

Prologue

Julie Pickton was sick after every frightening vision. She was sure it was something on the television making her ill, because the visions seemed to coincide with certain programs. They started two months ago and gave her blinding headaches, behind her skull in the middle of her forehead. It normally took two or three hours and several aspirins before she felt normal again after the programs.

She wrote and complained to the television authorities, but Ofcom, the Office of Communications, never replied to her complaint. The only things she did receive following her complaint were phone calls from people she didn't know, asking extraordinary questions. A survey by the census office asked where she was born. A priest wanted to know in which church she was baptised. Julie started to feel doubt and mistrust towards outsiders. Her husband insisted it was all in her mind and the television issue was ludicrous and demanded she go and visit their general practitioner. Finally, bitter and frustrated, she made an appointment.

The doctor recommended she see an ophthalmologist to make sure her eyes were in proper working order. He said headaches resulting from television watching often resulted from outdated prescription lenses. The doctor arranged an appointment for her at Exeter Hospital, thirty miles from her home in Taunton.

The day finally arrived for her appointment. Alone in the lift, Julie was standing twirling her straight, grey streaked hair through her fingers when she heard the ping of the electronic

Serpent Rising

bell, announcing her arrival at the ophthalmic ward in Exeter Hospital. She quickly finished completing the registration forms and turned to take a seat in the waiting room when a pretty young blonde nurse came in through a side door and told her the check-up was at a separate clinic.

The nurse escorted her to a car and Julie snapped the seatbelt closed around her long, skinny frame in the passenger seat, arranging her blue floral patterned skirt neatly on the leather seat. The nurse drove an expensive looking car, and Julie wondered if the National Health Service had paid for it.

The journey was longer than Julie expected and towards the end she became nervous and apprehensive. She felt she was floating through a dream where everything appeared to be going quite fine for her, but just behind the scenes everything she stood for and loved was being destroyed. Julie tried to question the nurse, but the woman only smiled sparkling teeth and said that the doctor would explain everything as soon as they arrived.

Almost two hours later they arrived and Julie was quite surprised how posh the place looked. It was a limestone Victorian house at the end of a long drive, converted into a medical clinic. The room she was lead into was spotlessly white with very modern looking equipment. The nurse asked her to sit in a large surgery chair upholstered with leather, which had fine adjustments to suit the shape of her back. It also had wide adjustable armrests for her to rest her arms comfortably.

Only when the nurse insisted on placing a shiny metal helmet on her head did Julie start to feel uncomfortable. The helmet had numerous electrodes that stuck painfully all around her scalp. After a few minutes, Julie desperately wanted to close her eyes, but they were being held open by eyelid retractors and a saline solution dripped onto her grey-blue

JIRO OLCOTT

irises to keep them moist. The nurse smiled and insisted that it was important for Julie to keep her eyes wide open at all times.

Before the tests started, the helmet and Julie's head were clamped back into a black metal frame that slid onto the headrest of the chair. Thick grey woven straps were fastened around her arms with metal buckles that snapped shut like seatbelts. She could now only twist her slender shoulders a few inches in either direction, but she dared not do that because it jarred her neck, held rigid by the frame behind her.

"Please, take me out of these straps," Julie pleaded. Furrows formed on her small pointed nose as she winced. "I need to stretch my legs."

"Please, keep quite still, Mrs Pickton. It's imperative not to move during the tests. It will all be over very soon," the doctor assured her. "We're just going to run through a couple of short tests. The nurse is going to start a video and I want you to describe to me exactly what you hear and see."

From where Julie sat, all she saw was a large video screen three feet in front of her with two speakers on either side. She heard the doctor and nurse conversing quietly behind her.

"Is the MEG ready?" the doctor said.

"Yes sir," the nurse replied. "The magnetoencephalogram is set for brain neuromagnetic activity monitoring on signal channels one to five."

"I'd like you to concentrate the scan in the middle of the brain. The peripheral readings being between the cerebellum and pituitary gland with a focus on the pineal gland."

"Adjusting focus now," the nurse confirmed.

Julie heard typing on a computer keyboard and the clicking of a mouse. She stared at the blank screen in front of her and heard the rustle of pages turning and the doctor's voice again, he seemed to be talking to himself.

"Born in West Suffolk Hospital, Bury St Edmonds. Parents lived in Taunton, Somerset, where you were conceived and

Serpent Rising

then baptised in Saint Michael's church, Trull. My goodness, Mrs Pickton, you have had quite a life, haven't you?"

Julie strained her forearms in the straps on the armrests. "What are you talking about? How do you know so much about me? I never wrote any of those things on the form."

"Pay attention to the screen and listen," the doctor replied firmly.

All the events in the past couple of months connected together in Julie's brain with high voltage wire.

"Have you anything to do with those census office people or local parish asking all those questions?" she asked.

"Start the video and plasma-*neurophone* transmissions now please, Jenny," the doctor said.

Small grains of pale green light appeared on the dark grey screen. The grains grew larger, changed to different colours and finally merged into a face. The face started to speak. Julie recognised the face on the screen and voice very well.

"...Are you frustrated by spiralling food prices? And are you tired of astronomical petrol prices...?"

The voice was soon followed by music with a bizarre beat that sounded like a distant marching band playing speeded up classical music. Then a second strange voice started in the middle of her head. It was the same person speaking, but in an ethereal hiss, making her frightened and sick. The two voices spoke together, but on the video the lips only moved in time with the first voice.

"Tell me what the second voice is saying," the doctor commanded.

"I don't know," Julie groaned. "It's making me feel sick."

"What is it saying?"

"It's...it's saying...Julie, you are growing weak and sad. Only my voice will bring you happiness and contentment... It's the demon's voice, please stop it; take it away!"

JIRO OLCOTT

The video finally stopped. Julie's breathing was fast and shallow. She felt dizzy, her heart racing in her throat and a clammy sweat oozed out all over her body.

"You're right, Doctor. There was very high neural activity in the core of the brain, around the pineal gland," the nurse said. "It's very unusual."

"Yes, most interesting. Hearing and seeing are not purely mechanical phenomena of wave propagation, but are also sensory and perceptual events. Mrs Pickton is able to perceive the subliminal psycho-acoustic transmissions from our plasma-*neurophone* at a conscious level. Her senses are somehow hardwired into her very well developed pineal gland."

Julie panicked and started to struggle. "What are you talking about? Please let me go. I'm going to make a complaint to the police. You can't do this to me."

The doctor stepped into Julie's narrow field of vision. He was a big burly dark man and had a beard with grey wisps curling out of the sides. He wore glasses with funny looking lenses. He smiled and pulled out an opaque plastic syringe from his white lab coat.

"What are you doing?" Julie screamed.

"Don't worry it's just something to make you feel a little more relaxed."

Julie screamed again, but the doctor quickly inserted the needle into her forearm. She was going to vomit when she felt the sharp agony of the hypodermic puncturing her skin. But felt calmer when she watched him squeeze the contents into her and felt the pressure of the cold fluid entering into her veins. A rush of rainbow colours filled her vision and then the room spun out of control.

1

The rusty girders groaned as Wik Lamley cautiously limped across the old railway bridge of Taunton, Somerset. He glanced down to maintain his footing on the tangled layer of blackberry and old man's beard. The supporting round steel rivets seemed to eye him suspiciously through bare gaps, and he quickly stepped off the bridge to follow a muddy embankment overgrown with leafless sycamore and birch saplings to the location of a small dump.

When he arrived and looked about him he realised that, rather than an official dump, it was more like a social blind spot the locals probably only saw when they needed to discard something from their lives. He adjusted his wool cap and gazed around the torn rubbish bags, spewing out soiled nappies and rancid polystyrene food cartons. A doll still managed to maintain a smile on its mud-smearred face despite the fact that it had no arms or legs.

At least the cold is keeping the stench at a tolerable level, he thought.

He squatted on the balls of his feet and leaned close to the ground, closing his eyes and sniffing at the gases released from the porous clumps of dirt through his high-bridged Roman nose, inhaling deeply. His eyes popped open and he looked down at the matted fur of a dead mouse to his right. The

JIRO OLCOTT

mouse's incisors were gnashing out at a long-gone threat, but the eyes were shrouded by a misty film and stared into space. The tiny body was untouched, no torn flesh or even puncture marks, as if it had simply frozen to death.

Odd.

His eyes ventured beyond the tiny corpse to the corner of a nearby car battery protruding between knotted webs of green creepers. The lead electrode was corroded white, and looked like a poisonous nipple.

Perhaps the mouse had eaten something in this polluted filth that killed him? Wik wearily stood and slowly leaned weight on his bad leg. *Why hadn't the council cleaned this muck up ages ago?*

He felt it strange how people subconsciously create a blind spot to hide ugly scars. For people living in the neighbourhood the location of the dump was probably pinpointed upon their subliminal map of the area. It was there when they needed it, hidden from view when they did not. The perfect solution to modern day society. The waves of unhealthy energy emanating from the heart of this dump flowed directly to the exact coordinates on those subliminal maps. Bypassing their reasoning mind, they brushed the undesired object beneath the carpet of their conscience. It was probably passed down between generations until it became a part of the family's genetic makeup. Even in death, the unclean energy followed them to their graves.

Wik felt the energy flowing out of this dump. It knotted in the pit of his stomach like a twisting spring and rose up through his body, wrenching him deep within his ears, which even disturbed his sense of emotional equilibrium. He pulled a thin thirteen-inch copper rod from within his weather-beaten tweed coat. The rod was bent ninety degrees after the first four inches forming a large 'L' shape and fit neatly into his deep breast pocket. He stroked the length of the darkened shaft tenderly between his thumb and forefinger. It was a cleansing

Serpent Rising

exercise he performed every time he used his dowsing rod. Though in this case he did not need it; the noxious waves were so blatant—but accuracy and precision were essential during police investigations.

Wik closed the long, fine fingers of his right hand lightly around the shorter four inch shaft of the rod, nestling it in his palm, and allowed the rest of the nine inch shaft to swing horizontally. His arm by his side with elbow bent at a right angle, he closed his eyes and reluctantly thought of the feelings the unhealthy energy created within his body. He started to form a picture in his mind. The knot in his stomach turned to a serpent that agonisingly twisted its way up to his brain. Fibril pulsations started in his chest that turned into a whining vibration as it worked its way up to his ears and eyes. He opened his wide but thin, dark eyes and looked at the rod.

“Indicate the direction in which the negative energy from the dump flows.” His raspy whisper sent whips of vapour curling though the air.

The rod slowly rose, turned away from the waste and pointed diagonally across the old railway tracks towards the descent of the embankment. He stumbled over the uneven rock surface beneath the rusting railway lines and black wooden sleepers, carefully avoiding the encroaching creepers. Wik sighed and closed his eyes, shutting out the grey sky and surrounding weakly lit buildings and frozen fauna; he knew he had to finish his work, but was not looking forward to climbing down the steep slope. He clenched his angular jaws tight on his long face and plunged his strong right leg forward into the dense vegetation below.

Wik stopped half way down the incline, his breath billowing out of his wide dry lips and nostrils, and looked across the dark grey slate roofs of a row of terrace houses. He stood about thirty yards away from the upper level of the houses, built along the opposite side of a cul-de-sac, running parallel to

JIRO OLCOTT

the railway embankment. A high wire fence draped with brambles demarked the side of the road along the bottom of the embankment.

They were homes built early in the twentieth century to accommodate the workforce of the expanding railway industry. Many of them had been personalised over the years, giving the houses a certain sense of individuality. Some had attic windows added; others were painted pink or white in an attempt to liven up the dour brickwork.

Wik paused to determine the exact width of the wave he was tracking. Standing in the middle of the wave he felt the full force of the serpent twisting and vibrating in his mind, but when he stepped to his right the ill feelings diminished and the tip of the copper rod pointed to the left along the alignment where he had been standing. He shifted to the left and repeated the same thing. He measured the wave to be only two feet wide, but quite high, taller than his five foot eleven frame, because he felt its intense tingling like a continuous electric charge throughout his body. He guessed it was a ten foot high wall of energy and travelled in a snake like form down the embankment. It pointed to a small broken part of the fence. Beyond it was the house in the cul-de-sac at the very end of the terrace.

Wik climbed down through the prickly undergrowth, squeezed through the gap in the fence and onto the cul-de-sac. A few cars were parked along the narrow pavement, but otherwise it was deserted. As he crossed the lane, the weaving energy curved away to the right towards a small alley along the right side of the end house. He followed the wave along the lane toward the end house, and a minute later his dowsing rod ended up pointing at the middle of a wooden gate entering into the back yard.

He held the cold metal knob at the side of the gate and took a deep breath, gathering his nerves. The lever clacked

Serpent Rising

open and he gently pushed the gate open with his shoulder. The squeak of the corroded hinges and scraping sound of mildewed wood along the ground announced his entry.

The only plants growing in the small yard were weeds, pushing out of the cracks in the cement ground. Wik wondered if he dared walk inside, but a cat slinked out from behind a wooden crate and eyed him accusingly, quashing his bravado. Instead, he stood in the middle of the energy wave and aligned the metal rod in its direction. He looked up towards the off-white house, noticing that the edges around the gutters had turned green. The current was aligned with the middle of the single window on the ground and first floors.

There was a faint odour of burning wood and coal. He looked up at the chimney on the left side of the roof and saw a thin trickle of smoke rising above it, the small fireplaces on both levels of the house directly below. The wave of energy filtered through the cracks in the brickwork and gaps in the window. He saw it snaking its way across the floor of the master bedroom directly across the bed on the right side of the room, opposite the fireplace. The occupants were probably unaware of the unhealthy current of energy passing directly across their bed and through their unconscious sleeping minds. Down the narrow staircase, the current weaved across the sitting room, through their favourite seats near the fireplace in front of the TV.

Wik wondered how many years the occupants had lived in this condition; the negative energy resonating within the liquid crystal structure of every nerve and every cell of their bodies. The thought made him shudder and wretched feelings of his own life constricted his heart.

He tore his gaze away from the house, but as he did, he saw the curtain in the master bedroom tremble. The edge of a ghostly face sank back into the darkness within.

JIRO OLCOTT

Despite the cold, Wik's face flushed and he felt his pulse quicken in his throat. Discretion as well as accuracy was important, and now the occupant was suspicious. He tucked the dowsing rod discretely by his side, stepped back, and closed the wooden gate.

Wik walked back quickly around to the front of the house with the intention of joining the main road at the end of the lane, but as he passed by the front door, he felt a fearful tremor run up his spine. He picked up the energy current again in front of the house. He lifted his copper rod and it swivelled towards the embankment again. For some perplexing reason the current had snaked out of the dump and looped through the end house simply to climb back onto the embankment again. He followed the current back across the cul-de-sac and into the thick vegetation growing along the disused railway line.

I'd better be more discreet, he thought. If anyone sees me performing these antics they'll be suspicious and call the police.

In his haste to disappear, Wik ducked his head and tried to barge through a thicket of thorns. A spiky branch whipped back and swiped the cold skin on his face. Halfway up the embankment, his dowsing rod made a sudden swivel to the right. He stepped back and retraced his steps to ensure he had not inadvertently twisted his wrist, making the rod sway. He was not mistaken, the energy line turned sharp right into a small level area of grass.

The grassy area was flanked on the left by a six foot wall smothered with a lively tapestry of moss and lichens. Straight across from the grass and to the right, down the embankment, was an impenetrable tangle of brambles and vines. Even the hard light of winter found it difficult to inflict its greyness upon this small sanctuary. The carpet of lush grass and moss grew together in vibrant green tones. A dozen young delicate ferns grew, curling out from the bottom of the wall.

Serpent Rising

Wik stepped onto the grass and a coldness ran through him, making the skin on his neck tighten. Wik turned his head; he was halfway up the embankment now and from where he stood he had a view across to the upper level bedroom window of the narrow end terrace house through the branches. The window was about forty yards away and the curtains were open and the darkness of the room beyond stared at him. He moved close to the wall and tried to shelter himself from visibility.

The divining rod in his hand swivelled again and led him directly into the middle of the wall. Two feet above the grassy surface, next to the wall, his dowsing rod started to turn in a circular motion in his hand and gyrated incoherently as if it had come alive, taking on the life of Wik's image of the writhing serpent. Wik shivered, and a sweat broke out along his hairline. He lifted his wool cap to allow the cool air to circulate around his thick, unkempt brown hair. The energy was starting to twist and turn at a frequency higher than the dowsing rod was able to indicate. The snaking wall of energy seemed to gather itself into a focused line and enter the stonework behind the curtain of green.

Wik stepped close to the wall, reached out with his left hand and scraped away a patch of the moss. He peered behind the moss and curiously discovered the craftsmanship of stone to be quite different and uncharacteristic of the surrounding masonry of the railway embankment. It was made of carefully hand-hewn granite blocks, precisely fitting one another. He bet he would not even be able to push a razor blade between the fine seams. The wall was crafted with an expertise long lost in Britain. It wasn't just a reinforcement wall; it was something different, something much older.

He put his nose close to a young fern growing from the bottom of the wall, its tender stem perfectly curled like the proboscis of a butterfly. A clear droplet of water had worked

JIRO OLCOTT

its way along the minute hairs of one of its still unfurled leaves and hung there tantalisingly. Wik let the droplet fall onto the tip of his finger and put it to his tongue. It was clean source water, but it possessed a strange vibration. A pureness and innocence that screamed out in fear.

Wik placed his copper rod back into his breast pocket and took out a small leather pouch. From it he pulled out a fine six inch silver chain which had a pear shaped quartz crystal suspended on the end. The finely cut surfaces sent glints of light twirling across the mossy surface of the wall.

From his other coat pocket, he took out a large note pad and pencil. He squatted with his knees leaning on the damp surface of the wall and suspended the crystal above a clean double page of the pad, the end of the chain held between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He positioned the middle of the crystal adjacent to the area of wall he had cleared away, the place where his dowsing rod had pointed to.

“Trace out the formation of the energy waves as it enters the stone wall,” he said.

He moved the pendulum slowly across the surface and it started to swing in different directions like the rod, but the pendulum had a much higher level of granularity and he was able to measure the shifts of the current of energy exactly. He carefully used his pencil to trace the paths his pendulum made.

The lines changed angle steadily as he moved the pendulum from left to right. The lines eventually drew together to a focal point in the middle of the page then fanned out again before they suddenly swung around and returned into the wall as it passed through the focal point. It was the same effect as the radio waves hitting a TV satellite dish—a parabolic reflector. The bowl shape has the unique characteristic of reflecting all the radio waves falling into it towards a finite focal point—where the small receiver is suspended above it.

Serpent Rising

Wik traced all the lines and replaced the pendulum into his pocket. He then drew a line along the tips of the sharply angled waves with his pencil. They formed a long curve about ten inches wide like the profile of a satellite dish but even more curved. He gasped in horror, staring at his drawing. It was the top of a human skull. The skull was right there, just on the other side of the stone wall. Inexplicably the current of energy was drawn into the cranium and was resonating within it in an obsessive dance around its curved inner surface.

Suddenly he realised how vulnerable he was. He needed to get away quickly. Panic flooded his thoughts. He stood and hurried back onto the top of the embankment and threw a quick glance back up to the house. The strange figure was standing back from the window in the dimness of the room, but the shadowy outline was discernable. He sensed long feelers reaching out to him from the black hole, sucking in the light given off from his body; tracking his movement. Wik shuddered.

It's him. The murderer.

He hastily followed the track back over the old iron bridge. The job was done, all he wanted to do now was get away. There were two warehouse yards he needed to cross before he entered into the sprawling parking lot at the back of the train station.

The light was dimming now and the wind started, blowing a discarded plastic bag across the half empty parking lot. He walked fast towards the station entrance, but restrained himself from breaking into a panic stricken run. The station was quiet and the smell of engine grease and cleaning detergent lingered in the air. A few waiting passengers were sitting on benches within the ticketing area, keeping out of the cold. Wik's leg ached from the exertion of getting away, but presence of a few people around him gave him some feeling of security.

JIRO OLCOTT

He found a telephone booth near the door to the platforms, fumbled for twenty pence and made a call. The ringing tone resonated in his right ear and he heard a mechanical rumbling sound in his left ear. He turned his head towards the platform; his train was approaching.

“Good afternoon, Southampton Police,” the receptionist answered. “May I help you?”

“Yes,” Wik said quickly. “Transfer me to Sergeant Craver, please.”

After an anxiously long interlude of music a gruff Yorkshire accent came on the line.

“Sergeant Craver.”

“Hello sergeant, it’s Wik Lamley.”

“Yes, Wik, what have you got for me?”

Wik started to stammer breathlessly. “It’s...it’s...”

“Yes, out with it lad.”

A series of thoughts churning through Wik’s subconscious mind leaped forward into his consciousness. The crystal clear droplet hanging on the fern leaf, the stonework so perfectly cut; the water had seeped out from an ancient source.

“It’s in an old sacred well...”

“What’s in a sacred well?”

“It’s an old well across the road from their house.”

“You’re not making much sense, Wik.”

“The body...the body of Julie Pickton, her husband has thrown her into an ancient well opposite their house, along that disused railway embankment. The body’s in there now. He did it, and he knows I know.” Wik saw the small lights on the side of the open doors of the train flashing and heard the tinkle of the departure bell. “I’ve got to get going, before he catches up with me, Sarge. You’d better get you’re your people down here.”

“Don’t worry, Wik, I’ll get the local police to have a look around. Now you look after yer self.”

Serpent Rising

Wik stumbled out of the phone booth, making a determined effort to move his left leg towards the closing doors of the train. The train was not crowded and he quickly found a seat where he frantically tried to rub the circulation back into his left leg. He felt as if someone had rammed a giant ice pick through his heel all the way up to his thigh. A couple of the passengers looked at him strangely, but he hid his face under the shadow of his cap.

What do I care what others think of me? he tried to convince himself. *I am safe on a warm, dry train.*

His breathing was calming now and the rush of adrenalin subsiding. He was tired though; his strength had been sapped out of him. However, it was not just the effects of the running on his bad leg and escaping—making a determined effort to follow malevolent currents of energy always drained his physical and emotional stamina.

He had worked for over five years searching for missing people for the police, but this assignment frightened him the most. Although he kept it to himself, he had a premonition at the beginning of the search that Julie Pickton was dead. It was over now, and he was looking forward to returning to the comfort of his home and drinking a nice hot mug of tea by the fire.