

The Master Switch

Jason Brentwood pulled the car into a parking spot in front of the white two story building. A line of windows wrapped around the two floors. He had never been to this facility before. It was just one of the many funded research labs of the Twinsom Group. He was in his mid-thirties, clean-cut, sandy blonde hair and, despite feeling like an impressive representative of the Twinsom Group in his gray tailored suit, he was uncertain what kind of welcome he would receive from Dr. Grover.

The powers that be at the Twinsom Group were growing increasingly concerned at not hearing from Dr. Grover for nearly two months. After two years of a steady stream of emails, conference calls and the like, suddenly, nothing. Unanswered emails and phone messages from the Twinsom Group had led to Jason's arrival. His job: an update, some answers, some kind of status report on what was going on.

Jason pulled the large glass door open and walked into the white tiled, white walled spacious lobby. A receptionist stationed at a wide desk in the middle of the room spotted him and leaped up. She nearly ran over to him. They were expecting him.

"Are you Mr. Brentwood? Are you? Huh? Huh?" she asked excitedly.

Jason hesitated. The woman's excitement took him slightly aback. She was very close to him---a bit over the line in terms of personal space. For a moment he almost thought she was going to kiss him.

"Mr. Brentwood." The voice came from a man just emerging from the elevators located behind the receptionist's desk. The man was taller, black hair, goatee, mustache and a blue suit. He hurried over and shouldered aside the receptionist.

"That will be all Miss Denning." He dismissed the receptionist. "Hello, Mr. Brentwood. My name is Dr. Haverton. I am the Assistant Director of the facility. Dr. Grover sends his apologies, but he was called away on an urgent matter. I am, however, completely at your disposal."

Jason shook the offered hand. "Uh, thank you, doctor."

"Can I get you something? Water? A bowl of something?" The receptionist had danced around Haverton and was up close to Jason again.

"That will be all, Miss Denning. Now, go." Haverton pointed back towards the receptionist's desk.

Miss Denning seemed to hunch over somewhat and scurry back behind her desk.

"Well, Dr. Haverton," Jason began, "I hope you don't find my visit too much of an inconvenience, but Dr. Grover's last status reports mentioned something about a breakthrough and everyone at the Twinsom Group is very excited to hear about it." Jason mentally patted himself on the back for his diplomacy in getting right down to business.

“Yes,” Haverton hesitated, “there has been something of a breakthrough and...I will explain everything to you shortly. Why don’t we go up to the conference room where it’s more comfortable.” Haverton turned, leading Jason back towards the elevators.

As the elevator doors closed behind them Haverton turned to Jason. “So, how much do you know about our work here?”

“Well, I understand that you are working on a 3 dimensional map of brain usage. In particular, those areas of the brain that are used for higher thought processes such as abstract thinking and reasoning. According to the last reports I have read, you were still in the initial phase of mapping animal brains to provide a baseline for identifying abstract thought in the human brain.”

Haverton nodded as they walked along a hallway on the second floor. Windows ran along the length of the hall.

“Very good. Yes, that is essentially our mission here.” Haverton said.

They passed two guys, casually dressed, staring out a window along the hall. They seemed to be anxiously staring down at something along the side of the building.

“Are you sure you saw it?” One man asked.

“Yes. Yes, I’m sure of it. It was a cat!” The second man responded.

“Where did it go? Which way?” The first man asked excitedly.

“That way, I think. Over there somewhere.” The second man answered.

Haverton gave the two men a hard look as he passed and they slowly tore themselves away from the window, moving sullenly back down the hall.

“Did you lose a test animal?” Jason asked.

“No.” Haverton answered quietly as he glanced back down the hall. “We have not lost a single animal from this facility.”

They reached a door and Haverton led Jason into the conference room. The far wall of the conference room comprised of windows that looked out across a room of cubicles. Jason saw the heads of different people constantly popping up over the tops of the cubicle walls, look around and drop back out of sight.

“Please have a seat.” Haverton said, with a wave towards the chairs surrounding a large conference table. He walked to the end of the table where an office phone sat. “I’ll just be a moment.”

Haverton turned the phone towards him and stared quietly at it for a moment. He seemed to be studying it carefully. Finally, he punched in a couple of numbers.

“Hello?” a voice sounded through the speaker.

“William, you and Davie please join us in the conference room.”

“Yes sir.”

Haverton glanced at the computer sitting in the middle of the conference table, but passed by it and took a seat near Jason.

“Your assessment of our work here is largely correct. We have been working at mapping the cerebral functions of animals. We started with animals, dogs in particular, because it was felt that their well known reasoning capabilities would allow for easier identification of the reasoning processes they were utilizing.”

“So have you succeeded then?” Jason asked.

Before Haverton could answer two men entered the room. The taller dark haired one, William, was dressed in a white shirt, untucked on one side, and black pants. Davie was short, also black hair and seemed to be uncomfortable keeping his glasses positioned right on his face.

“Ah, just in time. Gentlemen, please bring up a 3-D session for us.” Haverton waved at the computer sitting on the table.

The two men mumbled something and William sat down at the computer. He struggled for a couple of minutes to bring up the program. William was clearly not a good typist. At times he seemed to be swatting at the keyboard rather than typing on it.

The main screen of the program sat waiting for William to do something, but the attention of all four men was drawn towards the wall of windows. Out in the cubicles, somewhere out of sight, there were shouts. Briefly, above the top of a cubicle, the heads of two men were visible. They were clearly fighting.

Haverton quickly pulled the blinds closed.

Over his shoulder Jason heard the other two men, William and Davie, whispering. He caught snippets of their words.

“...knew that was coming...”

“...he wanted to move up...”

Jason started to say something, but Haverton spoke first.

“William,” he waved at the computer, “please continue.”

“But...” Jason half pointed back towards the windows.

“Ah, here it is.” Haverton said, waving at the computer.

Jason looked back at the computer and a graphical image that looked like a splattering of paint was displayed on the screen. The various colors twisted and wound around each other.

“What is this? Is this a map of the reasoning part of a dog’s brain?” Jason asked.

Haverton shook his head. “Not exactly. As with so many things in this universe, it turned out to be more complicated than that. We were unable to determine a clear differentiation between basic instinct and higher reasoning---our original target. Instead what we did find, and what we are looking at here, is rough delineations between knowledge---factual data storage---and personality---behavior patterns based on extrapolations from the stored knowledge.”

“You were able to map out the personality of the dog?” Jason’s mind began to run ahead. If you could map out personalities then the next logical step would be to map out the personalities of the general population. Knowing which individuals were likely to be trouble and which ones would be an asset could have tremendous uses.

“More or less, yes.” Haverton replied.

“This could be a major benefit to mankind. A great leap forward.” Jason spoke distractedly. Not only, he thought, could we better manage a society, but it would be highly useful to the military in determining insurgents from innocent civilians.

“And other species as well.” Haverton said.

Jason glanced briefly at Haverton. “I suppose so.” He said, not really following Haverton’s line of thinking. Jason’s mind was jumping to possibilities and various applications for this technology. This could be big for Twinsom---very big.

“Where are you at identifying specific personality traits?” Jason asked.

Haverton hesitated for just a moment. “Well, we haven’t been able, currently, to sort this matrix down to that level. It’s a 3 dimensional matrix of varying densities and non-uniform shapes which makes individual data points extremely complicated to sort out. We can, though, store the entire personality “cloud”, a p-cloud we call it, in a data set occupying approximately 3 terabytes.”

“You can store the mind of a dog into long term digital memory?”

Haverton nodded.

Jason thought for a moment. “So...have you been able to do anything with the data as yet?”

Haverton smiled. “Yes. Would you like to see?”

“Absolutely.”

Haverton stood up and Jason followed him out of the room. They walked down the hall turned twice and came to a door with a digital lock. Haverton punched in some numbers and pushed on through. It led to a set of stairs leading down to the basement of the facility. They walked between long rows of stacked empty cages.

“All empty.” Jason commented.

“Yes. That’s where the dogs originally were.” Haverton said over his shoulder as he walked on.

Jason was about to ask what happened to them all when they entered a room at the end of the cages. In the center of the room stood a steel table. Around it were several utility carts on wheels holding a variety of medical and electronic instruments. On one cart sat a computer. Out of the back of the computer a couple of cables emerged at the end of which were two long, very thin needles.

“It’s through these,” Haverton pointed to the thin needles, “which are inserted into the brain itself that the software maps out the mind. The software stimulates various parts of the brain

and translates the responses into data sets, based on the area of the brain and the type and amplitude of the electrical stimulus.”

“And that creates the 3D map?” Jason asked.

Haverton nodded. “The process itself can take up to 12 hours to complete. Also,” Haverton paused, as if remembering something, “the stress of the process causes some degree of pain to the subject.”

“So how many dogs have you processed to this point?” Jason slowly circled the table.

“All of them. That’s 27.”

“It would seem then that you should be ready to move on to primates.” It seemed odd to Jason that, given their success, they would not already have moved on.

Haverton glanced over at Jason with a strange look of surprise. Haverton shook his head. “No. We need to bring in more dogs.”

Jason’s face wrinkled. “Dogs? Surely you have sufficiently demonstrated adequate success with that species. It would seem logical to move further up to the monkeys.”

Haverton shook his head as if he was admonishing a student. “No. Dogs are the only reasonable species to work with.”

Jason was about to question this when the door burst open and a young woman stood in the threshold. She seemed frazzled as she pawed at her clothes.

“This won’t work for me.”

Haverton sighed. “You’ll just have to make due. Now leave us.”

“I can’t...” She tugged at the skirt. “It’s not right.”

Haverton’s voice turned hard. “Go! Go on! Go!”

The woman scampered away.

“I’m sorry.” Haverton said. “She’s kind of new and hasn’t adjusted yet.”

Jason stared at the door for a minute, puzzled. He was about to ask more about the woman and changed his mind. “Where are all the dogs you used in the testing?”

Haverton shook his head sadly. “The first dog successfully mapped died shortly after completion of the mapping process. It wasn’t until the death of the second dog it was discovered that the mapping process ultimately and permanently disrupts the autonomic center of the brain for reasons as yet unknown. Without a functioning autonomic center, of course, both heart and lung function fail.”

“I see. So all of the dogs are dead?” Jason asked.

Two technicians appeared in the doorway and, following a nod from Haverton, began tinkering with various pieces of equipment in the room.

“Yes. Well, sort of. We have all of their matrices stored on the network.” Haverton patted a computer station next to him.

“Yes, but that’s just data.” Jason pointed out. He was though, obviously not greatly concerned about the fate of the dogs. It was the primates that were of importance at this stage anyway.

“Ah, yes, well that brings us to another critical point of interest.” Haverton said with a smile.

“And that is?” Jason asked.

“Well, we discovered, quite by accident actually, that if the process is reversed and the data is fed into a healthy functioning brain the ‘personality’, if you will, can be restored---somewhat, anyway.”

Jason sat, stunned, for a moment. “Are you saying that you can download these brain patterns from one brain and transfer them into another?”

Haverton nodded. “Essentially, yes.”

Jason tried to digest this. “How...what happens with...?”

Haverton gestured instructions to one of the technicians. “Yes, of course, the data can be fed back into the brain at a much higher rate than the mapping process takes, but there is about a 48 hour adjustment period in which the subject must remain in a deep sleep. Presumably this allows the brain to sift and sort through the newly inserted brain pattern so it can be fully assimilated.”

“Assimilated?” Jason was still working through it.

“Yes, well, it’s not as if we can feed the data back into an empty brain now can we? Where would we obtain such a thing? The overlay of the new brain pattern happens fairly quickly, but it seems that full integration requires a little more time. Fascinating, isn’t it?”

“So, you have mapped out a dog’s personality pattern and...put it into another dog’s brain? Did that work?” Jason glanced back towards the hallway full of empty cages. “And where are the dogs? Are they all out in the backyard playing happily?”

Haverton gave a brief chuckle. “We don’t have a backyard.” He nodded to one of the technicians.

Jason felt a poke in his right arm. He tried to jerk around, but found himself held by a technician while the other one was pulling a syringe out of him. “What the...?”

“I haven’t told you about what could be our biggest discovery.” Haverton said. “You see Haverton had an idea after several of the dogs had been mapped out. He thought that it just might be possible to get a glimpse of exactly how a dog sees the world by reversing the feed and sending the image of the dog mapping into his own head. As it turns out the flexibility of the software was only too accommodating.”

“What did you just...?” Jason was pointing at his arm.

“Oh, just a mild sedative. For the stress of all of this.” Haverton said with a smile.

“But I’m not...” Jason started.

“So you see, by reversing the feed from the data stored on the network back into the brain the system quite smoothly writes the same pattern back into the brains synaptic pathways. What was amazing was its tendency to only overwrite patterns of a similar design.” Haverton spoke as he entered something into key fields on the computer screen.

Jason swayed. The two technicians stepped forward and helped him sit back on to the table. “Synaptic patterns...similar design.” He mumbled.

“Yes, the reverse feed tended to avoid overwriting areas where factual, knowledge based information was stored and only seemed to affect those parts of the brain that reflected our ‘personality’ mapping. What that meant was the essence of the dogs that were mapped,” Haverton patted the computer next to him, “could be reinserted into a different brain, any brain, as Haverton inadvertently discovered.”

Jason tried to stare through a growing haze. “Haverton discovered...? But you’re Haverton...” The two technicians eased Jason back on to the table and began strapping him down. He wanted to resist, but found his body reluctant to respond.

“Well, this has been an interesting discussion, but we can’t keep our last remaining friend waiting, now can we?” Again Haverton patted the computer.

“Waiting...?” Jason struggled to get the words out.

“Yes. You asked if the dogs were all dead. The answer is: not really. We’re all here. Its Haverton and his colleagues that are gone.” Haverton smiled and tapped his forehead.

With a spark of receding consciousness Jason began to understand. He glanced up at the two technicians. They smiled down at him, nodding. He shot a panicked look over at Haverton and tried to speak, but nothing would come out.

Haverton smiled again and answered Jason’s unspoken question. “Woof. Woof.”



K McConnell

www.kmccconnellbooks.com

kmccconnell@kmccconnellbooks.com

The Hamlet Mysteries series...

To Not Be In Hamlet

Sam MacNeil, part time mystery writer, has returned to his hometown to house sit for his parents as they start a lengthy vacation. What Sam has forgotten while away is the quirky weirdness of the little town of Hamlet. With expectations that he would quietly do his time in Hamlet the discovery of a dead body, clearly murdered, changes everything. Now Sam finds, much to his chagrin, the residents of Hamlet are expecting him to solve the murder. Not only does Sam not want to be involved in it, but the authorities have made it clear his help is not wanted. Was it the angry businessman from Detroit? Was it the shifty handyman the victim worked with? Sam doesn't know, but when killers from Detroit show up the situation is taking a serious and deadly turn. And then there's Becky. An old friend who clearly has more than friendship on her mind. Murder, killers and romance...this is not how this brief stay in Hamlet was supposed to go.

The Art of Hamlet

An old family friend asks Sam to look into a break in at her house. She is an art collector and critic, but nothing has been stolen and the only thing disturbed are some small statues. While it is a puzzling incident Sam doesn't think it is a serious issue, but when a neighbor is murdered and found bobbing in a nearby lake the story is once again taking a dark turn. As usual Sam is not inclined to get involved in a murder investigation, but somehow he seems to be sliding in that direction anyway. In addition, the County Detective seems to have recognized that Sam might be of some use---regardless of the consequences for Sam. And what of Sam's old classmate, who is now a seemingly crazy hermit, ranting on about terrorists in Hamlet? Is that actually possible? To complicate things even further something is happening between Sam and Becky. Love and Death seem to be chasing Sam through the wacky streets of Hamlet.

Ophelia's Hunt

Sam's women troubles have seemingly tripled. There is Becky and the relationship that Sam has found himself in with her. However, suddenly, there is Callie. Sam's wealthy and wild ex-fiance who has appeared in Hamlet. Is she here to get Sam back? Everyone thinks so---including Becky. Then there's the beautiful woman named Misty. She seems to have a particular interest in Sam as well. And, of course, there's murder in Hamlet once again. Questions abound. Is the lovely Misty a suspect or a new love interest? Who are the men stalking Callie? How is Sam going explain all of this to an increasingly angry Becky? Why is the County Detective actually soliciting Sam's help? Should Sam be flattered or very careful? With love and murder swirling around Sam how is he going to survive this?

The Ghosts of Hamlet

Sam MacNeil, part time writer, is house sitting for his parents in his hometown of Hamlet. The people of Hamlet are far more quirky than Sam remembers from his childhood and he is keen on leaving them behind and getting his life back, but it's those dead bodies that are the real problem. They just keep showing up. Murder in the small town of Hamlet has taken a noticeable uptick since Sam has returned and the residents have taken notice. Sam claims it has nothing to do with him and yet...Now, even worse, the residents are seeing ghosts and they blame Sam for that as well.

Sam may get his chance to escape Hamlet now that his parents are heading home, but can he really walk away without solving the mystery of the ghosts? Will he get away before the "gangsters" from Detroit catch up with him and turn him into a ghost? And what about Becky? He really wasn't planning on a romantic entanglement to muddle things up.

So what do ghosts, gangsters, girlfriends, musk ox and talking cans of beans all have in common? Sam MacNeil and the quirky town of Hamlet, of course.

The Play of Hamlet

It is finally here. The Founder's Day festival in Hamlet. A gala event highlighted by a play depicting the bizarre founding of Hamlet. Sam is not only the star of the play, but also a target for Scanlon and his killers from Detroit. They are determined to finish him off once and for all. But Sam knows they are coming and, with the help of the quirky residents of Hamlet, he has his own plans in the works. What

Sam doesn't know is that Scanlon isn't the only killer from Sam's past that is out to get him. Could the biggest day of the year in Hamlet be Sam's last?

The King of Hamlet

The sixth story in the Hamlet Mystery series starts out where most of the stories end up...with a dead body. The trouble is Sam is found standing over the dead body and refusing to explain what has happened. He seems willing to take the fall for the guy's murder, but he is clearly hiding something. His friends are sure he didn't commit murder, but who is he protecting and why? What Sam is not telling anyone is that he is playing a more dangerous game than any of them can imagine. As bodies begin piling up around Sam he is increasingly wondering if he has a guardian angel or has become an unwilling accomplice to the Angel of Death. Once again women and murder are causing headaches for Sam.

The Graves of Hamlet

As if the town of Hamlet didn't have enough trouble with dead bodies now, it appears, someone is digging them up in the cemetery. The quirky residents of Hamlet are sure this has something to do with Sam. As usual Sam doesn't really want anything to do with whatever is going on, but when someone tries to make the cemetery Sam's permanent home one dark night it would seem that Sam will need to sort this out---if only to save himself. To add to the confusion, with Becky out of town, Sam must also figure out who the half naked woman is that keeps showing up on his deck sun bathing. Oh, and who are these other guys that just showed up in Hamlet? The grandson of the recently deceased retired cop who is lying about his real identity and the suspicious looking guy casually asking questions around town about the same dead cop...?

Polonius' Plight

Here's a surprise...there's been a murder in Hamlet---again. This time, however, Sam is very much intentionally involved. It's the suspects. The guy was found with a gaping shotgun blast to the chest. Like the one in the trunk of Renee's car. Of course the last person to be seen with the murder victim was Jen---and she seems to have disappeared. And why is Reese, the County Detective looking for Becky and her grandfather's .38? Sam is sure none of his friends are murderers, but to keep any and all of them out of jail he needs to find out who the killer is and

fast. To make matters worse, while Sam is trying to solve a murder and hide his friends the Town Council of Hamlet has had enough of Sam and the murders that seem to follow him around. They passed yet another of their many bizarre ordinances. Sam has been ordered to leave Hamlet.

The Office of Scientific Operations

With the conclusion of the traumatic events in 1933 surrounding the shocking affair involving the city of New York and a beast commonly referred to as "King Kong", the president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, established the Office of Scientific Operations (OSO). The purpose of the OSO was to monitor and evaluate the level of risk and assist in any manner the mitigation of danger of any and all scientific operations and anomalies. With the rapid pace of scientific discovery this office was given the highest priority and clearance to investigate any potential threats or consequences to the interests of the United States of America.

What follows are the real stories behind the cinematic cover-ups presented to the general public...

Release #1

from the declassified files of the Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1953...

File #153 (commonly referred to by the public as "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms")

OSO agents Elliot Simms and Robbie Regan, while observing an atomic test in the Arctic, are unwittingly caught up in the release of prehistoric beasts from millions of years of suspended animation in the ice. Now they must help in stopping this new terror as it moves steadily down the east coast destroying anything in its path.

From 1954...

File #157 (commonly referred to by the public as "Them")

OSO agents Simms and Regan investigate the odd circumstances surrounding a missing FBI agent only to stumble upon a horror in the New Mexico desert and if they cannot find a way to stop it there is a very good chance this could be the end of humanity.

Release #2

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #159 (commonly referred to by the public as "Terror in the Jungle")

OSO agent Jonathon Wyatt is pulled off vacation to an island in Indonesia to investigate sightings of pteranodons. The island is not far from the island known infamously as Z Land. It was once the headquarters of Dr. Zeitner whose experiments in genetically manipulating prehistoric monsters terrorized the world in the 1930s before the OSO put a stop to it. Wyatt's job is to determine if these are indeed Dr. Zeitner's creatures, but what he finds is much more deadly. This is no way to spend a vacation---trying not to get eaten.

Release #3

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #161 (commonly referred to by the public as "Revenge of the Creature")

After the capture of an unknown species of half man half fish is brought back to a Florida marine institute, OSO agents Wayne and Wyatt must determine the risk to the American people it poses. When the creature escapes and begins terrorizing the citizens of Florida the risk becomes all too real. Now they must hunt it down and stop its killing spree, if they can.

From 1955...

File #165 (commonly referred to by the public as "It Came From Beneath the Sea")

OSO agents Simms and Regan are sent out to Pearl Harbor to investigate damage to one of the Navy's most advanced atomic submarines by some kind of giant creature. While the Navy has a hard time believing it, the OSO knows such creatures are real. It soon becomes apparent by the large number of ships being lost that something dangerous is hunting throughout the Pacific. Now, with the creature openly attacking the west coast of the United States Simms and Regan join the fight to stop this thing before the entire Pacific is destroyed by it.

Release #4

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1954...

File #163 (commonly referred to by the public as "The DC Creeper")

On a break from hunting monsters for the Office of Scientific Operations, OSO Agent Wyatt is trying to adjust to a more crowded domestic life. As brutally murdered bodies begin showing up in the nation's capitol, though, this doesn't seem like it is going to be much of a break. The newspapers have dubbed the hulking killer "The Creeper" and it looks like Wyatt is going to have to hunt him down and stop him before Wyatt becomes the next victim.

Release #5

from the declassified files of the
Office of Scientific Operations...

From 1956...

File #166 (commonly referred to by the public as "Tarantula")

Agents Simms and Regan from the Office of Scientific Operations, the OSO, returning from the Pacific Coast having just finished dealing with yet another monster threatening the United States are

redirected to a small town in Arizona to verify that a large tarantula that has been terrorizing the local inhabitants has been destroyed by the Air Force. With Beka, a woman who insists on tagging along with the intrepid agents---a clear violation of official regulations---in tow, they quickly discover that the threat of the giant spiders in the Arizona desert are not over just yet.

From 1956...

File #171 (commonly referred to by the public as "Invasion of the Body Snatchers")

The Office of Scientific Operations, the OSO, has sent agents Wayne and Wyatt out to the small California city of Santa Mira to locate a missing Air Force major, sent to investigate the impact of some meteors, and to understand the meaning of his last cryptic message to Washington. What they find is that, while the city of Santa Mira may look like a quaint place to visit it soon becomes apparent that a missing Air Force major is the least of Wayne and Wyatt's problems. There is something very strange and deadly going on in Santa Mira. Something that seems...alien?

The New Sheriff

Travis Ames, somehow, has developed super powers. Exactly what these powers entail he's not sure. He's still learning how to control his powers, but he's already decided that he should use this new found power to fight crime. And...if he made a little profit along the way, well, that wouldn't be so bad either. But reality has a way of altering the best laid plans. He has quickly figured out he has no idea how to go about crime fighting. And, to make matters worse, he has learned the hard way, his new powers won't protect him from getting hurt or, quite possibly, killed. Can he survive long enough to learn how to use his powers? Can he get an aging detective to teach him how to fight crime? Can he prevent Aubrey, the new girl, and everyone else at work from figuring out what he can do? How long can he keep this up before he makes that one small mistake and ends up dead?