf, were several views of something dark and huge, with sharp protrusions spiking from a rounded edge. Phoebe leaned over. “Hey Orlando, can you pull up our sketches for comparison?”

“No problem.” Orlando quickly tapped some keys and another window on the middle screen appeared, displaying a succession of scanned drawings, most of them crude and awkward, but unmistakably the same general structure as the object on the live image feed. He moved the pictures into different orientations to match the unearthed artifact.

“I still can’t believe this,” Colonel Hiltmeyer said, edging past the other group members and peering over Phoebe’s shoulder.

“What?” Phoebe asked. “That you guys found this thing in the ice at a depth equating to a geologic period of more than fifteen thousand years ago? Or that we separately drew the same thing four years before your team even set up shop here?”

He blinked at her, his dull gray eyes impassive. “Both, I guess.”

Phoebe stretched her legs, still relishing the ability to do just that. For ten years, during all of her teens, she had been in a wheelchair, her legs useless, her hip and lower vertebrae shattered after rushing into a booby-trapped tomb in Belize. But then the cure—the miraculous technique discovered in the original *Hippocrates Manuscript*, one of thousands of lost scrolls she and Caleb had discovered under the remains of the ancient Pharos Lighthouse in Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The miracle she’d never thought she would experience: to be able to walk again. To run. It still made her giddy, humble and grateful beyond words.

She clicked the microphone. “Okay Caleb, what do you have for us? You guys want to try to remote view it now that you’re within actual sight of the thing? Get some glimpses into its past and let us in on the

big mystery?”

Colonel Hiltmeyer licked his lips. “Like how big it is.”

Orlando tapped some keys and called up a smaller window which began running a graphical projection based on the tip of the head, then extrapolated a body, arms simply at its side. “It’s about 130 feet tall, if the curvature of the head’s to scale.” He looked up, grinning. “Any other easy questions, or should we hold out for the big one?”

Her voice dropping a notch, Phoebe said, “You mean, like how the hell did it get here?”

**Caleb Crowe pulled** back his hood and adjusted his earpiece before resealing the polypropylene fleece hat. He was still freezing, despite the layers of a pile fiber sweater and a North Face Parka, with 550-fill down content and a two-layer HyVent waterproof/windproof fabric. His fingers were tingly and getting numb by the minute, notwithstanding the thick goose-down mittens. But as Phoebe said, at least he was out of the wind.

He gave a quick thought to his nine-year-old son, Alexander, in their nice warm house on Sodus Bay in upstate New York. Hopefully he was doing his homework, or at least some light reading, which to him was something like *Herodotus*. But more likely the kid was just playing around the old lighthouse on the hill. Caleb’s wife, Lydia, was there with him, taking a much-needed break from her duties at the Alexandrian Library. She and her brother Robert were co-leaders of a two thousand-year-old organization called the Keepers, who just recently, with Caleb’s help, had rediscovered a secret

vault below the remains of the great Pharos Lighthouse—a vault which had protected the most important writings the world had ever produced, secreted away before the original Alexandrian Library's destruction in 391 CE. During the past five years, the Keepers, Caleb himself one of them now, had been slowly reintroducing certain manuscripts to the world, those which could benefit mankind the most, while keeping a lid on others with more explosive content until their impact could be controlled.

He envied his wife and son right now. Lydia and Alexander—warm, surrounded by familiar books, those timeless friends. And here he was, in one of the most inhospitable places in the world. And in a cave of all places. But if this find proved to be what he thought it was, everything would change. The archaeological equivalent of a meteor impact, finding evidence of an advanced civilization existing in Antarctica during prehistoric times would rock the academic world and shake the pillars of all major institutions. A civilization that could build such an immense statue, a guardian standing upon the field of an ancient city, with other monuments perhaps still preserved, frozen. And its libraries! Dare he even begin to hope? To dream that they could discover books containing all that lost knowledge?

“This could be Atlantis,” Ben Tillman said, reaching out a gloved hand to the closest thorny spike of the head's crown. Free of ice, it was a greenish-blue color, oddly metallic. Tillman was dressed in a heavy parka and a woolen hood that all but concealed his face. Icicles hung from his mustache.

“Could be,” Andy Bellows said excitedly, rubbing his mittened hands together in the steam from his breath.

“Impossible,” Henrik Tarn said. The anthropologist who had been brought in two days ago was the tallest of the group. Almost comically tall, Caleb had thought when he first met the bony, long-armed man with a narrow face and dark, button-like eyes. “Plato was very specific about his location of the legendary submerged island: ‘beyond the pillars of Gibraltar, past the Aegean.’”

“But,” Caleb countered, gazing now in wonder at the hint of curvature, a giant eye protruding from the ice, “Plato could have been right and that’s where it *was*, but during a cataclysmic event, the earth’s axis flipped, the crustal plates shifted, entire continents shook free and—”

“—and Atlantis could have shifted to the South Pole,” Tarn supplied. “Yes, yes, I’ve heard that hokey theory about how the Earth’s crust is like the skin of an orange and can shift over the core. But it’s nonsense.”

“Then how do you explain this?”

Tarn shrugged, hugging his shoulders. “I’m not yet convinced. We need to dig, expose more of the structure.”

“What about sonar readings? Would they do it for you?” Caleb asked. Then louder into the microphone, “Orlando, when can we get that imaging equipment out here?”

The speaker crackled. “In the morning, I think. The colonel here said he’ll contact Fort Erickson and have them haul out the sensor equipment once the storm clears.”

Tarn grunted. “We’ll see.”

Caleb knelt closer to the head, reaching out to tentatively touch one of the spiked protrusions. “Definitely sun-worshippers. This is similar to the prevalent Greek depictions of Helios, the sun god. I’m dying to see the

rest of this statue. Maybe . . . maybe just a touch . . .” He started peeling off his right mitten.

“Don’t be an idiot!” Phoebe shouted over his ear-piece. “At those temperatures, your skin will fuse to it and burn right off.”

Reluctantly, feeling like he had just been scolded by a grade-school hall monitor, Caleb pulled his hand away and slipped his mitten back on.

Phoebe’s voice admonished, “You weren’t seriously about to touch it, were you?”

“Sorry, got caught up in the excitement. Thinking back to my dive under the Alexandrian harbor, where I had that psychic vision after touching one of the statue heads.”

“Well, try it without physical contact, dummy. Or else wait.”

“But we’ve already tried it,” Tillman said. “A couple trance sessions on the plane, and another in the station. Didn’t see squat.”

Tarn made a scoffing sound. “Self-induced day-dreams and fanciful imaginations are no substitute for sound fieldwork.”

“Say what you’d like,” Caleb said, “but we saw this thing, exactly in this position. Orlando can tell you; he was one of the first to draw it when we started actively looking for the remnants of a past civilization.” He had to cut himself off before saying too much, indicating the real subject of their search, being the origin of the Emerald Tablet, the powerful but inscrutable tome that was once safeguarded under the Pharos. The tablet was the one artifact Caleb had kept for himself, believing its power so great that he needed to hide its existence even from his wife and the other Keepers.



Caleb thought for a moment. The questions they had asked on the plane had been broad, maybe too general. The very existence of the Emerald Tablet, hidden now in a vault under his own lighthouse back at Sodus Point, indicated that its creator, the legendary Hermes-Thoth, was a member of some pre-Egyptian, pre-Sumerian civilization, a race that not only pre-dated them, but may have actually given birth to those cultures—to their language, their myths, their very existence. One that had left no records other than those shrouded in legend.

So the latest Morpheus Initiative effort focused on just this problem: if there was an advanced civilization, one that had been eradicated in some tragic cataclysm, where could they find evidence of its existence? *Where was the Emerald Tablet created? And what, really, did it do?*

A number of hits popped up through the intervening years of searching through the Morpheus Initiative's efforts, through hundreds of trances and thousands of drawings. But the most consistent and similar image perceived among its members was this vision of an enormous half-concealed statue head, lying in this very position.

And then, almost coincidentally, came the call from Nelson Point in the South Pole. A two-time veteran, Colonel Hiltmeyer had known of the CIA's Stargate Program, which utilized remote-viewing psychics during the Cold War (and secretly beyond). But while unaware of its previous leader's extracurricular activities, Hiltmeyer had known enough about the Morpheus Initiative to seek its services when his research team stumbled across this potentially ancient discovery.

Now, Caleb knelt in the ice and crossed his legs.

"What are you doing?" Tarn asked. He had a shovel

out and was carefully digging around the eye area.

“Just give me a minute,” Caleb said. “Bellows and Tillman, if you want to give it a try too, maybe just by being in the vicinity, we’ll get clearer visions.” He held out his hands, palms outward toward the statue, then closed his eyes.

Phoebe’s voice came through his speaker. “Orlando and I will try to RV it too. Just keep still so I can focus on the statue.”

“This is nuts,” said Tarn.

“Tell that guy to zip it,” Orlando said over the ear-piece. “He’s getting annoying.”

“Hang on,” Caleb whispered, feeling suddenly dizzy. “I’m getting something. I’m in . . .

*. . . a warehouse. Leaded windows. Dusty floor. Scaffolding around a partial spherical construction, still with lattice-grillwork on half of it, while heavy metal plates are fitted into position.*

*Looking down from the ceiling, then descending and circling around the structure, seeing teams of workers toiling with the frame, hoisting the sheets and hollowing out the eyes. Workers wearing blue jumpsuits, dust-masks and goggles. A rumbling sound and suddenly a forklift drives forward, preparing to lift the partial head onto a waiting flatbed truck.*

Caleb staggered to his feet, scrambling and slipping on the ice. He tried to back up, then toppled forward, clutching one of the protruding sun-ray spikes to break his fall.

“It’s—”

*. . . a partial head, the exterior sealed now, set in the back of a truck as the door slams shut, and the vision wheels around to see the back of a tall, lanky man in a black silk suit, nodding and talking on a cell phone.*

*“It’s ready. Just as you specified. We’ll ship it to the research station tomorrow and have it transported to the cave by Thursday night. Hiltmeyer’s team is ready for it?”*

*The man listens, nods, then turns. His face—his too familiar face—pulls from the shadows . . .*

“—a FAKE!” Pushing away from the statue with disgust, Caleb turned to the anthropologist.

But it was already too late.

“Damn psychics,” Henrik Tarn spat, as he pulled off a mitten and with a thin glove underneath fished out a gun from inside his coat. Aiming at Caleb, Tarn tugged at his collar and spoke into his own microphone. “We’ve got to move up the timetable.”

“What!” Caleb began, but then there came a shriek from Phoebe in his earpiece before the microphone shorted out, just as Tarn, sensing Ben Tillman foolishly rushing him, swiveled and shot him point-blank in the chest.