

# Legion

by Doug Muder

I've got better things to do than tell you my story.

After the events are over, the story is just an old, dead thing that takes up space in your brain. The compulsion to tell the story is even worse. It's a parasite that feeds on your will, turning your behavior to its own purposes. I've got purposes of my own, and any day now I'm going to start attending to them. I should find a new job. I should make some new friends, people who think that Legion Software is just another corporate octopus, just something you swear at when your computer locks up.

I don't know why I keep finding myself sitting in front of an untitled document window with the word *Legion* formatted as Heading 1. I don't even know whether I keep opening the windows myself, or if they just pop up like those viral advertisements that launch whenever you start your browser. (Some of those companies died when the Internet bubble popped, but their ads still haunt us like ghosts.) Clicking those windows closed, I've begun to feel like Jonah running from something far more powerful than myself. I've been wondering what kind of whale's belly I might wind up in.

I should tell a doctor about these thoughts. (Jonah isn't the only prophet I think about. There's also Elijah calling fire down from heaven and killing those 450 prophets of Baal. I wonder if, late at night, he ever felt guilty about it.) I'm sure there are drugs that would stop them. Brains these days are just complicated machines. We don't have demons any more, we just have chemical imbalances.

OK, I give in. This is my story: I went to work for Legion and got sucked into some secret inner circle that was planning something you're much happier not knowing about. But then another secret inner circle found me, and between us we managed to get the whole thing stopped. So you're safe now, and you can forget all about it.

Satisfied?

I guess not.

There's no way you could know, but I saved the file, closed the window, shut down the machine (it hung and I had to turn off the power), and took a walk by the river. I even had a cigarette, because I need a few vices and the thought of dying young just isn't motivating me the way it used to. I stood and watched the lights reflect off the water and wondered who (or what) might be watching me. Then I decided I'd better *not* look too hard at the water, because you can hypnotize yourself doing that. The old pagans used to have conversations with the river gods that way.

I'm sure there are drugs for that now too. Probably on both sides – drugs for people who

want to hear the river gods and drugs for people who want them to shut up. It's a wonderful age we live in, an age of Science and Reason.

I came back, booted the computer (which scolded me for not turning it off properly), and opened the file.

So I guess you're not satisfied.

OK. I'll start a little further back.

I went to college. I majored in computer science, because (at least in theory) a computer is something that is completely under control. If a program does something unexpected, you don't smile and marvel at its creativity. You admit that you screwed up, and you fix it. You can always fix it, because the computer is not fighting you. It has no will of its own. I liked that.

I went to MIT, because I could. I had the scores. I liked the idea of a technology school, a place founded by scientists and engineers rather than churchmen. MIT doesn't like to think of itself as a school that lets you turn your back on all the touchy-feely, open-ended, deep-mystery-of-existence crap, but if you try hard you can get away with it. The requirements make you tag all the medieval academic bases, but there's always a way to sneak through. You can learn to write technical manuals rather than poetry, and philosophize about the true nature of numbers rather than the true nature of the Soul. I liked that too. I had heard enough about souls.

Through some combination of working, begging, and borrowing, I managed to pay for my education without asking my father for money. I'm sure he would have come up with it, and I'm sure he knew where I was anyway. But if he wasn't bothering me, I wasn't going to bother him. Chances are, he takes satisfaction in the idea that I skated through an expensive school on other people's money. He probably thinks I have a plan to skip out on the loans, and now that my stock options have gone under he may get the last laugh. He usually does.

I graduated. I'm skipping a lot of stories here, but I'm hoping to finish this in one sitting. Jonah skipped a lot of stories too, I'm sure, after he gave in and went to Nineveh.

I wasn't interested in graduate school. I already had enough debt to last me for a while, and it wasn't clear to me that the most interesting work was going on in the universities anyway. Computer science isn't like astrophysics or sociology. Companies with vast resources are doing research in it, and keeping as much of it secret as they can. Companies like MetroNet, Digiplex, TeleNexus.

And Legion.

Legion was the company all the new graduates secretly wanted to work for. It wasn't cool to say so, because Legion was Goliath rather than David. But Legion had mystique. It was unstoppable. It attacked new markets like Alexander routing the Persians. Its path was

marked by the wreckage of empires.

The company was big enough now to control the course of the industry rather than just respond to it. New developments came out of Legion when its internal plan said the time was right. Fantastic rumors spread about the technology locked up in its vaults, and the rumors themselves became weapons. Funding for a promising start-up might suddenly vanish if venture capitalists suspected that Legion already had a competing product it could roll out at the ideal moment. The founders of the start-up might become so desperate that they would have to sell out – to Legion, of course. What did it matter if the Legion product had never existed – it did now.

Each new market Legion monopolized gave it more avenues of attack on the next. “They’re like the Borg,” said my roommate Jack, who saw the whole world through the lens of Star Trek. “Resistance is futile.” Legion’s reputation created its own fulfillment. Why bother to learn how to use a competing product, when its days were numbered anyway? Eventually you’d have to convert your files into the Legion formats (from which you could never seem to convert them back), so why not just use the Legion product from Day One? I’ve seen this happen before: A feedback effect sets in, and something becomes inevitable for no other reason than because it is inevitable.

When Legion sent its recruiters to campus, we all pretended not to be interested, or to be interested only as a lark. (Legion would give us offers, we told each other, and then we could shop those offers around to other companies. But no one really believed that. Other companies couldn’t match Legion if it really wanted someone. Most of them wouldn’t even try.) But everyone interviewed: the top programmers, the middling ones, and even the ones who were just scraping by. Another part of the Legion mystique was that you could never guess who would interest them. Legion’s founder, Adam Door, had been a C student who left college after his sophomore year. Academic excellence didn’t matter to them, and neither did any other reasonable criterion, apparently. They didn’t seem to care what classes you had taken, what your extra-curricular activities were, whether you had previous on-the-job experience, or even if you had friends inside the company. Only Legion’s recruiters knew what they were looking for, and they weren’t telling.

Legion insiders never told. No one knew how a company its size managed to keep so many secrets. They had the nastiest non-disclosure and non-compete agreements in the business, of course, but those tactics didn’t work for anybody else. A clever lawyer could always find a way out of one of those agreements, we all believed. But the two tell-all books by ex-Legionnaires both turned out to be fakes. The authors had never worked for Legion at all, and had made the whole thing up.

Maybe they were looking for people willing to run an obstacle course. Most companies send one or two guys (or a woman, who can emphasize the equal-opportunity hiring policy) who sit behind a table, look at your transcript, and chat for awhile to make sure that you can string at least two sentences together. In a few days you might get a phone call and an invitation to fly out to headquarters for a more serious interview. But Legion

must have rented a whole floor of the Charles Hotel. I followed instructions for almost three hours, somehow going from room to room without running into any of the other candidates. I filled out what must have been a personality test, took a polygraph, and watched a film where famous media images went past apparently at random. They had me jog on a treadmill while they monitored my heart.

When they asked for a sample of my blood, I balked. Drug tests could be done more easily with urine, so what were they looking for? Congenital diseases? AIDS?

“No,” they said. Using blood-test data to influence the health-care pool was illegal, they told me.

“And that would stop you?” I asked. The whole experience was wearing me down. I was losing my shiny demeanor.

They smiled. “Continuing the interview process is always optional.”

I let my life flash quickly before my eyes. I winced a few times, but nothing I saw would make a blood test interesting, so I gave in.

At the very end of the process, I finally saw the two guys with my transcript. They never referred to it, and they asked me no questions. “We’re prepared to make you a very lucrative offer,” said the balding one with glasses.

“I think you’ll find the salary to be quite generous,” agreed the red-haired one, “and many employees have done quite well with our stock options.”

The red-haired interviewer had a knack for understatement. The salary was approximately double what I had been looking for, and the Pacific northwest was supposed to be littered with clerks and janitors who had become millionaires by hanging onto their Legion options.

“You analyzed all those tests in real time?” The questions just blurted out of me. “You made a decision just like that?”

“Our system is very efficient,” said the one with glasses.

I promised that I would give their offer a great deal of consideration.

“We’d prefer to have a decision immediately,” Red Hair replied. “At the end of the day all our paperwork goes back to headquarters. From there it is out of our hands.”

“It could be reconsidered,” Glasses added.

They were telling me I could take it or leave it.

“Where else are you interviewing?” Red Hair asked. I named four companies, three of which I pulled out of the air. I was still waiting for a response to the resume I had sent to the fourth one.

Glasses leaned back in his chair and nodded slowly. He took off his eyewear and began to clean the lenses with a tissue. “You realize that in the long run, none of those companies

can compete with Legion. Your job would always be at risk from one quarter to the next.”

Red Hair leaned forward. Without thinking about it, I had leaned forward when Glasses had leaned back, so now Red Hair’s eyes were only two or three inches from mine. “So the question you need to ask yourself,” he said with an unsettlingly wide smile, “is whether you want to eat or be eaten.”

I knew how my father had always answered that question. And though I didn’t want to be like him, I didn’t want to be like his marks either.

I wanted to eat.

After graduation I saw no reason to delay. I didn’t have a girl friend to marry or parents that I wanted to spend time with. And I had gotten the travel bug out of my system early in my father’s career, when he didn’t stick around long enough for people to wonder how their money would be spent. I threw everything into a moving van before the ink was dry on my diploma, and the next Monday I was on the payroll.

I spent a week in orientation. It made me wonder about the “efficiency” of the Legion system, that they could offer me a job in a few hours, but needed a week to “orient” me to the company. Fifteen other new Legionnaires went through orientation with me; I think we were supposed to bond. Maybe we did. I still know where five of them are, though I doubt they know what has become of me. The five are all still with the company, and some of them seem happier than I’m ever likely to be. Two of the men in particular – they found Stepford-type wives, tall blondes who don’t mind a geeky guy if his stock options look good. The babies are as blonde and bubbly as their mothers, and they love their Dads because that’s just what babies do. They don’t know any better. When you see the guys with their daughters, it’s like they’ve found the goddesses they were secretly looking for their whole lives. They think they’re being fathers, but they’re really acolytes. And the Goddess loves them.

You didn’t need to know that.

And there’s a lot more I could tell you about my early days at Legion that you don’t need to know either. Some of my orientation-mates got chewed up and spit out in a few months. Others worked themselves into a crash. One or two developed the same wide smile that Red Hair had, and came to personify the company’s rapacious nature. In each case it was a startling transformation that took about two years. But it didn’t happen to most of us. We were ordinary people when we came in, and we continued to be ordinary people, most of us. On the job, we took for granted that we were riding the tide of history, and that our company deserved to crush everything in its path. But it was just a job. Individual brain cells aren’t smart and individual muscle cells aren’t strong. They’re just cells, and unless you’ve been specially trained you can’t tell what they are when you see them in isolation. So it was with us. We were cells in the body of Legion; we looked like everybody else.

For five years, I did a little of this and a little of that. I switched departments three times. Neither I nor the company had any apparent plan for my career. But somehow I wound up working sixty-hour weeks. I had interesting things to do at work, and not so many interesting things to do at home. When I socialized it was with other Legionnaires, and we talked about work. Why not just stay there?

Not long after my fifth anniversary, I got email from the security department. They wanted me to come in.

A call from Security always makes a Legionnaire nervous. A big chunk of orientation concerns the handling of confidential material: what documents to keep in a safe, what files need passwords, what you can take home, and so on. Some of the procedures are necessary, but I figured a lot of them were just ritual. A little paranoia was good for the corporate culture. But the security people took it all seriously. Every now and then you'd hear about somebody getting reprimanded for a security lapse, and there were always rumors of much worse things happening to a friend of somebody's friend on the other side of the campus. I wasn't aware of having done anything worth a reprimand, but Security never called you in just for fun.

We met in a little room with just a table and two chairs. He was a physically fit guy with a grey crewcut and no identification badge. He wore a suit, which was rare among Legionnaires. It was a very expensive suit, which was even rarer. He had a folder full of papers, some of which looked like things I had filled out during orientation.

"You're Daniel DeSalvo's kid," he said.

That wasn't what I had expected to talk about. "More or less," I answered defensively. I had wanted it to sound funny.

"Salvation Sal."

"I don't think he likes to be called that any more," I said. It was too undistinguished a name for the head of the DeSalvo Institute. "But I wouldn't know. We don't talk much."

"And you're Miracle Mike."

I looked down at my sneakers. I really didn't want to be having this conversation. "Not now. Not for a long time."

"You never mentioned it."

"Nobody asked."

I heard papers crinkling, and I knew he was pulling out one of those small-town news clippings. "Your father's people tell a very interesting story about you."

I don't know why I thought I could avoid telling you that story. It's long, long ago and it's *so* over. It shouldn't have anything to do with the Legion story at all. But they thought it did. And so, I guess, it does. Because they thought so.

"Things get exaggerated," I said. "You know how people are about religion."

“We talked to some witnesses.”

*Oh crap*, I thought. “You probably know more about it than I do, then. I was six. You know how it is with stories like that. They get told and retold and after awhile all you remember is the telling. I have no idea what really happened.”

“Why don’t you just tell me the story the way you remember telling it, then?”

My shoelaces were really dirty, I noticed. The sneakers would probably look almost new if I washed them. “Why do you care?” I asked. I tried not to whine, but I don’t think I succeeded.

He held up his hands in a yielding gesture. “We like to know our personnel. But as you know, Legion does not pressure its employees. This interview is entirely voluntary.”

I looked up hopefully. The sight-lines from his eyes were like two stick pins, the kind that boys use to attach butterflies to a science project. “You do care, don’t you,” I said despairingly. “Why?”

He closed the folder and clasped his hands over it, as if he were about to pray. “We have done our best to create an atmosphere of openness and safety here on the main campus. But you need to realize that Legion is the target of more corporate espionage than any other company in the world. Even governments want our secrets. We need to know if our employees have anything in their pasts that could be used to turn them against Legion. Things that could be used for blackmail, for example. And so it raises a red flag whenever an employee has a secret, something he doesn’t want to talk about.”

“There’s no blackmail potential here,” I said. “It’s over. It’s history.”

“Why don’t you just tell me?” he said paternally. “I’m sure we’ll both feel better after you do.”

I told him what I remember, which is a bunch of nonsense. Brains don’t really remember memories; they chew them like cows chew their cuds. Any time you pull a memory out and handle it, it changes by the time you put it back. And so you can wind up with all kinds of crap in your head, especially the kind of crap that will make people yell “Praise Jesus!” and drop some twenties in the basket.

So I was six. We were someplace in Oklahoma. We had a big tent in a field not far from where the Institute is now. Dad probably has a marker in the exact spot – or a better spot if he’s found one – but I wouldn’t know because I haven’t been back to look. We weren’t doing very well that night. There were probably only about forty people in the tent. In the years since, I must have met hundreds who claimed they were there, but they weren’t. Dad just wasn’t very good yet. It hadn’t come together for him the way it did later. He had the voice and the gestures, the showmanship. He must have had half the New Testament committed to memory, and he could spit it back out any time he wanted. Once in a while he’d have those flashes of brilliance, where women would swoon and people with arthritis would get up and dance. But not very often. He was like a gambler who won

just often enough to make him think he'd hit it big one day.

He was trying to work my brother Jackie into the act. Jackie was ten, and he was pretty. Tall, blonde like Mom, and he had a high voice that really sounded great on some of the old hymns. But he had stage fright. He'd get up there with people in front of him and just start to croak. Dad was trying to teach him to have visions and prophesy. Afternoons when nobody was around yet, they'd go through Jackie's script and try to get his moves right. When to fall down, how to look like your eyes were rolling up into your head, making your voice sound like it was somebody else's voice coming through you – stuff like that. “No! No! No!” I remember Dad yelling at him. “If you flop around like that people will think it's a demon in you and I'll have to cast it out. This is God you're supposed to have inside you, boy. God!” And then Jackie would forget his lines and if Dad had been drinking he'd hit him, and it got ugly sometimes. I think that's why Jackie had so much trouble putting it all together, because he was scared.

I had it easy by comparison. I was just supposed to clap to the music and maybe dance a little. I carried the collection basket around, and if we got enough I could have a dollar of my own to spend on candy the next day. But I'd get scared too, because of Jackie. I wanted him to do well and not get Dad mad at him.

That night was supposed to be Jackie's big opening. He was anxious about it, but Dad said he was ready and he'd better not blow it. His cue was Joel 2:28: “And it shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”

When I saw the turnout, I knew Dad wasn't going to be happy no matter what Jackie did. Jackie must have known it too, because when the energy was peaking and the moment was right, Dad yelled out the quote from Joel. And Jackie just stood there. And he yelled it out again and I looked over and Jackie was all white and sweating like he wanted to throw up.

And Dad lost it. He reached down into the front row, grabbed Jackie's shirtfront with one hand and yanked him up onto the platform. He threw Jackie down in the spot where he was supposed to flop, and I didn't know what was going to happen. I don't know what was in my head, either, but I just launched myself. It was like I flew up onto the platform and came down laying across Jackie. I tried to be as big as I could and spread myself out across him so that Dad wouldn't hit him. I must have surprised Dad as much as I surprised myself, because when I turned around to look up he was just standing there, looking like he was ten feet tall and his eyes bugging out.

And then it happened. Whatever it was. And this is where it gets fuzzy, because I had to testify to this hundreds of times over the next ten years. The first part, the part up to here, we fudged. We made up some other story entirely and I'd only remember this one late at night when I was supposed to be asleep. I didn't retell that part, so it stayed more-or-less intact in my head. But the rest has been packaged and repackaged again and again. So it's



all crap by now. Nothing like this happened, I'm sure.

But here's what I remember: Light came down from the top of the tent. It was like the top ripped open and there was light even brighter than sunlight coming down through the hole. It was white, with maybe just a hint of pink in it. I felt myself rising up into the light, and there was this big voice in me. Or rather, I was in it. It wasn't like I was saying this, it was like I was the thing that vibrates inside a speaker. And it said: "THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER BOND NOR FREE, THERE IS NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE: FOR YE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS." It's from somewhere in Galatians. I must have heard Dad say it sometime, but I didn't know that I knew it. It just came out.

And then the light wasn't coming down on me, it was coming out of me. I heard this awful chatter, like I was on a big party line and everybody was talking at once. Words and images went past way too fast for me to catch them. And I must have blacked out or something, because I don't remember anything after that. I remember waking up in the middle of the night and realizing that I was still in the big tent instead of the trailer, and that there were lots of people still buzzing around talking. But I had a headache and I wasn't interested, so I went back to sleep and slept until morning.

Eventually I found out what the other people thought had happened. They thought that at that moment they had all really *become* one. They all babbled when they talked about it, but the gist of it was that for a moment they were all one person. They saw through forty pairs of eyes and remembered forty lives and so on. They all came out completely convinced that their own individual lives didn't matter any more. They were one-in-God now, whatever that meant. They had great things to do together.

Of course it was Dad who eventually got control of that multi-person, God-fused being. They criss-crossed the country together and spread the word. Eventually it became its own little empire – TV, radio, a university, a hospital. I've lost track of it. I *wanted* to lose track of it. I don't know what really happened. I don't know what those people really experienced. And I certainly don't know how Dad convinced them that he should be the brains of that body. Even Jackie fell into it, which I never understood at all. Except that he's the heir now. He's on the Board. He's got his own radio show. I don't talk to him either.

That, abridged a little, was what I told the guy from Legion Security.

"And did your father try to make this *event* happen again?"

"Of course he did. He tried everything. For a couple years I was like some kind of lab animal. When I wasn't testifying, they were working on me. I don't remember most of it, except that they almost drowned me once. I remember that. I think they thought something would happen if I believed I was going to die."

"Did it?"

"No."

He reached into the inner pocket of his suit and did something, maybe switched off a recorder. Then he started collecting the papers back into the folder. “Interesting story,” he said.

“I’d appreciate it if it didn’t get out.”

He smiled as if I had made a joke. “We can keep a secret,” he said. I started to leave, but as I got to the door he called me back. “One more thing,” he said. He was shuffling papers again. “Did you take a blood test back when you were hired?”

“Sure. Doesn’t everybody?”

He found the paper he was looking for. “Got it,” he said. Then he did a double-take.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, nothing. Somebody screwed up. That’s all.”

“Do I need to take another test?”

He closed the folder quickly. “No. No, not a problem. Go back to work.”

Nothing happened. I didn’t expect anything to happen. They knew my history now, but so what? What did any of that have to do with software? I kept working in my cubicle. Maybe I’d look up occasionally to see if anybody was looking at me, but they weren’t. Everyone treated me just like before.

About a week later a bunch of us got transferred to the new Games division. We had heard that something big was brewing. There’d been a lot of speculation going back and forth over pizza in the evenings. Games were a big part of the new strategy. Gamers are early adopters of new tech, and they start young. Letting someone else control the gaming platforms was like leaving a door open. Whoever controlled it would accrue brand loyalty, and would always be in a position to attack our other markets. It couldn’t be allowed. Legion needed to have its own game platform, and its own games – better, more exciting, more realistic games than anyone else.

The Games division had a lot of new people. They gathered us all together in a big conference room, and Adam Door himself told us how important this was. I’d never seen him that close before. He told us we’d have to learn to think differently, that gaming wasn’t about completing a task, it was about making a world come alive. He told us that he had hired a consultant, and that the consultant had made a list of all the things Legion would have to do to become competitive in the gaming market. Door fired him. “We’re not here to compete,” he told us. “We’re here to dominate. I don’t want you to do something as good as Domo-san or Tenjay. I want to do things they would never even attempt. If we don’t make money for ten years, I don’t care. I have money. Legion has money. I don’t have the gaming market. I want it.”

I was assigned to a game whose working title was *Magus*. The short description was all about demon hunting and magical battles. It was very hush-hush, so much so that they moved me to a real office with a door that had to be locked at night. My monitor had to

face away from the hall so that no passers-by could see what I was doing. The whole thing seemed weird to me because I wasn't writing any code. I mean, I had written games when I was a student. CS students write games the way that chem students blow things up. It's how we impress each other. I expected to be rendering a landscape and working on motion algorithms, but I wasn't.

"Not yet," said Marjorie, my supervisor. She was a tall woman of some race that combined dark skin with long, flowing brown hair. I could not guess her age, but she was attractive enough that it seemed totally unfair to expect me to be intelligent in her presence. "We're still in the research phase. We need to get inside the *Magus* world first. We need to make it real to ourselves before we can make it real to the players."

*Whatever*, I thought. *You're signing the checks*. And so I did "research". It was like being in school again. I read everything she gave me. I thought that I'd be studying fantasy and horror novels, to know how worlds with demons and mages get portrayed. (I would have had an advantage there; I read a lot of demonic fiction while I was working up my courage to leave the crusade.) But instead she gave me books by authors who wanted to be taken seriously: Crowley, Levi, Agrippa, and a bunch of medieval rabbis. I had CD's full of scanned-in manuscripts hand-written by people with stupid pen names like Frater Something-In-Latin and Soror Something-Else-in-Latin. I read books about the design of rituals, and research papers about the structure of the brain.

"Magical ritual is like hacking," Marjorie told me. "You're looking to combine inputs in a way that the brain was not designed to handle. You overflow some buffers and underflow others, and the everyday facade of the operating system crashes." She would say stuff like that as if she expected me to follow it. Or maybe our discussions were themselves some kind of ritual that my brain was not designed to handle.

"I just wish they didn't keep talking about blood," I said.

She looked disapprovingly at me. When she shook her head the loose strands of her hair would keep waving for a few beats after she stopped. "The brain is a product of evolution," she explained, as if I were a student in her remedial class, "and nothing has more evolutionary significance than spilled blood."

One night when I was trying to go to sleep it dawned on me why I had been assigned to *Magus*. It was a mistake. The Miracle Mike story had made it into my file, and some management genius had decided that the supernatural was right up my alley. I wanted to laugh. I was sure I had neither aptitude nor interest for this stuff, but I would have to wait for Marjorie to figure that out and inform the Powers That Be. In the meantime, it was a job.

Parts of it even became interesting, after a while. At night sometimes I'd wind down by drinking decaf in the bookstore cafe that was two plazas down from my apartment complex. And once, while I was pretending to read the newspaper and watching the people go by, I thought back to those tent revivals. And I realized that none of it was accidental, that whether my father or any of the others realized it or not, it was all part of

some ancient technology. Most of the time, for most of the people, the tech misfired like a ten-thousand-year-old Mercedes discovered by some future civilization that has long forgotten about pistons and gears. But now and then, somebody would come into the tent with just the right amount of gas in his tank and gap in his spark plugs, and the ancient engine would roar like the voice of God.

Eventually Marjorie roughed out a ritual that she thought should be part of *Magus* and I said “fine”. I wasn’t sure what it had to do with anything or where it fit into the game. I knew that it was some kind of spirit-raising, and that the player needed to do it to bind his tribe together or something. We talked it through, wrote a script, and so on. It involved a pig sacrifice and some other stuff I’m not going to tell you.

If you’re disappointed, I don’t want to hear about it. Did you think I was going to tell you how it all worked, and what techniques we used? Forget it; I’m not that dumb. I don’t know why I’m telling you anything at all, but if I have any choice in the matter, I’m not going to give you anything reproducible. If you really wanted to know, you should have asked me then. Because I thought the whole thing was stupid then. But I was the one who was stupid.

Marjorie said we should report our progress to our superiors, and I wondered: *What progress?* I pictured our script and our diagrams turned into vugraphs, and a room full of Legion executives listening skeptically as I explained. If they asked “Where is there a game in this?” I was going to freeze like a small animal in the headlights. When she said, “Don’t worry, we’ll be ready” I thought she must be insane.

“When?” I asked.

“Tomorrow,” she replied.

And I thought: *Why not?* Giving me another week or two to prepare wasn’t going to make it any better, so why not just get it over with? Within a week I might be working on streaming video, or something else that made sense.

In the morning Marjorie was supposed to bring breakfast to my office so that we could eat while we got our presentation together, but she arrived with nothing but coffee, looking as uncorporate as I had ever seen her. She was barefoot and wore one of those brightly colored, one-piece, cover-all dresses like the Polynesians. I tried not to deduce whether she had underwear. “It’s executive coffee,” she said. And it must have been, because it tasted more bitter than anything I had found in the cafeteria.

“Who are we briefing?” I asked.

And she said, “Everyone.” I could feel my heart beating faster, and I was starting to sweat. I was sure that if she turned a little to the side and held up her arm, the big draping sleeve would show me the side of her breast. And then she said, “It’s time.” She left her coffee behind and walked out the door without waiting for me to follow. She carried nothing, and I worried that I’d lose her if I stopped to gather up my notes. I didn’t know where the meeting was, or even what kind of equipment we would have.

I rushed out the door with nothing and saw her far down the hall. She didn't seem to be hurrying, and yet my longest strides did not close the distance. When she turned a corner and was temporarily out of sight, I started to run. I was puffing and panting by the time I saw her again, just for a moment, before she made another turn. *What is she doing?* I wondered. *Why am I running? I'll get there and be sweaty and out of breath.* I caught and lost sight of her twice more. We were in parts of the complex I hadn't seen before. The halls were empty and the doors were all closed. I wasn't even sure I could find my way back. When I made a turn and didn't see her I panicked, but there was no fork she could have turned down, so I kept running. Sprinting now, I turned another corner and saw nothing but an open door into darkness.

The Polynesian dress was lying in the doorway.

Maybe there was no briefing, I thought. Maybe this was all an unnecessarily elaborate flirtation. *All you had to do was ask*, I thought.

And then I noticed that the colors on the dress seemed to be in flux: blue one second, then green, then orange. Maybe I had run too fast for the shape I was in. Maybe I was about to pass out.

*Maybe that wasn't coffee.*

I overcame my dizziness and stumbled into the dark room. The doors closed behind me and I heard drumming and chanting coming from no particular angle. I couldn't see the walls, but the acoustics made the room seem huge. A column of light came down from a very high ceiling. It illuminated a black cushion and nothing else.

"There is inside and there is outside," boomed an amplified voice. Was it hers? I couldn't tell. "Which do you choose?"

We weren't briefing the ritual, I realized. We were doing it. But for whom? How far were we going to go with it?

It was clear which role I was to play: I was the center, the channel. "I would be inside," I said, moving into the light. "Outside is winter. Outside is the beast. Outside is the enemy. I would be inside. I would be at the center."

I was happy to sit down on the cushion. I was still out of breath, still dizzy, still sweating. I sat and tried to regain my composure. The chanting and drumming got louder. What was I supposed to do again?

"Outside laughs at you," she whispered into my ear. She must have been right behind me, but when I turned she had pulled back into the darkness. "Outside is warm. Outside is rich. Outside is tasty. Leave the inside. Leave the light. Come into the darkness."

I could hear bare feet against the floor. Dancing. She was dancing just outside the beam of light. I saw motions in the darkness, but I couldn't assign body parts to them. I wanted to reach out and grab, but that was insane; it would ruin everything.

"You are afraid of the darkness," she taunted. "There are creatures in the darkness. They

are stronger than you. They will tear you to pieces.”

Maybe there were; maybe they would. I didn’t know how much reality she had built into this. The column of light shrunk down to a pencil width. I could barely see my own hands. She danced so close that I could feel the wind of her passage, but I could not see.

This was the part of the ritual that had never made sense to me. Somehow the player was supposed to widen the beam, to control more of the floor with the light. I had always pictured the light being controlled by a trackball or a slider. Maybe the player would have to have found or won some kind of magical object before the slider would work. But I didn’t have any opportunity to do something like that now.

The light beam began to pulse with the rhythm, to widen and then shrink. I sat with it for nearly a minute, frozen. And then I realized that the rhythm wasn’t the drums, it was my heart. *I’m controlling it with my mind*, I thought, *just like in the game*. And then I thought: *That’s nutty*. (It’s not. I know how they did it now, but I’m not telling.) I gave a shove with my thoughts and the beam expanded. Marjorie was illuminated for barely an instant before pulling back into the darkness. I didn’t get a very good look. She might have been wearing something sheer that matched her brown skin. Or not. I pushed again, and caught just the white sole of her bare foot as she retreated behind a circle of dancers.

The dancers moved in a counterclockwise circle around me, facing outward. They were naked and all seemed to be men, though I didn’t look around. They were clearly not professional dancers. Some were short and balding. Some were overweight. Their motions were simple, but seemed well practiced. No one broke rhythm.

They repeated my opening invocation. “I would be inside. Outside is winter. Outside is the beast. Outside is the enemy. I would be inside.” Like me, they stared into the darkness. They couldn’t see her either, I was sure, but I didn’t know how I was sure.

“Outside is warm. Outside is rich. Outside is tasty.”

The dancers turned to face me, to face the Center. The first one I saw was the security man who had interviewed me. “Inside is strong,” he said. One by one they came into my field of vision and one by one they spoke of the virtues of Inside. I recognized many of them from pictures I had seen in the newsletter or portraits that hung on the walls of the corporate Atrium. We were doing this ritual for a much higher level of executives than I had imagined. I couldn’t believe that they were here, naked, having practiced their steps. Had they fasted? Were they drugged as well?

The last of the dancers stepped into my field of vision. He came much closer than the others and faced me nose to nose. “Inside is *hungry*,” said Adam Door.

I heard a booming, thundering, ripping noise that seemed to come from inside my brain. I fell backward and hit the back of my head on the hard floor. But at the same time I watched myself fall backward. I watched *kaleidoscopically*, from many angles, including one that stood directly over my body. And for the second time in my life I heard a voice that spoke not from my throat, but by vibrating my whole body. “INSIDE IS MANY.

INSIDE IS ONE. INSIDE IS LEGION.”

I/we/Legion sniffed the air. We smelled the female sweat and menstrual blood. And something else as well. We heard the running feet – two feet and four, running side by side away from us. We sprang to the hunt, into the darkness.

Except for me. I lay on the hard floor, looking up into the blinding light. I was Legion, but I was broken. Legion ran through the darkness without me. He did not need me; he had arms and legs and teeth to spare. We fell on the pregnant sow as if we were one great predatory beast. Our arms tackled its legs, our teeth pierced its tough hairy skin. The warm, salty blood was on our faces. We tore the piglets from their womb while the sow was still squealing and ripped them with our teeth. We did not fight over the hearts. We did not jostle to drink the thickest streams of blood. There was no rivalry between us; we were one.

My last, meaningless, impotent thought was to wonder if the woman had gotten away.

I woke up on the warmest, firmest, most comfortable mattress I had ever experienced. The sheets around me were clean and pressed without the slightest trace of institutional abrasiveness. I heard aetherial music and opened my eyes to soft light that seemed to come from all directions.

“Welcome back to the land of the living,” Marjorie said. She was sitting next to my bed with a notebook on her lap and a pen in her hand. She wore a grey business suit with an off-white turtleneck stretching almost to her chin. Her hair was styled and her makeup was flawless. It seemed grossly impertinent to imagine that she could ever have been naked.

“What ...” I started to ask, but the questions all logjammed somewhere prior to my verbal centers.

“You are in Mr. Door’s private infirmary. You seem to have hurt yourself during the meeting, but we still haven’t determined whether anything more than a simple concussion is involved.”

“The meeting ...”

“Went very well. Mr. Door is quite pleased with you, with all of us. Legion is pleased. You have proven yourself to be uniquely valuable.”

“Legion ...” I squinted hard and then opened my eyes wide, trying to shake out the cobwebs. It didn’t help. *Legion is pleased*. I had never heard a compliment phrased that way before. High-ranking Legionnaires didn’t usually anthropomorphize the company. I propped myself up on my elbows. “What did we do?”

“Exactly what the ritual was designed to do. We brought something new into the physical world.”

Marjorie seemed to be taking *Magus* far too seriously. I understood that we were supposed to be making the gameworld real to ourselves so that we could make it real to the player. But her tone was a little too matter-of-fact for my comfort. “And what was that?” I asked uncertainly.

She frowned and put down her pen. “Didn’t you help me design the ritual? We raised an egregore.”

Her brown eyes met mine without the slightest twinkle. *She’s serious*, I thought.

“An egregore,” I repeated slowly. I wanted to ask her what that was, but I realized that I knew. I knew all about egregores, just like I knew about unicorns and manticores and werewolves. I’d been studying them for months. And she was right: We had designed the ritual to raise an egregore. “But ...” I started, and then realized I didn’t know how to finish my objection. Nineteenth century logicians used to argue about whether the thought of a unicorn was a real thought. I hadn’t realized I had an opinion on that question, but I did. My thoughts about egregores had *not* been real thoughts. They were just markers that I moved around in my mind in place of thoughts, the way that kings move armies around on maps without really grasping that they stand for thousands of living, breathing people. Now Marjorie was insisting that I *think* about egregores.

An egregore, I knew, is a technical term that magicians use to describe the spirit of a group or tribe or coven. To the extent that I had taken egregores seriously at all, I thought they were just a way of talking about culture and group dynamics, a figure of speech. France, for example, has a personality that persists through the generations, and is distinctly different from the persisting personality of America. You can imagine, if you want, spirits that these personalities belong to. Egregores. A theologian named Walter Wink had recently started using the word *angel* in more or less the same way, in an attempt to assign moral responsibility to the cultures of countries and churches and corporations. But it was just a word game to me.

And then I thought back to the ritual, and the way that I had *felt* the other men tearing pig-throats with their teeth. *It’s Miracle Mike all over again*, I thought. I fell back onto my pillow and then wished that I hadn’t. The back of my head still hurt.

“You probably shouldn’t think too hard right now,” Marjorie advised. “I’m sure Adam will be happy to answer your questions when he shows up. By now the staff has probably told him that you’re awake.”

I had been asleep for a day and a half. Marjorie left, and a young black nurse with a golden cross hanging from her neck came to help me walk to the bathroom. Ten minutes later she found me sitting on the toilet crying. I didn’t know what I was crying about. I hadn’t realized I was doing it, but I was in some kind of emotional hangover. All my feelings were out of whack. “Don’t despair,” she whispered as she helped me up. “I can help you.” I did feel better for a few seconds, but after she left I realized that the last thing I needed was another mysterious person whispering cryptic nothings into my ear. *To hell with them all*, I thought.



I napped again, and woke up when Adam Door arrived. It seemed like a bizarre dream from which I would soon awaken. The richest man in the world was sitting on my bed like an old friend. He was in his forties now and had hints of grey on his temples, but looked boyish nonetheless, as if he had come to my dorm room to see if I wanted to catch a movie at the Brattle. He exuded calmness and confidence. For some reason I was certain everything would be clear now that he had arrived.

“I apologize for fooling you like that,” he said. “But it seemed necessary. Your previous experience of mediumship left you with a lot of conscious defenses that would have prevented you from succeeding. We had to make you think it was a game.”

“Like Ender,” I said. *Mediumship*. That was another word I had never had a real thought about.

“Except that you gave birth to something, rather than destroying it.”

Part of me watched this whole conversation from a distance, as if Adam and I were characters on a screen. I was amazed that my character was taking this all so calmly and talking about it as if it made sense. “And what exactly did I give birth to?”

“The Legion egregore.” His glasses had slipped down to the end of his nose, and he pushed them back up to the bridge. “But that’s just a name to you right now, I suppose. Something you’ve read about in books.” I nodded. “Let me see if I can explain it to you, then, because I would like to get your voluntary cooperation from here.”

He cleared his throat and shifted his sitting position on the bed. “Ever since human beings have had words to express abstract ideas, nobody has quite known what to do with them. The abstractions seem real in some ways, and yet in other ways they don’t. Plato’s forms, Jung’s archetypes – they sort of exist and sort of don’t. Buddha says that your ego is the same kind of thing. If all the cells of your body got together and debated whether Mike DeSalvo really exists or is just an abstract metaphor to express their sense of unity, I’m sure they’d have an interesting discussion.

“That’s why the ancients invented the idea of a spirit world – a place where the abstractions could live. Over here, in the physical world, you have a bunch of cells congealing into a body. Over there: Mike DeSalvo – your soul, if you want to call it that.

“But from the very beginning people have recognized that it’s not quite that simple. The spirit world has its own logic. You can create any kind of abstraction you want, but that doesn’t mean there’s a spirit on the other side to match it. Plato believed that a form corresponded to horses, but not to left-handed Spartans. Why not? He didn’t say. Your body has a spirit, but your elbow? Not so much.”

He reached under the bed, opened a refrigerator I hadn’t be aware of, and took out a can of Coke. After a few sips he was ready to continue.

“All the way back, spiritually open people – mystics – have noticed that there are larger spirits than the ones that are our individual souls. And empire builders have looked for

ways to use those spirits to unify their empires. Every would-be pharaoh had to have his staff of magicians. Every king has to have his priests.

“The problem has been that the Mage and the Mystic are opposite types. Oversimplifying a little, mystics are born and mages are made. The two development paths are completely different. There’s no reason they *can’t* align in a single individual, but they very seldom do. And so the Mystic sees the spirits but can’t manifest them, while the Mage tries to manifest what he can’t see. And neither is well set up to amass the kind of temporal power necessary to do some serious social engineering. The result has been a great number of stillborns and accidents. Because, you see, you can’t just call down any old spirit into any old group of people. They have to match. Otherwise the body ‘gives up the ghost’ to use the old King James phrase.”

If anything, Door was even more matter-of-fact than Marjorie had been. I wanted to believe that he was insane, but the situation was worse than that. I was following his line of thought. “What happened to me ... the last time?” I asked.

“Your father, you mean. The two of you managed to call down an egregore, all right, into the people in that tent. But neither of you knew what you were doing. It was an accident. The egregore was dead within hours – minutes maybe.”

“And the DeSalvo Institute? His ministry?”

“Clippoth,” he said, using another technical term that I recognized from my reading. “Shells. The walking dead. Many human institutions and more than a few churches are like that. A spirit lived there briefly, and now the individuals keep it going out of nostalgia or for power or some other human-scale motive.”

He sipped the Coke again, and seemed to be waiting for me to ask a question.

“What about Legion?”

He nodded; it was the right question. “Legion is the spirit of duality, of separation. Inside and Outside. Us against Them. It has a definite character: it is greedy, aggressive. It sees itself as unique, and not at all relative. A relativist would say that our Inside is somebody else’s Outside, but Legion doesn’t see it that way. We are not like Them. Their point of view doesn’t matter. We will dominate Them What is Theirs will become Ours.”

Maybe it was his calm certainty, and maybe it was the recent experience we had shared, but I had no doubt at all that Door was talking about a real being. I knew Him; as if I had been seeing Him in nightmares all my life.

“I had an early mystical experience in which Legion became very real to me,” Door continued. “Like you back in Oklahoma, I was just a boy. It’s an interesting story – not quite as good as your meeting with whatever spirit you raised for your father – but it’s a sidetrack. I can tell you some other time. Ever after that, Legion has been a presence in my life. A companion. An advisor.”

“What Would Legion Do?” I commented.

“Precisely. And yet, I was not the physical embodiment Legion; I knew that. Legion was bigger than me, and he stayed in the spirit world. Many people have gone insane by identifying with a spirit that size. ‘Archetypal inflation,’ Jung called it. He did a seminar once about the Zarathustra spirit, and how it had driven Nietzsche insane. Thousands of years before, Moses realized the same thing. ‘No man can see the face of God and live,’ he said. He knew that it takes a tribe to manifest something the size of Yahweh.”

“Or a corporation,” I offered.

“Yes. From the time I was 13, I began thinking about how to manifest Legion. I studied magic. I studied religion. Around the same time I was learning about computers. I thought it was something completely different, a hobby, maybe something I could use to get a job someday. And then I realized the connection: Duality. Separation.”

“Binary,” I said. “Zeros and ones.”

“I realized that my life wasn’t divided between Legion and computers. The same thing that attracted Legion to me attracted me to computers. I was 17 by then. And I saw what I had to do. With Legion’s help and advice, I would build a software corporation, and shape it to be his body. Its culture would be like his thoughts, its behavior like his actions. I had been born a mystic and transformed myself into a mage. Now I had to build an empire.”

“You had to become pharaoh as well.”

“So to speak.”

Reading what I’ve just written, I can tell that you’re probably expecting Door to break loose with a mad, Ming-the-Merciless style cackle. That’s my fault. Nothing could have been further from his manner. As we talked he became just a bit animated, perhaps, but no more so than any geek describing his new project. He finished his Coke and carefully placed the can on the nightstand.

“Why did you need me?”

He shrugged and looked embarrassed. “Well, after a few years the Legion body – that’s what *corporation* means, you know – was taking shape. The Legion spirit was sitting there in the spirit world, and I realized I had no idea how to make the connection. I understood it in theory, of course. It’s a feedback process – all consciousness is a feedback process; don’t get me started. The body, in some germinal way, begins to see itself as the spirit; the spirit as the body. The initial vision changes them both just a little. But that little bit makes them identify a little bit better, which changes them both again, and so on. That’s exactly what happens when you acquire your adult ego in adolescence, so it’s not magic – I mean, it *is* magic, but it’s not *unusual*. It’s happening all the time, just not on this scale.

“But the initial spark, the seed crystal – how does that happen? It takes an act of mediumship, which is yet another role. And it turns out that it’s not an acquired skill like

magic. Like mysticism, you have to be born to it. It's quite literally genetic – we've found the markers." He smiled at that memory of scientific triumph, then shook his head sadly. "And I don't have it. You do. You're off the charts, it turns out, so you're perfect. We should have begun this process when we first hired you, but someone misclassified you. Then Peter started investigating random acts of mediumship around the world and stumbled onto the Miracle Mike story. Imagine his surprise when he discovered you were already here."

I was glad to let him talk. I was very tired. Even speaking seemed exhausting. "But now I've done it. So why do you need my 'voluntary cooperation'?"

"Because the body of Legion is more than just the Board. Legion is thousands of people. Right now we've had a glimpse – and you should see how excited the other members of the Board are. They've heard me talk about Legion, but they've never really *experienced* Him until now. We've had a little burst of electrical activity in the brain, as it were, but the heart and the lungs and the kidneys are still cold.

"If we stop now, in a few days all those guys will be just like your father's people. They'll have memories of being part of some larger being, and they'll yearn for it and try to recreate it, but it will be over."

"So I have to do it again," I said. I wanted to go back to crying. I wanted to disbelieve everything, to think that I was still lying on floor of the ritual room having a concussive hallucination. My head hurt. It all seemed like too much.

"Bigger," he said. "Much bigger. But don't worry about it. It will be easier next time, because you've experienced Legion now. You'll know what you're reaching out to connect with. You'll be surprised how easy it is."

I knew he was right, but at the same time I knew he was wrong. I had experienced Legion, all right, and He had scared the crap out of me. I knew exactly what to reach out for, but could I do it? Falling into scalding water once doesn't make it easier to jump in the next time.

I closed my eyes hard. I didn't want to cry in front of Door.

He patted my hand and got up from the bed. "Rest," he said. "Whatever you need, you'll have. You're on the Inside now."

I tried to sleep again and failed. I tried to distract myself by watching television, but I couldn't follow anything. The black woman with the cross brought a tray of food in, but I couldn't imagine eating. An hour later she came back, looked at the tray, and said, "Now you have got to eat, Mr. DeSalvo. You've been through an ordeal, and the only way you're going to start to feel normal again is if you get some food into you." She folded her arms and stood over me in an almost menacing posture. "I'm going to stand right here until you at least eat those carrots."

Something struck me odd about that, but it took a moment for me to realize what it was. “You’re not offering me an option. You’re not asking for my voluntary cooperation.”

“No sir,” she said. “I’m getting ready to open up your mouth and shovel those carrots in myself.”

My emotions were so out of whack that I felt enormously touched, as if there was more nurturance in her threats than I had received in many years. I started to smile, but then I felt unworthy and began to cry again.

“Now stop that,” she scolded. She sat down on the bed, took the tray on her lap, and spooned some carrot slices into my mouth. “Whatever it is can’t be as bad as all that.”

I concentrated on chewing and swallowing. “But it is,” I said. “I’ve done something awful. I’ve let a demon loose.” *Now I’ve said it*, I thought. I waited for her to laugh or for my mouth to break into an embarrassed smile, but neither happened. I really believed what I was saying, I realized, and this woman was taking it seriously.

She sniffed dismissively. “Like the world’s never seen one of them before.” She scooped up more carrots, and as she put them into my mouth she leaned forward to whisper. “There are people who can help you, but we can’t talk here. Be brave. Have faith.” Then she sat up straight and said out loud, “You think you can take it from here, or do I have to feed you the rest of the tray too?”

“No,” I said. “I think I can handle it.”

And I did. After she left I finished the entire meal, including the turkey, which tasted much more like animal flesh than turkey ever had before. *I’ll have to become a vegetarian now*, I thought.

I didn’t know who this woman was or who she knew, and the most likely explanation was that she was part of some larger scheme of Door and Legion. But I decided to indulge myself in a little wishful thinking and imagine that there was some mysterious way in which this could all turn out for the best. That tiny hope was just enough to let me fall asleep.

Two days later I was back on the job. There was much planning to be done. Having performed the small-scale ritual and analyzed the results, Marjorie was now thinking about the challenges of scaling up. Adam, of course, had been working out the general outlines for decades, but there were still many details to be filled in. They decided to take my involvement as an excuse to start over, to re-examine the plan from the ground up.

The first question to answer was: How big did the ritual have to become? Moses, after all, hadn’t taken all twelve tribes to the top of Sinai with him. Three priests and seventy elders had been sufficient; the other Israelites had to be content with witnessing the thunder and lightning from a distance and hearing the story. “And the Yahweh egregore lived for centuries,” Adam claimed, “all the way through the time of the Judges. Parts of

the body were still twitching in Solomon's day." Clearly a core group – larger than the Board but smaller than the entire company – needed to have the full treatment. The rest would require a lesser experience, a quickening of some sort. Adam thought the born-again experience was a good model. "Only twelve people had the full experience of Pentecost, but they also had something they could transmit to newcomers. Their mistake was making the core group too small, though, and not keeping them all together afterward. That egregore only made it through a few decades, at most. By the time the gospels were written down, it was all over."

Adam and I had long talks about the tent revival process and its techniques for inducing the Holy Spirit.

"It's like an electrical current making a corpse twitch," he said. "You have the transforming experience, but then what do you do? Joining an actual church is always a disappointment, because the body you were prepared to join is dead. But Legion will be alive. There won't just be an electrical jolt, there will be a ongoing psychic metabolism you can plug into."

From time to time I would take a step back and marvel that it was so easy to fall into line. Once again I was spending twelve hours a day on the job. *The Manhattan Project must have been like this*, I thought. The technical details were fascinating and Adam's excitement was contagious. Only at night, when I was home – Adam had offered me the guest apartment of his own on-campus mansion, but I told him that moving would be a distraction – did I stop to think about the implications. *Legion will eat the world*, I thought. *I have to do something*. But that thought leached away all the energy I had borrowed from Adam, and I felt very small and helpless and tired. *What is the world to me*, I thought, *that I should risk my neck for it? Why does the world deserve anything better than Legion? Why should I give up my place on the Inside, where all my wants will be provided?* Those thoughts became my own little unproductive feedback process; I looped through them many times without getting any deeper.

If I got home before the bookstore closed at 11, I'd get a decaf latte and a newspaper that I pretended to read. Really all I did was watch the people. *Will they enjoy being predators?* I wondered. *Do they deserve to be anything more than prey?*

One evening an elderly man with his own coffee and his own newspaper came to my table. "Do you mind if I sit here?" he asked. As he leaned forward, the neckline of his sport shirt opened enough for me to see some white chest hair and a golden cross.

"Please do," I said politely.

"The answer to your question," he said, "is that the world means the world to you."

"It's where I keep all my stuff," I quipped cynically. It was an old line from the superhero cartoon spoof *The Tick*.

"It's more than that," he said without rancor. "But acknowledging how much more is painful."

*This is not what I need*, I thought. I picked up my newspaper and started reading. The government was giving the rich another tax cut. Adam would save millions. My companion read his paper also. After several minutes of silence I boiled over.

“So why are you here?” I demanded.

“To help, if I can.”

“By sitting here reading the newspaper with me?”

He put his paper down. His movements were slow and graceful, as if he had all the time in the world. “What kind of help would you like?”

I felt tricked, out-manuevered. They came to me. I hadn’t asked anybody for help. “I just want to know if I have any choices,” I said.

“There are always choices.”

“Any *good* choices.”

“*Good*,” he said, rolling the word on his tongue like a wine connoisseur evaluating the new vintage. “What a value-laden word that is. Very unscientific. Do you want to be *good*?”

This guy was starting to piss me off. “If you’ve got something to tell me, just tell me. Don’t play games with me. I’m sick of games.”

He nodded. “Very well then,” he said. “I’ll interpret your question: You want to know if there is any other way to be part of something larger than yourself. You’ve come to look at yourself with disgust, and that causes you to look at everyone else with disgust as well. As individuals, after all, we’re all rather sad, pathetic little beings. We’re born; we chase after some form or other of trivial amusement; other people take advantage of us for their own sordid little purposes; and we die. You want to know if there can be more than that, if we can be part of something living, something meaningful, something *good*.”

It was a good question. I’m not sure that it was *my* question, but it was a good one.

“And?”

“The answer is yes. Not all the other egregores are dead. I belong to one who is quite different from Legion.”

“So why haven’t you taken over the world?”

“It’s not our way. We don’t force ourselves on people. We wait for them to become ready, and then we make ourselves known.”

I had heard this rap before. It’s part of the standard secret-society pitch: We’re letting you join us because you are part of the Secret Elect. There’s a certain kind of person who has been telling himself all his life that he belongs to the Secret Elect. No matter how skeptical he is about everything else in life, when a mysterious stranger tells him out loud what he’s been whispering to himself, he falls for it like a ton of bricks. “So you think

I'm ready?"

"No," the old man said sadly. "This situation would be so much less complicated if you were."

"Then why approach me?"

"Because," he said, "I think things may be about to get desperate, so I've taken it on myself to bend the rules a little. I hope, when it's all over, that you'll forgive us."

"For what, exactly?"

The old man sighed. He reached behind his head and unclasped his necklace. He set the cross and its gold chain on the center of the table.

"This is a talisman," he said. "I trust you know what that means. Go home, lock all the doors, latch all the windows, and make yourself as safe and comfortable as you can. Then hold this cross in your palm, close your eyes, and let yourself reach out for what you really want. You'll have an experience, and then we'll have more to talk about." He got up from the table, taking his newspaper but leaving the coffee. "If you find you want to have that conversation, come back here and sit with the *LA Times* rather than your usual paper. Until you do that, none of us will bother you."

I let the cross sit there for ten minutes after he left. I opened the newspaper in front of my face, half hoping that the cross would be gone the next time I looked. Finally I scooped it up and put it in my pocket. When I got home I locked both the doors and latched all the windows.

And then I went to bed.

At work, planning continued. We determined (via a calculation I'm sure I couldn't reproduce) that 144 Legionnaires would be sufficient for the initial establishment of the egregore in physical space. With that large a group, the Legion consciousness would be continuous.

"You mean all 144 minds will be united all the time?" I asked.

"No, of course not," Marjorie answered impatiently. "An immediate feeling of identity with the egregore and unity of thought and perception among the members – it's always just a peak experience. Physical and informational laws are not violated over the long term. Individuals will still think and talk and communicate as they always have, just as your cells continue to do their individual cellular activities."

"The two hemispheres of your brain are both you," Adam commented. "But if the physical connection between them is cut your right hand literally doesn't know what your left hand is doing."

Marjorie continued, "Communication will have to increase, in fact, so that the Legion subprocess in my mind stays synchronized with the Legion subprocess in yours."



“We’ll all *want* to communicate more,” Adam added, “to experience the feedback of the Legion process.”

I wondered to what extent the egregore we had raised in the first ritual was still present, and to what extent it had faded. Marjorie and Adam clearly *did* want to communicate more, and they all but finished each other’s sentences.

“So,” I said, getting back to nuts and bolts, “twelve people each from each of the twelve divisions of the company.”

“And we keep them here,” Marjorie said, “until the division sends us twelve more. Always 144 are here at headquarters, until everyone has been brought into Legion.”

“By then each of the local offices will have a critical mass of Legion cells, so that they also will be centers of continuous Legion consciousness,” Adam said.

The day we designed the secondary ritual, the one to spread Legion consciousness to newcomers after the egregore was firmly established, I felt unusually depressed. My experience and insights had been invaluable. Now that I was out of denial about the Miracle Mike experience, I was discovering talents and aptitudes I had never suspected and incorporating experiences from my entire life. The “training”, as we called it, looked so much like a revival meeting that it brought back bitter memories for me.

I brought home a bag of Chinese takeout and set it down on my kitchen table, next to the cross. “Hell,” I said. I rechecked my doors and windows, then went into my bedroom and sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed with the covers pulled up over my head like a tent. I held the cross inside my right fist. I closed my eyes.

And I let myself want.

I trotted a few of the standard want-objects in front of my mind’s eye, to see if that was what I really wanted: money, fame, sex, toys. Then I tried more abstract yearnings on for size: my father’s approval, reuniting with Jackie, Mom still being alive. I figured this was a Christian talisman, so just for laughs I thought about their catalog of wares: eternal life, forgiveness, salvation. It was all good, but none of it really struck home.

Eventually I stopped trying to picture an object of desire. I just thought about wanting as an experience in itself. I sat there under the covers and thought about myself as a person who wants, a person who is wanting, a person incomplete. I pictured me, and then a hole that was not-me, a hole that I wanted to fill with something. And then it passed through my mind that the hole was me too, and that it wasn’t a hole, it was just a shape. It was my shape. And then I had a bunch of other thoughts that have been written down a million times and that always sound stupid when you read them later: That there isn’t any me and not-me. That it’s all just one thing, and that thing is Good. And then I didn’t have any thoughts at all for a long time, because if everything is You, then there isn’t anything outside You to think about. Or maybe I had every possible thought simultaneously, and it only seemed like I wasn’t thinking, because no single thought stood out above the others.

It was almost midnight by the time I came out of it. Too late to make contact at the bookstore. I was tired, but I was giddy. Part of me believed that I didn't need any system with cafes and newspapers. The Universe was all One; I was connected to everything. All I had to do was reach out with my mind and I would find that elderly man. We could have our conversation right Here, because everyplace is Here.

People get like that after a spiritual experience. They take these kinds of thoughts seriously. That's why human religions are such a mess.

I was almost myself again by morning, but there was no way I could pull myself together enough to go to work. I called in and told Marjorie I had a cold. "That's biology for you," she said.

I went to the bookstore as soon as it opened. I got a bagel and a caffeinated latte this time, along with an *LA Times*. The place looked totally different by daylight. It sounded different too; it was full of mothers meeting for coffee and toddlers fussing in their strollers. I wondered if anyone in the old man's egregore would think to look for me during the day, or if it would be somebody else's shift. But I hadn't even finished reading the comics yet when the same man appeared. I stood up and then we sat down at the same time.

"I don't think I know your name," I said.

"Simon."

"Like the apostle."

He shrugged. "It's my birth name. I didn't choose it."

I fished the cross-and-chain out of my shirt pocket and laid it on the table. "I believe this is yours."

He picked it up, fiddled with the catch for a moment, and then fastened the chain around his neck. "So what happened?"

"I had your basic William James variety of religious experience."

"And?"

"I think it's a trick. Like pulling a coin out of somebody's ear." I hadn't put it together that clearly until then.

I thought he might be offended, but he wasn't. "That's one kind of truth about it. It's not a special act of grace; it's something people can learn to do."

"And it's deceptive. I wasn't really one with the Universe."

Simon nodded. "No more so than usual. I could make up a physical explanation, if you want."

"So could I. What's yours?"

“There’s a part of the human brain that is always trying to establish the boundaries of Self, and another part that is trying to map where that Self is in space. It’s unconscious; you have no control over it. If you get into the right meditative/emotional state, or if you get just the right jolt of energy from the outside – like from a talisman – the inputs to those modules can get disrupted. It’s a bit of a design flaw, you might say. Their efforts to recover interfere with each other. So they each start casting wider and wider nets, trying to get input. But no matter what boundaries and locations they postulate, they can’t confirm them.”

“So your brain is telling you that you have no boundaries and no location.”

“You’re everything. You’re everywhere.”

*Tricks*, I thought disgustedly. *Like convincing cancer patients not to feel their pain for a minute and telling them that they’re healed.*

“But you’re not,” I said. “You’re not experiencing the presence of God. There’s just something misfiring in your brain.”

Simon shook his head. “Yes and no,” he said. “It’s an experiential metaphor. Before, unity-with-God is just a phrase to you. After, you have an experience you can hang it on. You can say: *Oh, it would be like this.* If you had been ready, that experience would have told you everything you need to know about us.”

That sounded like a non sequitur to me, so I figured I must not be ready. Or else it was just a non sequitur. “Try something else.”

Simon sipped his coffee and stared out the window. “How about a parable? Imagine a tribe living by a river. The land is rich, there’s lots of game. They’ve got no reason to go anywhere else. They forget where they came from. After a few generations they think they’re the only people in the world. Their circle of knowledge and their circle of caring are identical. They’re happy.”

“Paradise,” I said.

“Eden. They’re innocent in their ignorance. They throw all their refuse, all their garbage, all their sewage into the river, because – why not? The river takes it away, and they have no idea where *away* is. They have no reason to think about it.

“Then one day a canoe comes up the river. There’s a man in the canoe, and he tells them that he comes from another tribe of people. His people are sick now, and the river god told him to find the people who live upstream and get them to stop dumping everything in the river. Then his people can be healthy.”

“Sound advice.”

“For the downstream people. But what do the upstream people do? It’s not easy to change all your habits, and it’s especially hard to do it for the benefit of people that you have never met and can barely imagine. So they have choices to make. But one choice they don’t have: They can’t choose to go back to being innocent. Their circle of awareness has

grown, and now they have to decide what to do with their circle of caring.”

“Maybe nothing,” I suggested. “Send the guy back to his sickly tribe and tell them to screw themselves. Or better yet, kill him, dump the body, and let the river take him back to his people. They’ll get the message.”

“That’s one option,” Simon said. “Leave the circle of caring where it is. Now, because the circle of awareness is bigger, you realize that your circle of caring has an inside and an outside. There are people who live Outside, but you don’t care about them.”

“Legion,” I said.

He nodded. “Legion. And because the circle of awareness might expand further someday, you have no idea how far Outside goes, or what it includes. There might be powerful forces out there. You might be harming them in ways you have never imagined. They may be getting angry. They may be preparing to strike you.”

“Maybe you should strike them first,” I suggested.

“And when you go to conquer them, they tell you about more people, even further out. It never ends. As long as your circle of caring has an outside, you always live with anxiety and with fear. You can never be strong enough to live without fear.”

“And the other choice?”

“Don’t let your circle of caring have an outside. Expand your circle of caring so that it fills your circle of awareness. And then expand it even further.”

“I don’t know who’s out there, but I love them,” I suggested.

“Precisely. Compassion without boundaries. That’s what I hoped the experience would show you.”

“And I suppose there’s a spirit for that, too. Like Legion.”

“Yes,” he said. “The Christ spirit.”

I nodded. “I thought we’d get there eventually. So you people are Christians. Praise Jesus.”

Simon shook his head. “We haven’t gotten to Jesus yet.”

“But you just said – ”

“Jesus was a man who lived and died centuries ago. Christ is a spirit that has existed at least as long as human awareness.”

“In the beginning was the Logos,” I quoted. “But – ”

“Jesus was probably the greatest mage of human history. He succeeded in doing what no one had done before him. He built a community and manifested the Christ spirit as its egregore.”

“Like Adam and Legion?”

“Better. Door is manifesting Legion because they have a special affinity. Jesus chose. The story of the forty days in the desert, of the temptations – the kernel of truth is that Jesus all but took a census of the spirit world. He found the Christ spirit for himself, and then began choosing followers to manifest it. The Christ spirit is probably the hardest one to manifest. There’s a special problem. You usually need blood to manifest a spirit, but choosing a victim to sacrifice puts you outside the Christ paradigm. The victim is an Other, and you can’t have Others in Christ.”

“So what did he do?”

Simon pulled the cross out from under his shirt. “The most powerful blood is the magician’s own,” he said.

I sat and thought about that for awhile. I couldn’t imagine Adam deciding to sacrifice his own life, even for Legion. It would invalidate everything that they both stood for. And I couldn’t imagine deciding to sacrifice myself, either. Not because I stand for anything, but just because I’m a coward.

I changed the subject.

“So there are other spirits?”

“Lots of them. The gospels garble together events from various parts of Jesus’ career, and so they wound up preserving invocations for any number of spirits.”

The mention of the gospels reminded me of something. “Adam told me that the Christ egregore died, that it was dead before the gospels were written.”

“Not exactly. Most of the community lost touch with the egregore. The four canonical gospels were written by people who knew they had lost something and were trying to get it back. Only one gospel comes from the community of the Christ egregore.”

“John?” I guessed.

“Thomas. The doubter. Of all the disciples, Thomas was always the most skeptical of the whole project. That’s why they left him out of the first attempt to contact the egregore after Jesus’ death; the other disciples didn’t think they could overcome his skepticism. After they’d done it once they brought him back in. And, as so often happens, the strongest faith comes from overcoming the strongest doubt.

“As the apostles started to collect followers and the commune began to have some property, Thomas began worrying about corruption. And when that lunatic Paul came in, raving about his own visions in the desert and trying to bring in everybody without any testing or training, Thomas decided to take some precautions. He gathered a few strong souls together, enough to keep the egregore alive by themselves, if need be, and went off to found his own community. Every time the others found him again, he moved further out. Eventually he settled in India. That’s where we come from. The Christ egregore didn’t see the Western world again until the Middle Ages.”

“So Peter and Paul get corrupted by the institution and go on to found the Catholic

Church, while you guys keep the true spirit,” I summarized. Simon nodded. “And out of all the hundreds of millions who claim the word today, your little group are the only authentic Christians.” He nodded again. “I think I’ve heard that claim before somewhere.”

“I’m sure you have,” Simon acknowledged. “And by their fruits you shall know them.”

That’s probably the most annoying thing about religious people: the way they’ll quote scripture and then just sit there, as if there is nothing more to be said. But none of this was solving my problems. “So what can you do to stop Legion?” I asked.

“Nothing.”

I had a flash of temper that I controlled before it caused me to do anything. I set my cup down carefully. “Nothing? What do you mean nothing? You claim” I started ticking points off on my fingers “that you’re the original Christians; that while Adam is struggling to get his egregore manifested, you’ve had yours up and running for two thousand years; that you’re the heirs of the most powerful magician in history. I know that you’ve infiltrated the company. You’ve even got somebody on Adam’s private medical staff. You’re probably responsible for them misclassifying me. If nothing else, you could have poisoned Adam years ago. Why can’t you do anything?”

“Adam Door is not our enemy. Legion is not our enemy. We have no enemies. If we did, we would split the world in two, divide it between our friends and our enemies. It would kill the spirit we are trying to maintain.”

“You’re kidding.”

Simon assured that he wasn’t. I couldn’t believe him.

“Legion won’t share the world with another egregore,” I said. “As soon as he realizes that you exist, he’ll hunt you down.”

Simon nodded. “Most likely.”

“But he’s not your enemy?”

“We cannot wish him harm without destroying ourselves.”

“Isn’t that taking ‘Turn the other cheek’ a little bit too far?”

“We don’t think so. Take our point of view seriously for a moment. What if you were in danger of dying, and a doctor told you that the vast majority of your body’s cells could survive, at the cost of wiping out your spirit, your personality, and all the aetherial qualities that you think of as yourself? Maybe you could even become an immortal vegetable. Is that tempting?”

It wasn’t, but I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of admitting it. “So why are you here, if you can’t help me?”

“I didn’t say we can’t help you. I said we can’t harm anyone.”

We discussed options for help. They could help me escape, he said. And I laughed.

Unless there was a lot more hocus-pocus in their bag of tricks than they'd shown so far, there was no way they could keep Adam from finding me. And even if they did, he'd eventually find another medium, manifest Legion, and hunt Simon's people down, catching me as a bonus.

Or Simon could continue to do what he was doing: provide a source of information separate from Adam, and a sympathetic ear while I made my own plans. "You may find a use for the things I've been telling you," he said. And he could encourage me with his own faith. "We have often found," he said, "that if we have courage and refuse to abandon our principles in the face of danger, an unforeseen means of escape from the situation arises."

I was unimpressed. "Next you'll tell me that you can help me face death with equanimity."

"If it comes to that," he said, "yes."

"Or I could just go ahead with Adam's plan and watch Legion mop the floor with you."

Simon did not rise to the bait. "That is another option," he admitted.

I had had enough. I got up to go home. "Thanks for the story-telling. Thanks for the entertainment. But let me tell you what I think is really happening here: You need me to do your dirty work for you. You know there's a way to screw this up, but you can't lift a finger to do it yourself. And you can't tell me what it is, because even that would be too much for your two-thousand-year-old conscience. But just by being here, you're telling me to keep looking, that there's a solution. You've probably even dropped me some clues that I haven't put together yet. When I do put it together (*if* I put it together) and when I do carry it out (*if* I have the guts to carry it out) it'll be on my head, not yours. You and your non-dual egregore can ride off into the sunset admiring each other's virtue."

Simon got up and offered me his hand. "I am sorry that you are in such pain," he said. "I wish you well in whatever you choose to do."

"Go to Hell," I said.

The manifestation ritual was scheduled for a week later. Twelve dozen Legionnaires had already made their travel plans and had been told to anticipate a unique experience. Marjorie was glad that my cold had cleared up so quickly, because there was much to be done. I slipped easily back into my Manhattan-Project attitude. There were challenges to meet, problems to solve. There was a deadline.

Rituals don't just scale up, as a rule. For example, we needed twelve pigs rather than a single pig twelve times larger. And we needed to make sure the pigs would run together, so that the 144 Legionnaires could pursue them as a single body, rather than splintering into many packs each running in its own direction. Many of the objects of the ritual needed to be prepared with care and infused with the proper energies. Adam had done all

this for the first ritual, but there were more objects to prepare this time, so Marjorie and I had to help out. Despite what Adam had said about the incompatibility of magical and mystical talents, I was proving to be surprisingly useful.

The artful way that I had been teased and tricked into my role could not be repeated, of course. This time I had to know what I was doing and do it with intention. I spent hours getting comfortable in the ritual hall. I worked with the light mechanism, learning how to expand and contract the beam at will. And I worked with Legion. To the extent that I had felt the egregore at all, that feeling was long gone. But as Adam had indicated, I knew where He lived now. My mystical abilities were becoming better honed. I could place my own calls to the spirit world and have a good chance to find someone home. I had my own version of What Would Legion Do.

And I didn't like it.

I didn't say so, of course. I tried not to let on in any way. It was easy, most of the time. I could just sink into the momentum of the project. I could feed off of Adam's excitement and bask in his approval. Each new technical problem that I solved gave me the pride of a job well done.

Only at night, when I was alone in my bed and no one could see my face, did I try to put together what Simon must have been trying to tell me. *There are other spirits*. Could I call on one for help? *Jesus all but took a census*. I tried to use my new and improved mystic sense to look around a little. Could anyone out there help me? But I got nowhere. When I looked into the spirit world, I saw Legion. And I wondered if He saw me. *The Christ spirit*. In spite of Simon and his pacifist crew, the Christ spirit had to be very powerful if the Catholic shell of its egregore was still spanning the world thousands of years later. Constantine and Pope Julius and the other powerful Christian leaders must have been tapped into *something*. What? Could I use it? During the ritual, could I reach into the spirit world and come back with *something else*? Not Legion?

Try as I might, it didn't come together. The ritual, not to mention the entire corporation, had been designed for Legion. I couldn't invoke a Christ spirit into it just because I wanted to. Where would I get that kind of power?

Not until the last night before the ritual did I admit that I knew the answer to that question as well. I had known it for days, but I had not been willing to admit that I knew it. *The most powerful blood is the magician's own*. At first I tried to tell myself that Adam was the magician, and that Simon had been telling me to kill Adam myself. If I could plant a knife in the ritual hall and kill Adam at the key moment, I thought, maybe his blood would give me the power to call down whatever I wanted.

But that idea was ridiculous. I knew from the beginning that it was ridiculous. Simon had said as much. The Christ spirit wouldn't come because I killed Adam, no matter how powerful his spilled blood might be.

To raise the Christ spirit, I would have to kill myself.



And I thought: *Why not? Is my life so great? Am I having such a good time that I should cling to existence at all costs? Doesn't the world mean the world to me?*

It was a great fantasy, imagining myself heroically opening my veins and over my own blood invoking a spirit to save the world from disaster. Add in a big-breasted heroine tied to a pole somewhere and you'd really have something. Some people have what it takes to save the world, and some don't. I knew which category I fit into.

Simon may have pissed me off, but even so I was going to feel really bad about failing him.

I must have fallen asleep at some point, because it was morning when I woke up. Preparations were well underway by the time I arrived. Marjorie had been training the 144 in their steps for three days. For some of them the whole thing was a lark, and they went along with everything good-naturedly. Many wanted to be back at their desks and some went so far as to say that they thought the whole thing was a waste of time. But they all snapped into line when Marjorie reminded them that their participation was voluntary. All of them fasted and drank their coffee like good Legionnaires.

If I didn't tell you much about the first ritual, I'm going to tell you even less about this one. I won't tell you the trappings or how we prepared and charged them. I won't tell you how we arranged the 144, or where we put the pigs. I'm still not telling you how the light worked. I'm not telling you the chants we used, or the rhythms. If you want to manifest an egregore, you'll have to figure it out for yourself. I have enough karma.

I sat on the cushion and waited in the dark while the chanting and drumming raised energy. I still didn't know what I was going to do. Or rather, I knew that I was going to follow the script, but still I wished that I could think of something else. *We have often found that if we have courage and refuse to abandon our principles in the face of danger, an unforeseen means of escape from the situation arises.*

But what if you are cowardly and get meekly into line whenever the face of danger looks down its nose at you? What happens then?

I meditated and tried to open myself to the spirit world. There was no chance of spilling any magician's blood, either mine or Adam's. I hadn't hidden a knife. I was so confident in my cowardice that I didn't even prepare for the possibility of a last-minute burst of courage.

Legion was waiting. He was eager. He was ambitious. He was hungry. His spirit seemed enormous. It took up almost my entire field of awareness.

Almost.

I inhaled sharply and then tried to relax. I let my heart slow down to synchronize with the beat of the drums. Then I opened my awareness again. There was Legion. And Legion. And Legion.

And something else.

“There is inside and there is outside,” Adam said into a microphone. “Which do you choose?”

I made the light appear, a thin beam focusing the attention of the room on me.

*You could choose me. You don't have to choose him.*

I said nothing.

*They're prepared for him, but they're prepared for me too. We're not that different.*

“There is inside and there is outside,” Adam repeated. “Which do you choose?”

*The most powerful blood is the magician's own.*

I acted as soon as I understood, before I had a chance to think it over or change my mind. I bit down hard on my tongue and spat a glob of blood onto the floor. Adam had enough time to yell “NO!” before I made the light vanish and thought: *Come.*

There is darkness and then there is something way past darkness. After the light was extinguished the room was dark, but the darkness that lifted me off the ground was an active darkness, an infra-dark, the kind that blots out light and refuses to be penetrated.

“I COME NOT TO SEND PEACE, BUT A SWORD. FOR I AM COME TO SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER. AND A MAN'S FOES SHALL BE THEY OF HIS OWN HOUSE.”

The darkness exploded out of me, out of my hands and feet, my toes and fingers. It splashed across the room like thick, black oil. It muffled the drums and silenced the chant.

I fell to the ground in a heap, closed my eyes tight and tried not to move.

But I heard all of it.

I heard the snarls and the squeals, the ripping and the tearing. I felt bodies fall against me and bounce back up in frenzy. I felt blood splash onto my back and flow under my hands.

It went on for a very long time. Even after the tumult began to decrease in volume, it lost nothing in intensity. The last few standing screamed their triumph and fell upon each other with bloodlust. Eventually I heard only moans and wheezes.

And then it was silent.

I must have waited for an hour in the silence. I opened my eyes just a little and tried to determine if the extraordinary darkness had passed. The first time I moved, I stopped immediately and waited to listen for predators. When I heard nothing, I pushed a torso off my back and got up. The light wouldn't obey me any more, so I guessed where the door must be and picked my way across the floor in darkness. Twice I tripped over something and my hands reached into some kind of goo to keep from falling. Luck was with me

when I got to the wall. I turned the right way and found the door in just a few minutes.

I don't know what possessed me to hit the light switch. I looked around and tried to guess if there were enough body parts there to account for twelve pigs, 144 Legionnaires, the Board, Marjorie, and Adam.

The war of Us against Them, it turns out, is not so far away from the war of All against All. That war has its own spirit, its own demon. Don't ask me for his name. I won't tell you. But I will tell you this: When he manifests, he isn't looking for a body he can live in through the ages. He just wants to have a good time.

I pushed into the hallway and walked at a normal pace, as if I weren't covered with every manner of gore. I left the building by a secret exit, found my car and drove home. I sat in my bathroom for two hours before I realized that I should wash.

There was nothing else to do. It was over.

"You knew what would happen," I said the next day when I saw Simon at the cafe. Under my elbow was an *LA Times* whose headline reported the terrorist bomb that had hit the headquarters of Legion Software. (My best guess was that someone in Security had decided to blow the place up themselves rather than try to determine or explain what really happened. Maybe Adam had left instructions to that effect. I'll never know.)

Simon winced. "I knew what *could* happen," he said. "I didn't know what would. There really was a chance for a Pentecostal moment. Miracles do happen, when people have faith and take the chance."

"But murder happens more often," I said. "I as good as murdered all those people."

"You did what you thought best. You didn't act out of malice."

I hadn't been buying my own rationalizations, so I certainly wasn't going to buy his. "You don't know that. You don't know what's in my soul."

He looked profoundly uncomfortable. "You're right," he said. "I don't know. We don't know. But I wish you'd let us take care of you now. We feel responsible. These last weeks you've experienced things – horrible things – that most people will never see. There's always residue from things like this. Qlippoth – dead patterns whose energy hasn't run down yet. You need to work through them. You need to have people around you who understand and who care about you."

"I need to be alone," I said. "I need to have people around who have no idea what's going on in my head and don't try to muck with it."

Simon had no answer. I got up from the table.

"Don't watch me," I said. "Don't contact me."

"If you discover that you need us," he said, "I'm sure you'll find a way to let us know."

Doug Muder, *Legion*

“Don’t wait up for me, Dad,” I responded. “I’m not coming home.”

That was a week ago. The next day I got a call from a woman in Personnel. She had been going down a roster, trying to determine who was still alive. We had never met, but she seemed genuinely thrilled to hear my voice. For some reason that got to me. I could only imagine the other conversations she had been having.

As for Legion Himself, I haven’t heard a word or seen a sign. I don’t think anyone from the egreore survived. But spirits don’t die. And I doubt they forget, either.

My dreams have sucked, but I’m not going to tell you about them. When I’m awake I’ve done nothing but eat and sleep and take walks. And stare at blank windows in my word processor. I hate compulsions. I hate being under control. I think my compulsions are just qliphoth, just shells – echoes of things that were once alive but now are not.

At least I hope so.

The sun is up now. My back hurts and my eyes are burning. I’m done. I’ve told you the whole story. You can leave me alone now.

Satisfied?

*Doug Muder*

*February 2004*

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As for Legion Himself, I haven’t heard a word or seen a sign. I don’t think anyone from the egreore survived. But spirits don’t die. And I doubt they forget, either.

Doug Muder, *Legion*

My dreams have sucked, but I'm not going to tell you about them. When I'm awake I've done nothing but eat and sleep and take walks. And stare at blank windows in my word processor. I hate compulsions. I hate being under control. I think my compulsions are just qliphoth, just shells – echoes of things that were once alive but now are not.

At least I hope so.

The sun is up now. My back hurts and my eyes are burning. I'm done. I've told you the whole story. You can leave me alone now.

Satisfied?

*Doug Muder*  
*February 2004*