



JAYNE
ANN
KRENTZ

THE SCARGILL
COVE CASE FILES

An Arcane Society Story



a penguin group

eSpecial

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MEMO

FROM: Fallon Jones, Director of the West Coast office of Jones & Jones.

SUBJECT: Scargill Cove Case Files

CLASSIFICATION: Top Secret.
Authorized Eyes Only.

NOTE FROM FALLON JONES:
These are my private notes, the confidential records of the cases handled by J&J here in Scargill Cove. The Cove is a small town and the local cases are small, too. Definitely not the sort that attract attention from the outside world

or the media. Hell, the outside world and the media couldn't even find the Cove on a map of Northern California. As far as GPS is concerned, the town doesn't exist. That is exactly why I decided to establish the West Coast office of J&J here. I like my privacy.

Most of the cases handled here won't ever make it into the official files of the Arcane Society. But it turns out people get murdered in small towns just like they do in big cities. The Cove being a paranormal nexus, however, nothing is ever normal here—including murder. In this town there are no coincidences.

Case # 1

Death in a Bookstore

(Timeframe: Just before the incidents in
In Too Deep)

July 6

Got a walk-in client today. Named Fitch. Guess it's what I get for being the only psychic detective agency in town.

Fitch just bought the bookstore, which sells mostly books on vegan cooking and metaphysics. Don't think he knows much about either.

Fitch says he thinks something bad happened in the bookstore, like maybe someone got killed there. Wants me to investigate.

I told Fitch I don't do ghosts. I'm a real psychic, not one of those phonies who claims to speak to the dead. Can't waste my time.

Fitch said he's not hiring me to get rid of a ghost. Just wants to know what happened.

Something about Fitch. May be a low-grade sensitive who really is picking up on some bad energy.

Still digging my way out from under

the Hawaii case but told Fitch I'd take the job. Probably a mistake.

This is a small town. If I refused the Fitch case, people would talk. Fitch might bring in an outside investigator. Not good.

July 15

Up all night again. Probably can't go on like this indefinitely. Maybe I do need an assistant.

Getting low on coffee. Got to remember to pick up some more soon.

Another report of a body found near a campground. Same MO. J&J agent says it's a rogue. Like I needed a psychic serial killer problem.

J&J will have to deal with the

rogue. Regular law enforcement doesn't stand a chance against guys like that.

Regular law enforcement won't even admit there is such a thing as the paranormal, let alone killers with psychic talents.

July 17

Crashed last night. Fell asleep at the computer in the middle of reading the new classified report on the Nightshade case.

Promised Fitch I'd stop by his bookstore today. Don't have time for this. Should focus on Nightshade and the rogue.

Need more agents. Like that's gonna happen. J&J isn't the CIA or the FBI. Don't have unlimited resources.

The rogue struck again. Another campground, another body. I'll call the illusion-talent in Seattle. Guy gives me chills but he gets the job done. Sometimes it takes a killer to catch a killer.

Went to see Fitch. Pretty sure now that he's got some talent. Probably doesn't know it yet, himself. He's right. Bad vibes in that store.

Back in the office with a cup of coffee. Thinking about Fitch. No such thing as ghosts but violence always

leaves a psychic stain.

Illusion-talent took the job. Same arrangement as last time. He deals with the rogue and I don't ask any questions. Works for us.

It's raining but I'm going to take a walk on the beach. Need to clear my head.

Only enough coffee left for one more pot. Got to remember to pick up some at the store.

July 20

Just got off the phone with Zack. Knew he'd be a problem once they made him Master of the Society. Always demanding status reports.

Should focus on Nightshade but I keep coming back to the Fitch case. Need to do some research on the former owner of the bookstore.

Ran out of coffee. Going across the street to the Sunshine Café. Lousy coffee but it's not like there's a lot of choice in this burg.

Marge at the Sunshine says Jenny the waitress just quit. Marge is looking for new counter help.

Marge and I talked about how to find reliable help in a small town like Scargill Cove. Neither of us had any good ideas.

Marge and I also talked about Fitch. She says she doesn't think he's been in the book business very long. Something about the guy.

I asked Marge what she knew about Hooker, the guy who used to own the bookstore. Marge didn't know much.

The thing about Scargill Cove is that it's one of those edge-of-the-coast towns filled with folks who don't fit in anywhere else. Like me.

In places like Scargill Cove you don't ask questions about peoples' pasts. Bad manners. Also dangerous.

All Marge could tell me was that

Hooker had arrived in town ten years ago and opened the bookstore. A loner.

I've been in town for a while now, and I went into the bookstore only twice. Don't know any more about Hooker than Marge did.

Went online and checked out Hooker. Got nothing, which is always interesting. Guy had no past but paid taxes on time. Uh huh.

So now I'm curious. Who was Hooker, and why did he suddenly sell up

and leave town? Or did he do either?

Looks like Hooker handled the sale privately. No real estate agent involved. Deed recorded properly. All taxes paid.

July 21

Asked Fitch how he found out that Hooker wanted to sell the bookstore. Fitch said he drove through town one day. Bought a book.

Fitch says he got to talking to Hooker, who said he was ready to move on. Fitch was retired and looking for something to do.

Fitch says the idea of running a bookstore appealed to him so he and Hooker did a deal. Doesn't know where Hooker went.

Definitely bad energy in that store. Told Fitch I wanted to walk through the place, including the basement, soak up the vibes.

Fitch says the basement is stacked wall to wall with old junk. Says he hasn't had time to clean it out.

Turns out the place used to be a bank. Old vault in the basement hidden behind a pile of crates. Fitch looks surprised. Maybe he is.

Vault is locked. New, high-tech lock, not the original. What are the odds that we're going to find out what happened to Hooker?

July 22

Got a crypto-talent in from Oakland to open the vault. Hooker's body's inside. Not a pretty sight. Smell almost knocks us out.

Scratch marks on the vault door. Looks like the guy tried to claw his way out. Probably went mad before he ran out of air.

Local doc is the coroner and ME. Calls it natural causes. Guy goes into a vault, door slams shut, locking him inside. Accidents happen.

Sure, accidents like this used to happen with old, abandoned refrigerators. But an old vault? In Scargill Cove? What are the odds?

Hooker sold the shop to Fitch and left town. So what was he doing sneaking back into his old basement vault? Forget something?

County sheriff agrees with the doc. Hooker died as the result of an accident. No evidence of foul play, no motive. Nothing.

I told Fitch that the investigation was finished. He was right. Something bad did happen to Hooker. Case closed.

Fitch asks me if I believe that Hooker's death was an accident. I tell him no. I remind him this is Northern California. He gets it.

Scargill Cove is in the heart of the Emerald Triangle. Marijuana country. Major cash crop. Lot of money involved.

Combine an illegal substance with big profits and you get violence. Odds are good Hooker was in the drug business.

If that theory is right, then Hooker may have been the loser in a quarrel with one of his business associates.

But I can't shake two questions about Hooker. Why did he come back after moving out of town? What did he keep in the vault?

July 24

Illusion-talent decides to check in. Says he picked up the trail of the rogue. I hang up and think about the scratch marks in the vault.

I shouldn't care how and why Hooker died. Hardly knew the guy and he probably had it coming if he was in the marijuana trade. Still.

It occurs to me that I need to do something about the Hooker murder because it happened here on my turf. This is my town.

When did I develop a sense of civic responsibility? When did Scargill Cove become home? Weird feeling.

If Hooker used the vault to store bundles of marijuana there should be some traces of the stuff.

Got to go out for coffee, anyway, so might as well stop by Fitch's shop and take another look at the vault. I grab a flashlight.

Fitch seems glad to see me. We go downstairs and take a look around the vault. No visible residue of marijuana.

I examine the scratches on the vault door. Random marks left by a dying man? I go hot and raise my psychic talent for a closer look.

Within Arcane, there's a formal name for my kind of paranormal vision: chaos theory—talent.

There are other, informal, less polite terms for people like me:

paranoid conspiracy theorist, obsessive, eccentric. Nice resume.

Probably doomed to take over J&J. Couldn't get any other kind of job. Can't get a date, either. But that's another issue.

People tell me that I see patterns where others see only chaos. And sure enough, I can see a pattern in the scratch marks on the door.

Hooker didn't try to claw his way out of the vault. He knew that was

impossible. So he left a message. In code. For me.

Fitch asks if I notice any clues. I tell him no. I don't tell him about the code. I need to think about this.

I take a walk on the beach. Storm coming in. Why did Hooker think I might investigate his death?

He kept the code simple. Knew anyone connected with Arcane could figure it out. That means he knew I'm Arcane. Knew I'm psychic.

Hooker must have figured that if anyone ever found his body, I might get involved in the investigation. I'm the only PI in town.

The scratches are crude Roman numerals. I'm good with codes and this is child's play. The numbers refer to letters of the alphabet.

The letters spell *Crystallus*. It's one of the three Latin words on the seal of the Arcane Society. *Lux Lucis, Somnium, Crystallus*.

Lux Lucis: light. *Somnium*: dreams. *Crystallus*: crystals. Combined with fire they represent the Society's theory of psychic energy.

Why would Hooker leave me a coded message referring to crystals? Like I tell my agents: there are no coincidences.

Hooker was killed around the time the Hawaii case was closed. He probably heard about Craigmore's death. It was in the papers.

Craigmore was well known in the business world. But he had a secret life. More than one. I think Hooker knew about those other lives.

Hooker figured I was aware of Craigmore's history with Arcane and the black ops government agency. Knew I'd get the message.

I keep walking. I'm running hot, in the zone. Letting the energy of the storm focus my talent.

Out there on the glittering web of the invisible psychic grid that is my chessboard, I start moving pieces. Running scenarios.

Hooker must have known about Craigmore's psychic talent for manipulating the energy of crystals.

If he knew that much, Hooker might have known about the crystal weapon Craigmore kept as a souvenir of his black ops work.

Question: Did Hooker know about Craigmore because they worked together at the black ops agency? Yes. Feels right.

The black ops agency was shut down several years ago. But Hooker and Craigmore were about the same age. Could have been colleagues.

If Hooker knew that Craigmore was dead, why point me in that direction? Did he know about the Nightshade connection? My talent says no.

If Hooker knew about Nightshade he would have left another message. The scratches are about Craigmores and crystals and the weapon.

I watch more points illuminate on the paranormal plane. Craigmores crystal gun. That was the crux of Hookers message.

Maybe there was more than one crystal weapon. Reasonable assumption. Any remaining guns would be incredibly valuable. And dangerous.

Arcane. The government. Rogue crystal-talents. Arms dealers. The list of potential buyers is a long one. But so are the risks.

Anyone trying to sell the crystal guns would have a big marketing problem. The buyers would all be willing to kill for the product.

Maybe that's what happened to Hooker. He wasn't murdered for his stash of weed. He was killed for his stash of crystal guns.

The whole paranormal grid is hot now. I can feel answers slamming into place. But I need more background.

I also need more coffee. I go back up the cliff trail and walk into town. Stop at the Sunshine. Marge still hasn't gotten a new waitress.

Marge wants to know if I've had any luck looking for an assistant. I tell her no. She gets me my coffee. I go back to the office.

I take a good look around the

office. I'm buried in paperwork. Probably do need an assistant, but how do I find one in this town?

Back to work on the Fitch case. I fire up the computer. Hit my favorite conspiracy theorist sites. Whack jobs are as busy as ever.

I exclude the Area 51 crowd. Not dealing with aliens here. Focus on the black helicopter folks. Strike out.

Move on to what used to be my favorite conspiracy site, but the Sentinel

went dark a while back and it is still silent. Rumors are circulating that the Sentinel is dead.

The Sentinel was way, way out there, definitely over the horizon, even for a conspiracy theorist. But in a weird way, I'm going to miss the site. What does that say about me?

No luck with the usual suspects. Sit back and think for a while. Get an idea and pick up the phone. Call Arizona Snow.

Arizona Snow is the ultimate conspiracy theorist. Lives in a little town on the Oregon Coast. Eclipse Bay.

Snow is kind of crazy. Sunk so deep into her conspiracy theories that she will never escape. Some people say I'll end up like her.

Snow and I have never met but we have mutual acquaintances. Grace and Luther in Hawaii. They worked the Craigmore case.

When AZ answers the phone I start

to introduce myself; use the Grace and Luther connection. But Snow says she knows who I am.

The fact that AZ recognizes my name and is willing to talk to me is a little scary. The woman is loony tunes. But she's got talent.

AZ once worked for a secret government agency. She was black ops before they had a name for it. Now she's nuts. Coincidence?

When I talk to AZ, am I talking to

my own future? Am I doomed to get so far out on the psychic plane that I'll never find my way back?

Have to worry about my para-psych problems some other time. Got to find those missing crystal guns before Nightshade or a rogue does.

Arizona asks if my phone is encrypted. I say yes. She starts talking about rumors of three men who vanished several years ago.

AZ says that at one time the three

missing men worked for her old agency. Got sent to another dept. for some tests. Never returned.

Rumor was that the tests were intended to identify agents with certain psychic abilities. AZ thinks the men went to another agency.

AZ hints that one of the projects at the other agency involved some kind of psychic weapons. Agency shut down years ago.

Officially, the three men died in an

accident. But rumor is they pulled a disappearing act and took some of the weapons with them.

AZ says there haven't been any rumors of the crystal guns in years. She says Vortex probably tracked down the men and the guns.

AZ says the crystal guns are just the kind of thing Vortex would try to get hold of. I ask her what Vortex is and brace myself.

AZ says Vortex is a group of

highly-placed conspirators dedicated to controlling the world. Like anyone would want that job.

I think of Nightshade. Okay, there are such things as conspiracies. Problem is, Nightshade is real. Vortex isn't.

I thank AZ, tell her J&J owes her a favor, and try to end the call. She wants to tell me one more thing.

AZ says that I'm opening a can of worms. Says to keep an eye out for Vortex agents. I ask how I'll recognize

one.

AZ says I'll know a Vortex agent by a tattoo of a tornado on the shoulder. I tell her I don't plan to get that close.

End the call, sit back, and pull up my talent. Watch the grid light up with connections. No such thing as Vortex except in AZ's head.

But the crystal guns are real. Scenario: Hooker and two others stole the psychic weapons years ago when their agency shut down.

Hooker and the others knew the guns were very, very hot. Went into deep hiding. But why no rumors about the weapons in all this time?

If Hooker and his partners had used the weapons themselves or sold them on the black market, there would have been rumors.

Looked into the victim's past. Got nothing on Hooker. Time to take another look at the client. Fitch.

I go deep online, looking for anything I can find on Fitch. His past is squeaky clean, just like Hooker's.

I've got my red flag. Fitch is too clean. Why was he so anxious for me to investigate Hooker's death?

Grid's getting hotter now. Fitch didn't come to me because he was worried about some bad energy in his shop.

Fitch hired me to find something

that he couldn't find himself: Hooker's stash of crystal guns. It's all coming together now.

Hooker, Fitch, and a third man stole the crystal guns. But Hooker betrayed his two partners. Disappeared with the guns.

Classic falling-out among thieves scenario. Took Fitch years to find Hooker here in Scargill Cove.

Must have been a quarrel. Hooker died without revealing the location of the crystal guns. Fitch hit a wall so he

hired a psychic PI.

Fitch hopes that my investigation will lead to the crystal guns. Once he has them, figures he'll get rid of me. No loose ends.

Need more answers and there's only one place to get them. I leave the office and walk down the street to Fitch's bookshop.

I'm running hot now. In the zone. The grid is blazing. Nothing like a lot of adrenaline and psi to heat the blood.

Bookshop is open but Fitch isn't behind the counter. I go downstairs to the vault room. Fitch is waiting. With a gun.

You know, he says. I tell him I know some of it, but not all. It's about the crystal guns, I say.

He tells me they stole three of them, one for each man. But Hooker turned on them. Disappeared with all three guns.

I ask about the third man. Fitch says after they stole the guns, another agent named Craigmores came looking for them.

Craigmores got to Brock. Killed him. But never found Fitch or Hooker or the three guns. Eventually Craigmores stopped looking.

I don't tell Fitch that Craigmores stopped looking because he had bigger fish to fry. Instead I ask how Hooker died.

Fitch says that after all these years he finally found Hooker here in Scargill Cove. Confronted him down here in the basement.

Fitch says there was an argument. Hooker refused to give up the guns. Why? I ask. He never used them. Never sold them.

Fitch says Hooker had a change of heart after they stole the guns. He decided they were too dangerous. So he hid them.

Fitch says Hooker planned to take the secret to his grave. Which is exactly what he did. So how did Hooker end up in the vault?

Fitch says during the argument, Hooker clutched his chest. Looked like he was having a heart attack. Stumbled into the vault.

Fitch says Hooker pulled the vault door closed. It locked. Fitch couldn't get it open.

I understand now. Hooker was

dying. Knew he had only one chance to leave me a message. Locked himself in the vault.

The dying Hooker scratched his message in code on the inside of the bank vault door, hoping that eventually I'd find it.

I look at Fitch. You asked me to investigate because you couldn't find the crystal guns yourself, I say.

Fitch says that I failed. Says it's time to tie up loose ends. I'm going to

have the same kind of heart attack that killed Hooker.

The wave of cold psychic energy comes at me like a tsunami, crashing across my senses. Killing energy. Fitch is generating it.

Always knew there was something about Fitch. Guy is a powerful talent. Very few can kill with psychic energy.

The icy mind blast is freezing my para-senses. Power like this can stop the human heart. I now know exactly what

killed Hooker.

I need to distract Fitch for a second. That's all. One lousy second. I manage to talk. I know where the guns are hidden, I say.

He doesn't believe me but he doesn't want to take any chances, either. The mind blast lessens a little. Where are they? he asks.

And suddenly I know. Hooker gave me that information, too, in his coded message. But I'm not about to tell Fitch.

I've got an opening. With my talent, I reach into the whirlwind of chaos and seize the power I need.

I slam the chaos energy into Fitch's aura, shattering his currents. He goes down hard. Dead before he hits the floor.

I take a little time to get myself back under control. Killing a man takes a psychic toll. I'll revisit this scene in my nightmares. Won't be the first bad dreams I've had.

I leave the body on the floor and go upstairs. Hooker stocked a lot of New Age books: meditation, dream theory, crystals.

There are three shelves of books devoted to crystals. I find one that carries the logo of the Arcane Society. Open it.

Book is hollowed out. Three small flashlights inside. The crystal guns. Hidden in plain sight.

I go back down into the vault room. Crouch beside Fitch's body. I know the authorities will call it natural causes.

I feel a frisson of intuition. I unbutton Fitch's shirt. Breathe a sigh of relief when I don't find any mark on his shoulder.

But I make the mistake of turning him over. Look at the back of his shoulder. A small tattoo. Looks like a tornado. Vortex.

Epilogue

Monday morning. Some good news. Illusion talent sees fit to call in. Says I don't have to worry about the serial killer anymore.

I ask what happened to the rogue. The illusion talent tells me the guy drowned. Right. I don't ask any more questions.

No coffee. I head for the Sunshine Café. I sense the change when I go through the door. Good energy in the Sunshine today.

Got a new employee, Marge tells me. Name is Isabella Valdez. New employee comes out of the kitchen. That's when I know.

Isabella Valdez is the source of the good energy in the Sunshine. I introduce myself. She pours coffee for me.

Isabella Valdez is a talent of some kind. Very high grade. Another talent in this small town? What are the odds?

I sit at the counter for a long time, thinking about Vortex. Just what I need, another conspiracy of rogue psychics to worry about.

After a while I stop thinking about Vortex. I think about Isabella Valdez instead.

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