

The Other Side of the Page

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The Other Side of the Page

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Summary

One officer connects with another. The Department of Temporal Investigations probably should look into this.

Off Eleuthera

Earth, the Bahamas, Across the Western Ocean

July 1803

Captain James Blackthorne, RN, manages to block the boarding ax swinging at his head with the old sword. He manages to grab his attacker's wrist. He is able to keep from recoiling at the feel of the course green skin. He stares into the intense blue eyes in the strangest face he has ever seen. He can feel himself being forced back along the cliff. The pounding waves of the inlet are loud in his ears.

He glances around, splitting his concentration as the strange man forces him back further. There is no one else around, none of the rest of his little cutting-out party that had come ashore with him to destroy the French battery and watering station.

Blackthorne grunts as the attacker's shoulder suddenly unjoints and forces his sword to slide down the blade of the ax. He is just able to parry the cutlass in the monster's other hand, before spinning. He feels the cutlass bite into his arm, but he is able to duck under the swinging axe. He swings his sword.

The attacker screams as the old blade of Toledo steel slices into the wrist. He managed to keep his balance on the edge of the cliff as the attacker screams. There is a flash of light and the attacker is gone. The ax and cutlass lie on the ground.

Along with the still twitching right hand.

Blackthorne looks around. He can hear the jangling of equipment that marks the double-time of his Royal Marines along the path.

No one will believe this. Even with the evidence on the ground.

His coxswain, Mark Dawson, a fellow American, is the first to arrive. His eyes take in his wound, then the hand.

Blackthorne shakes his head, looking toward the other path.

When Sergeant Hagood arrives, the hand is concealed in Dawson's haversack and his arm is bandaged. Hagood narrows his eyes. Blackthorne glances over at the cliff.

It would do no good to show this evidence, which would beg more questions than it would answer. He puts it down to another strange occurrence in his life.

The image of the attacker is burned into his brain.

Montana, Earth

Now (January 2297)

Jamie Blackthorne, called Croft by his loved ones, starts awake, his breath exploding from his lungs. He tries to calm his breathing as pain fades from his shoulder.

The picture in his mind of the attacker doesn't fade; it remains in his mind like a snapshot.

A postcard.

He looks down at the ancient, fragile notebook. He turns it back to the title page.

Memoirs of Colonel James D. Blackthorne, late of the Royal Navy and the Virginia Militia.

The dates inscribed burns into his mind.

b. 1776 d. 1853

He pulls up the PADD from the end table. He scrolls through a database search until a particular image cuts into his mind.

An identical image from the memory or dream or whatever in his head, of a humanoid with burning eyes set in course, green, sandpaper-like skin.

He takes a deep breath as he stares at the image and then its label.

Suliban.

He looks up as Chandra comes down the stairs, followed by Decker Sinclair and Emma Rosewarne.

Apparently he had shouted something when he had wakened.

All three women look at him with concern. "Bad dreams?" Chandra asks, touching his face.

He smiles. "An undigested bit of beef," he says.

Decker rolls her eyes. "Okay, Scrooge," she says. "Enough reading. Come on up to bed." He puts book and PADD down, then stands. When he is lying in bed, between Chandra and Emma, with Decker on the other side of Chandra, his mind plays over what he had seen.

How can he tell them that his ancestor had once supposedly come up against a Suliban?

Back in the early nineteenth century on Earth.

The next morning, he stares at the severed green hand of his 'dream'. Resting in a jar of what looks like brandy.

He places it back in the cabinet, locking it.

His eyes travel up to the ancient Toledo sword on the wall.

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