

ances linked to the paranormal. Ten of his vile vortices can be found in the tropic region of the earth, distributed equally between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.” She pointed out the location of each one on the screen, each part she touched becoming marked with a red dot. “The remaining two can be found in the north and south poles, here and here.” She smiled at me. “This brings us to 1973 when three Russian scientists extended Sanderson’s theory. They proposed that the earth had twelve pentagonal plates that made up a matrix of cosmic energy.”

The globe shifted and became a map overlaid by a planetary grid made up of a complex mix of polyhedrons. “It is said that the sixty-two junctions produced by the intersection of any three plates have proven to be sites of anomalies and mysterious phenomena. Now, of the twelve, there are three areas which are the most popular, the most active. These are the Bermuda Triangle, the South Atlantic Anomaly, and of course, the Dragon’s Triangle in the Devil’s Sea.”

It was all very interesting really, but something inside me was telling me to go. This woman had an agenda. Our conversation had ceased to be about academia and my future in it quite a while ago. This was no longer a talk between a student and her teacher. A feeling of awareness, of entrapment washed over me. I stood up. “I don’t really understand what this has to do with me, professor. With all due respect, we never took this up in class and I’m really not in the position to comment on...”

She motioned for me to sit down, her frosty blue eyes brooking no argument. “Quiet! I’ll ask for your opinion when I need it. Right now what I need from you is your attention, your mind. This has been a long time coming. Surely you must sense that.”

I stared at her, felt the gravity of truth in her words, and obeyed.

“Look at this, in the region of Asia right here off the coast of Japan between Iwo Jima and Marcus Island, almost exactly opposite the Bermuda Triangle. That is Ma-no Umi, the Sea of the Devil. It doesn’t appear on any of the official global maps but it’s there...” With quick motions of her fingers on the screen, she zoomed out of the Dragon Triangle and showed in a broader angle, the continent of Asia. “If you were to incorporate the world grid, the new one by Becker and Hagens,” as she said this, the planetary grid shifted and became even more intricate, “look here, see how even the land masses are shaped, how they correspond to the pattern? Even with

your Philippines, right here on the bottom, see how its curve follows this circle here?”

I pressed my back against my chair. Like this, eyes bright and voice intent, Professor Rilke reminded me of *the fortune teller*, despite the difference in their looks and general demeanor. My heart began to race and I felt a faint trace of fear slither down my spine. Did she *know* about me?

“Obviously the vortex is very strong here in this spot.” She pointed to the Dragon’s Triangle. “The Devil’s Graveyards, these vile vortices, are areas of the earth where disappearances occur, mechanical failures, time-space distortions. Explorers have disappeared if they were unlucky enough to cross these places at the wrong time of the lunar and planetary alignments. These factors serve as switches that activate particular areas. Look here, the green dots represent an approximation of anomalous disappearances and where they occurred.”

The number of green dots that appeared astounded me.

“Those are just disappearances, mind you. Miss Mendoza, are you all right? You seem very uncomfortable. Shall I guess the reason? You are baffled, I suppose. Why am I telling you this? Well, because you see... aren’t you an anomaly yourself?”

I kept my face impassive and I looked her in the eye. “Excuse me?”

“It all sounds so very esoteric doesn’t it, but you should know. What, no comment? Nothing to say? All right, I suppose I can understand your reticence. I’ll tell you a story then, so listen. Sanderson went about his investigations and in one of them he found the story of a pilot who had flown very near one of the vile vortices in Hawaii. He had been flying with passengers, maintaining constant radio contact with tower officials, when suddenly he found himself flying blind. His equipment had been rendered useless and he had lost all communications with the outside world. He flew anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour, relying only on his sight and his instincts. Then, just as suddenly as it began, the experience ended and he found himself able to get in touch with the tower once more. What is so strange about the incident is that for the people in the tower, no such time had elapsed. One moment, the pilot was speaking to them about his coordinates, and in the next moment he was in a panic, calling out that he had lost communication and that he was flying blind, had flown 350 miles without the aid of any instrument. Time is relative yes, but by that much?”

She leveled me with a glare that brooked no argument. “How could such a thing happen?”

I answered automatically, before I could stop myself. “They must have entered into a time warp, a different dimensional frequency unaffected by time.”

“Exactly so,” she nodded, the note of approval unmistakable in her voice. “That’s what I think as well. You’ve seen how particles behave, existing simultaneously in all directions until observed. The relative weakness of gravity is explained when other dimensions are factored in. What do you think about the possibility of parallel universes? Do you believe that they exist?”

How could I not? I grew cautious but nodded nonetheless. “Yes, I do. But it’s all theory right now, mathematically consistent, but theoretical still. But what does all this have to do with me? I’m not an anomaly.”

“Oh, aren’t you? I have seen you around. More than that, I have *sensed* you. You possess a great deal of odic force, though much less than the levels you are capable of carrying. You were depleted somehow, weren’t you? Someone must have taken it away.”

I kept silent, my heart racing. “What?”

“You don’t belong here,” she stated matter-of-factly. “You’re from an alternate plane.”

“You’re insane!” I cried, all the while wondering if I should just tell her everything. Could I trust her? This was the first time anyone had ever mentioned anything even remotely related to my not belonging to this reality. I stared at her, her too-old eyes looking out from a too-young face. How old was she anyway? Not even past her mid-thirties, only a few years older than myself. What would she be getting out of this?

Professor Rilke snorted, the sound seemed obscene coming from her fine-boned face. “You *are* an anomaly. It’s easy to see when you know what you’re looking for. I knew from the moment you stepped into my classroom. You don’t belong here. You carry it around with you everywhere. Your energy distorts the matter around you.”

I looked down accusingly at the bag resting on my calf. Was the tablet the reason? Or was it really me? I toed my bag away. “Can you sense any fluctuations in the level of the odic energy I emit? If what you say is true,

then haven't you considered that perhaps I've simply served as a conduit to an outside source?"

She laughed. "That tablet of yours is a part of it, but mostly it's coming from you."

"How do you ... how can you ... ?"

"You should let me help you. It's the reason you're so intent on understanding gravity, isn't it? You think it might be the key. That's a smart inference. What is it that you want? To explore? To replicate the process? You and I, we could help each other. There are others like you, just as there are people like me. We are the ones who know about this phenomena occurring."

"We? People like me?"

A sardonic twist of her lips preceded another laugh. "Do you honestly think that you are the only one? We are dealing with quantities as large as infinity here, worlds splitting again and again enumerable times." She lifted an eyebrow and regarded me with a level stare. "Well then, are you interested?"

"Interested?" I repeated, something like hope beginning to unfurl inside of me. I squelched it before it could fully bloom. After years of nothing, here was this woman, this professor, presenting me with the means with which to attain my goal. It didn't feel real.

"You're being tiresome, Miss Mendoza, and it's starting to annoy me. You were not this slow in my class. Yes, I'm asking you if you are interested. Do you want to learn more? Follow Alice down the Rabbit Hole, step through the looking-glass, look far down into the abyss and have it look back at you?"

I stared at her quietly for a moment, needing a bit of time to process what was happening. I felt excited and anxious, wanting to believe and yet afraid to let myself hope. Should her promise prove false, if this was all some kind of psychotic scam, the worst case scenario would be that I'd end up dead in a desert somewhere. Taking this into account, would the risk be worth it? As of now, Professor Rilke's offer was my best chance at finding my way back home.

"Well?" she prompted. The look on her face told me that she knew exactly what my answer was going to be.

“Okay,” I said with more confidence than I actually felt. Whether or not I *could* or *should* trust her did not matter. In the end, it all boiled down to me, to whether or not I was willing to risk it ... to risk everything for this one chance.

Yes I was.

“I’m interested,” I said. “Let’s do it.”