

A VISIT TO LANGLEY

by

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The President of the United States finished his inaugural address. The massive crowd, gathered before him, dutifully assembled on the National Mall, erupted into a shower of praise and choral adulation, as a thin rain began coming down. The newly-minted President soaked up the sycophancy for several minutes, waving to the revering masses, a broad, handsome smile across his face.

He turned to his beloved wife, still clutching Thomas Jefferson's Bible, the wonderful woman who had supported him so much during the difficult campaign. She herself had endured harsh treatment at the hands of his opponent and his army of propagandists, but she had survived remarkably well. He kissed her briefly, then embraced her warmly. He could barely hear the words "I love you" over the din of the crowd. He then bent down to pet Kaleb, their beloved chocolate lab, who his wife had insisted on bringing. The Secret Service was tacitly okay with the dog's presence, as long as the animal didn't interfere with their own dogs. Kaleb's rear shook as his tail wagged enthusiastically. How lucky, thought the President, to be an oblivious animal.

Next, The President heartily shook the hand of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He then proceeded to make his way down the line of the first row of seats. There, before him, were all surviving former Presidents. He stopped and greeted each one; the Republicans would give him a hearty handshake, while the Democrats would embrace him tightly in an eager hug. All of them gave him the prerequisite "Congratulations, Mr. President," and "Good luck, Mr. President."

At the end of the row was the last President, his now predecessor. The former President had campaigned viciously against him, ardently supporting his opponent. The two men stopped, and stared directly at each other, eye to eye, practically chest to chest. The new President could not help but notice a strange look of fear and sadness in his predecessor's eyes, as the outgoing President reached out with his hand, shaking his successor's hand firmly. "Good luck, Mr. President," he said. "Things are about to change for you." The outgoing President held the new President's hand a bit too long.

Shaking it off, the new President made his way further down the row, greeting and accepting the felicitations of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, The Speaker of the House of Representatives, and, finally, his loyal running mate, the new Vice President. They embraced warmly, saying nothing. The President noticed tears running down the Vice President's cheeks.

There was a tap on the President's shoulder. He turned around, and gave his new Chief of Staff, formerly the director of his campaign, a broad smile and an exuberant handshake. "Alright, Mr. President," the Chief of Staff said. "Let's get going to 1600 Pennsylvania."

The President clasped his Chief of Staff at his shoulders, before speaking: "We will, but there is a stop we need to make first." The Chief of Staff was unaware of any unscheduled appointments; the entire day was planned out, filled to the minute with obligations. "Uh, alright sir. This way to the motorcade."

The two men rushed away from the crowd, agents of the Secret Service close behind. At the bottom of the stairs to the rostrum was a waiting armored limousine. A convoy of security vehicles surrounded it. Opening the door to the limousine was the President's National Security Adviser, a stern, humorless General who ate nails for breakfast and slept once every few years. His appointment was not part of the Constitutional Cabinet, needing no Senate approval, and the President had selected him for the position several weeks ago. His role in the new administration was already in play.

After shaking the General's hand, the three men settled into the back of the limousine. The vehicle began to speed off. The National Security Adviser spoke: "Excellent speech, Mr. President. I assume we're off to the White House? We can have you in the Oval Office in less than five minutes."

The Chief of Staff spoke abruptly: "Yes, I believe that's on the schedule, but Mr. President, you mentioned stopping somewhere else first?"

The President leaned back in his seat, his head peering out of the window as raindrops gathered across it. He twisted the top off of the bottle of water in his lap. After a brief moment, he spoke: "Yes, gentlemen. There's a stop I need to make." He turned to his Chief of Staff. "Tell the Secret Service we're going to Langley."

The President had campaigned vigorously on a liberal platform, frequently railing against the delinquent ways of the nation's intelligence community. His favorite target had been the Central Intelligence Agency. He was well aware of the CIA's history, and he was strongly repulsed by it. This shadow organization, he had told his campaign rallies, was going to change its untoward ways, once he was President. This had won him the support of many who felt strongly that America should be a republic, not an empire, a nation that does not interfere in places it shouldn't.

The National Security Adviser appeared confused. He leaned forward in his seat, clutching a thick binder. "Mr. President," he said, "I've already prepared a full briefing on global security for you; we can go over it at any time. Don't you think..."

"We'll get to the White House soon enough," the President replied. "We're going to stop by CIA headquarters for a surprise visit." The Chief of Staff and the National Security Adviser exchanged nervous glances. "Sir," the Adviser said, "the Director of National Intelligence is not expecting you until next week."

"Perfect timing then," said the President. He turned again towards his Chief of Staff: "Get in touch with the Secret Service."

"Uh... Yes sir, of course," the Chief of Staff replied. He reached into his suit jacket and produced his cell phone. After a brief and somewhat terse conversation, the motorcade changed its course.

The President's convoy arrived in front of CIA headquarters, flanked by an attendance of security SUV's, motorcycles, the decoy limousine, and Virginia State Troopers. Overhead, an Army Blackhawk helicopter circled diligently, keeping the prying eyes of the snooping media at bay. The President, his Chief of Staff and his National Security Adviser stepped out of the limousine. Two Secret Service agents took up position behind them. By this time, it had stopped raining.

The Director of National Intelligence came bounding down the steps to the entrance of the Agency's headquarters, practically running, flanked by several of his lieutenants. He was panting by the time he reached the President. "Mr. President," he said, extending his right hand, "what a surprise. We were not expecting you for several-

"Can it, Bill," the President said, sharply cutting him off. He did not return the Director's handshake. The Director and the National Security Adviser's eyes briefly met. The Chief of Staff stared at the ground.

The President continued: "You know damned well that you and I are not going to be friends, Director. I'm here to inspect this hellhole of crime before I tear it to pieces."

The Director, taken aback, managed a small smile: "With all due respect, Mr. President, the CIA has been providing valuable intelligence to the Executive branch for decades. We are here to serve at your pleasure, sir."

The President took a step closer to the Director, nearly in his face, before speaking: "And with all due fucking respect, Director, you and I both know that the CIA is guilty of some of the most heinous and damning crimes in this nation's history. Now, why don't we take a tour of the facility before you and I have a little one-on-one?"

The Director's face was pale. "Yes, of course, sir," he said, "It's just that we've had no time to prepare for your visit. If I had known you were coming here today, on Inauguration Day, we would have-

The President interrupted the Director again: "Well, that's too goddamned bad, Director. Let's have a look around. I have a busy day ahead of me."

"Uh... Yes, of course, Mr. President," the Director replied. "Right this way, please, I'll give you the tour myself."

The entourage climbed the steps of the massive building and made their way into the foyer. The floors were a polished marble, and the massive ceiling was held high by glossy pillars. A large plaque of fallen agents, a requiem of espionage, adorned the wall to the right. Rows of security stations, a dozen across, spanned the diameter of the atrium. At each station, the security agent stopped what they were doing, and looked up in amazement at the new arrivals.

Off to the side, a tour guide abruptly stopped her prepared remarks to her group of sightseers as she saw the President enter the building. The tourists immediately began snapping photos.

“We'll take my personal entrance,” the Director said nervously. They made their way over to a discreet door, between two potted plants, off to the side of the foyer. The Director slid his card in a small reader by the side of the door, waited for the light to blink green, and pushed the door open.

A massive floor of office cubicles greeted them. The Director dismissed his lieutenants, repeating that he would give the President the tour personally. The President nodded in stern agreement.

They made their way down a broad hallway, flanked by rows and rows of desks and computers. As they passed each one, an agent would stand up, some still holding their phones to their heads, and marvel in intense curiosity at the the unexpected visitors. The President stared straight ahead. The Chief of Staff looked around in inquisitiveness. The National Security Adviser stared at the ground as they walked, vaguely listening to the Director droning on about the work these agents were doing. The Secret Service agents walked behind the entourage diligently, showing no expression.

As far as the CIA's work went, the work of these agents, on the first floor, was relatively pedestrian. The President knew this. Midway through the walk, the President turned to the Director, interrupting a speech he had probably made several times, to many new Presidents. “This is not why I came here, Director. I think you know that.”

The Director paused, a bead of sweat dripping down his forehead. “Of course, Mr. President. I believe you would like to inspect our Operations Center.” The Director turned to his left. At the end of the long hallway was a set of elevator doors, steel and imposing. “Let me take you there now.”

They made their way to the elevator. After the sliding of the security card, the party waited for the lift to arrive. Attempting to break the awkward silence, the Director spoke: “Our main Operations Control Center is on the third floor. After that, perhaps I can show you some of the projects we're working on. We've got a real eye on the world, sir!” He attempted a smile. The President looked astringent and impatient. He said nothing.

Mercifully, the elevator doors opened, breaking the nervous reticence. The group of men stepped inside. The Director again slid his security card through a reader, and pressed the button for floor three. The lift jolted, and began to shift.

Without hesitating, the President swiftly reached out and pressed the 'stop' button on the elevator's control panel. The lift swiftly ground to a screeching halt. The Director was shocked, and glanced at the National Security Adviser, who could only shrug his shoulders. The Chief of Staff was equally confused. “Mr. President,” the Director nervously began, “is there a problem?”

A voice came over the elevator's intercom: “Is there a problem in the elevator?” “Yes,” the President replied, “but it's getting off. Go back to your work.” The President glared at the security camera.

“Sir,” the Director said, “I don't understand-”

“Shut the fuck up,” said the President. The National Security Adviser reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair of Tums. The President continued: “I don't care about your control room, or your spying on the Russians, or the Chinese, or the fucking Costa Rican embassy. I want to see the god-damned dirt, Mr. Director. Take me the lower levels. Take me to the vaults. Take me to the things you don't want me to see.”

The Director's face was ashen. He stammered when he spoke: “Mr. President, I will be the first to agree that this agency has not always behaved in a manner consistent with the values of The United States, but liberty often requires a brutal hand. Why don't we talk about this in my office, first. Sir.”

The President again stepped closely to the Director. “The dirt,” he said, an angry scowl across his face. “I want to see it. I want to see what you have, before I scatter this polluted agency to the four winds.”

The Chief of Staff's bowels puckered. They should be preparing for the Inaugural Ball right now.

The Director was silent for a moment, but he knew he had no choice. The schedule would have to be moved up now. “Yes, yes sir. Of course,” he said. He reached into his pocket, and pulled out a small metal key. It fit perfectly into a small lock just below the elevator's control panel. The Director turned the key, and opened a concealed metal panel. A series of buttons, labeled one through nine, were exposed. The Director pushed the first button, put away his key and turned back to the President. He found the courage to speak: “Mr. President. This is highly unorthodox. But I will do as you ask.”

“You're too fucking kind,” said he President.

The elevator began to descend. After a brief moment, the doors opened. The four men found themselves staring into a large, cavernous vault, full of rows upon rows of high metal shelving. Here and there, among the shelving, were tall, sliding access ladders. Each metal shelf held a row of metal boxes. They stepped into the vast chamber.

“Alright,” said the President. “What are we looking at?”

The Director's demeanor had quickly changed. He suddenly no longer seemed nervous, as if accepting of his fate. “These, Mr. President, are records of every citizen of the United States.”

The President turned towards the Director. “Excuse me?”

“The records of every American citizen, Mr. President, the Director continued. “Names. Birth dates. Birth places. Social Security numbers. Job histories. Internet records. Spouses. Acquaintances. Pets. Hobbies. You name it. Every bit of information on every American citizen that ever existed is here.”

The President took a moment, hiding his disgust, as he took in the enormous room. “I see,” he finally said. “This is some impressive work. There must be millions of files here.”

The National Security Adviser spoke: "Isn't this the NSA's purview? Or the FBI's?"

"Well, it's good to have back-up. And our records are much more thorough."

The President slowly looked around: "You've got dirt on everybody?"

"Well, sir," said the Director, "In order to keep the country safe, we need to--"

He was cut off again. "This is disgusting, Director," said the President. "I intend to burn these records on the White House lawn. Absolutely disgusting."

"But sir," the Director said, attempting to counter, "This information is vital to our security as a nation."

"No," said the President. "It's vital for control. Control by the people of power that this President will no longer answer to."

Hoo-boy, thought the National Security Adviser. The Chief of Staff was withdrawn, silent.

The Director stared at the President, not knowing what to say.

"Alright, that's strike one, out of about fifty, I'd say," said the President. "Let's see what else you've got, lurking in this basement. Take me to level two."

The Director paused for a moment. "Of course, sir, but your entourage," he said, gesturing towards the National Security Adviser, the Chief of Staff, and the two Secret Service agents, "do not have the proper clearance. I'm afraid the rest of the tour will have to be just the two of us."

The Chief of Staff seemed relieved. The National Security Adviser was visibly indignant. "Look here, Director," he said in a loud voice, "I've been a fucking General longer than you've been sucking Jimmy Carter's cock. Take me on your god-damned tour."

The Director smiled. The President was now wondering where the Director's jitters had gone. The Director faced the National Security Adviser and said: "General, I'm sorry, but until we have clearance from the--"

"I've got your fucking clearance right here, you Ivy League piece of shit," the National Security Adviser exclaimed. "Jim," said the President. "it's alright. The two of you head to the White House. Take the agents with you. I'll be fine. I'll be over at the White House in a few hours." The General stared at the Director as his muscles slowly relaxed. "Fine," he said.

The Director produced his cell phone, directing security to take the Chief of Staff and the National Security Adviser, along with the Secret Service agents, back to the main level. After a moment, the elevator opened. The National Security Adviser gave one last, pissed-off look to the Director and stepped inside. The Chief of Staff, eager to leave this place, quickly followed. He shot the President a nervous look as the doors closed behind them.

The Director spoke: "Mr. President, the elevator will take your staff back to the main level, before returning to continue our tour. But I must protest at your hostility. We are a vital component-"

"To hell with you," the President said, still looking around. "You know I campaigned on dismantling the military industrial complex. Your little spy club is at the center of it, a god-damned mistake." He turned to face the Director. "I intend to fix that mistake. Good luck finding a new job."

"I see," said the Director. The President noticed that the Director was now showing no expression. Trying to be tough, maybe? The two of them faced the elevator doors, waiting for the arrival, saying nothing.

After a moment the doors opened, and the President and the Director of National Intelligence stepped inside. The Director paused for a moment as the doors slid closed. "Mr. President, again, as I was trying to say..." he began. "Mr. Director, again, go to hell," countered the President. "Press the god-damned button." The Director sighed, and pressed floor two.

The doors slid open into a smaller chamber. The room was quite dark, lit by the soft light of several rows of computer terminals, some standing, some resting on desks. Each terminal was staffed by an agent, who, upon seeing the President and the Director enter the room, immediately faced them and stood at attention.

"Back to work, all of you," said the Director. The agents quickly resumed to their work.

"Well, what have we got here?" asked the President.

The Director looked around the room before he spoke. "Well, Mr. President, as you and I have both indicated, this agency has not always operated within the norms of American values."

"You mean within the law," the President said.

"Yes, I suppose you could put it that way," the Director responded. "In any event, some of our most... sensitive operations require constant upkeep to maintain their secrecy. That is what these agents are doing, scanning the global media, listening to the world, making sure our secrets remain secure."

"You mean covering your ass," the President said. He pointed to the nearest desk: "What's that man doing?"

"The Kennedy assassination," the Director casually replied.

The President did his best to maintain his shock. "The what?"

"The JFK hit. The one we worked on with the Mafia."

"Wait a minute," said the President. "Are you saying that the conspiracy kooks are right? You had a hand in that?"

The Director cleared his throat. "You wanted the truth, Mr. President. Yes. We killed Kennedy. We couldn't let him abandon Vietnam like that."

"Jesus," said the President. "I will have all your asses rotting in Rikers."

"As you say, sir."

"What about these others," the President asked, his voice beginning to shake with anger.

"More diligent work, making sure secrets stay that way," replied the Director. "That one there is working on Jonestown. That agent there is working on Martin Luther King. That fellow in the corner is working on September 11th."

The President's mind reeled. He felt himself growing slightly dizzy as his adrenaline rose. He quickly composed himself, a wellspring of outrage growing inside of him.

"These events happened long ago," said the President. "Why the hell do you have people working on them now?"

"As I indicated, Mr. President," said the Director, "We must maintain our secrecy. These agents are scouting every chatroom, every Facebook page, every reddit read across the globe. As soon as someone gets too close to the the truth, we make sure that they don't."

"What, you fucking kill them?" asked the President, shocked.

"We do what we have to do," said the Director.

"This is outrageous," said the President, mentally planning the arrest and trial of the Director. "What hand did you have in Jonestown?"

"Well, you really don't think Jim Jones could have gotten all of that cyanide without a little help, do you?" responded the Director.

"Unbelievable," said the President.

"You asked for the truth, sir," said the Director. He pointed to a desk at the far end. "That agent there, I hand-picked myself. He's maintaining the Roswell cover-up."

"The what?"

"The Roswell cover-up. Come. Let me show you level three."

"Right," said the President, "You had damned well better."

They made their way back to the elevator.

Level three was nearly empty, except for one feature. The room was large, nearly as cavernous as the first floor. In the center of the room, resting on a slightly raised platform, was a large metal saucer, a craft of some kind, showing obvious signs of damage. Here and there, various people, dressed fully in hazmat suits, inspected the wreckage, working on, and reverse engineering the alien technology. Unlike the agents on the first floor, they did not acknowledge their visitors.

“You gotta be fucking kidding...” said the President.

The Director was unfazed at the President's distress. He spoke, unemotionally, almost mechanically: “In 1947, near Roswell, New Mexico, we came into possession of a crashed UFO. Two of the three occupants were dead. The third lived for a while, before dying. Their bodies are at Groom Lake, out at Nellis.”

The President stared at the object for several minutes. A wave of shock and realization slowly came over him. “Director,” he spoke, “Do you have any actual idea what this means?”

The Director sighed. “Again, sir, you asked for the truth.”

“Jesus,” whispered the President. “How deep does this thing go?”

“Great question,” said the Director. “You can see that the craft is on a platform; it's actually a lift. Let's make our way to level four. Really not much to see here, we've been reverse engineering that thing for decades.”

“Right,” said the President. “Not much to see here. We're just concealing the biggest scientific find in history.” His mind reeled. The damage control was going to be intense. There was going to be an ass ton of hell to pay.

The elevator doors opened onto level four.

This room was the largest of the tour so far. They two men stepped into an enormous cavern, hewn from the rocky earth itself. In the center of the room were the mechanics of the lift, apparently ready to lower the craft from level three, above them. Running through the room were sets of what appeared to the President to be railroad tracks. Each track disappeared at the edge of the cavern into a dark tunnel.

From time to time, a steel, white train would enter the chamber. The cars appeared to be electric, as the President could only hear a slight hum. The doors would open, and several people would exit, stand between the rails, and wait to board another train as it arrived. Several of the people wore suits. Several of them wore dark, thick robes; the President could make out no features of these individuals. None of them paid the President or the Director any notice.

The President stood there, in complete shock. He said nothing.

The Director broke the silence, in a calm voice: “This is the Langley station, where we can access the underground. We can get to just about anywhere from here. You can see the lift; if we need to get the craft back to Groom Lake, we can lower it onto a special car and it-”

“Who are these people...” the President stammered.

“Oh, them?” The Director was completely at ease. “These are the people in power that you spoke of. You'll notice that they don't give a rat's ass that you're here. They have important work to do. Running the planet is tough work. Tough work indeed.”

“These... tracks...,” managed the President. “Where do they go? Where are these trains going?”

“Oh, all kinds of places,” replied the Director nonchalantly. “Groom Lake. New Agatha. Dulce. Wakiokon's Tomb. Those kinds of places.”

“I...”

“Mr. President,” said the Director. “It's getting late, and I believe you have festivities to attend to this evening. Why don't we continue with the tour?”

“But...”

The Director, taking control, took the President by the arm, and guided him back to the elevator. He pressed the button for level five. The elevator took noticeably longer to descend.

Level five was much smaller than level four. It was clearly some kind of laboratory. The President was doing his best to maintain his composure. “And what the hell is this?” he asked, as they stepped into the room.

“This is our little off-the-books science experiment. Nothing as interesting as what goes on out at Dulce, but fascinating work nonetheless.” The President could see rows upon rows of laboratory and scientific equipment, banks of computers, and a row of what looked like animal pens. A small group of scientists, again dressed head to toe in hazmat suits, darted among the equipment. Again, these people paid their visitors no mind. “Say,” said the Director, “let me show you one of my favorites!” The President thought he could hear cries of pain over the din of the humming equipment.

The Director guided the President over to a small glass enclosure, filed with a viscous, pale liquid. Suspended in the fluid was a human brain, with both eyes protruding from the frontal lobe, dangling by their optic nerves, floating, bobbing in the fluid. A spinal cord reached down from brain stem. Various lines, wires of some sort, were attached to the end of the column of vertebrae.

“Mr. President,” the Director said proudly, “may I present to you: Adolf Hitler!”

“What?”

“The leader of the Third Reich himself!” The Director pointed to a small box on the side of the tank, what appeared to a rudimentary intercom. “Would you like to say hello?”

The President resisted the urge to vomit before speaking: “I most certainly would not. This is vile, Director. Absolutely vile....” He swallowed hard. “This is beyond anything I thought you bastards could come up with. Unbelievable.”

“Our research is important, Mr. President.”

“And highly illegal.”

“Not exactly. According to the CIA Langley Clandestine Operations Act of 1949, we are no longer on American soil.”

“I've never heard of that act.”

“Of course you haven't, Mr. President, but come, you haven't seen the best parts. Let me show you what else we're working on.”

The Director guided the President to the opposite side of the room, in between stacks of equipment, dodging darting scientists. These researchers were obviously quite busy with their work.

The President and the Director stood before a row of caged animal pens. “It's not as good as what goes on at Dulce's Nightmare Hall, but we have fun,” said the Director. The President peered inside the cages.

Each pen held a grotesque experimentation, a single creature, but hardly a recognizable animal. Each one was a fusion of body parts; limbs, eyeballs on stems, antlers, claws, mouths and orifices where they should not be. The President also noticed, clearly, human anatomy on some of the creatures. Each one howled in pain, writhing in a pool of blood and excrement.

The President stood silently, numb. “Pretty cool, huh,” said the Director.

The President was frozen in horror.

“Director!” They were interrupted by one of the scientists. A tall, gangling man came over to them. The Director turned to him: “Ah!”

“Mr. President,” the Director began, “May I present to you Dr. Foule, our chief researcher. Dr., this...”

“Yes, of course,” said Dr. Foule. “No offense, but I voted for the other guy.” His voice was muffled through his suit. “I hope you are impressed with our work, sir!”

“I find it utterly revolting, you sick piece of shit. I'm going to see that you get the chair,” replied the President.

Dr. Foule chuckled. “Okie dokie! But you haven't seen the best! The labs on level...”

“We'll get to those soon enough,” interrupted the Director. “We have a tour we must finish.”

“Alright, then,” said the Doctor. As the two men turned to leave, Dr. Foule called out: “Director, you really should come down here more often; we do great stuff!”

The Director and the President made their way back to the elevator. The Director pushed floor six. The elevator returned to its descent.

The President said nothing, as the lift descended. Eventually, The Director broke the silence: "I believe, sir, you said something about shutting us down?" A small smile was across his face.

"Fuck you," responded the President. "You will burn in hell for this. All of you." He was numb with confusion and revulsion. The elevator doors opened onto the next level.

Before them was a relatively unspectacular room. It was roughly the same size as the laboratory above them. Throughout the room were, the President guessed, about fifty or so beds. On each bed, a single person lay sleeping. Various electrodes were attached to each slumbering individual's head, wired to a computer at the head of each cot.

The President was somewhat relieved at the comparative calmness of this chamber. He spoke: "What the hell do we have here?"

"This," said the Director, is the dream level."

"The what?"

"The dream level, sir. This is where our sleeping psychics, those with the special gift, send out thoughts across the globe."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Well," the Director responded, "we can invade dreams, we can implant, or even scan memories, but, most of all, we use it to infuse thoughts for the powers that be."

The President was stunned, incredulous. "How do you mean?"

"Watch," replied the Director. He went over to the nearest bed, where a woman slumbered, snoring loudly. The Director flipped a few switches on the computer at the head of the woman's bed.

Instantly, the President wanted a Coca-Cola. He found his mind repeating the soft drink's jingle.

The President shook his head violently, attempting to remove the thoughts from his head. "How the hell did you do that?!?"

"Well," said the Director, "it took years of research to perfect, but we finally got it down. It's important work, really, if you think about it. It can be hard to keep capitalism going. That slumbering soul over there is transmitting pro-American thoughts to sleeping North Koreans. That agent next to him is penetrating the dreams of Russian Generals."

"And I assume," said the President, "That these people, these people with your 'gifts,' had no say in the matter."

"They are all volunteers," said the Director.

"Yes, I'm sure," said the President. This morning, he had no idea how far down the rabbit hole he was going to go. He was not assuming a trip to hell on earth, here in the darkest bowels of America's nightmares. He summoned whatever strength he could. "I believe," he said, "that we have three more levels of this nightmare to go?" He was eager to leave, to begin the process of destroying this organization.

"Yes, let's continue," confirmed the Director.

The elevator doors opened onto level seven.

The President found this room remarkable, and completely out of place, compared to the horror show he had seen so far. The President and the Director were standing in an enormous, dimly lit library, filled with tall shelves, with rows upon rows of books. Most, it appeared to the President, were quite old. Throughout the room were wooden tables, upon which were ancient maps and tattered scrolls.

In the center of the room, sitting at a simple desk, peering through a magnifying glass, was a kindly looking, bearded old man, pouring over an aged, leather-bound book. He did not look up as the two men entered the room.

"This is our archive level," said the Director.

The President was a bit taken aback. "Archive level? A library? What the hell is this doing down here, below the god-damned nightmares above us? Why the hell do you have an archive, all the way down here? We have a Library of Congress, for God's sake! Talk to me, Bill!"

The Director chuckled. "This is no ordinary library, Mr. President. This is the true history of the world."

"The what?"

"Come," said the Director, "Let's meet the Archivist."

The two men made their way to the center of the room. As they approached, the Archivist looked up from his work and spoke: "Director! And the new man himself! To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Archivist," said the Director, "This is America's new President."

"Of course he is," said the Archivist, "The latest in the long line of House Roosevelt."

The President was perplexed: "I beg your pardon?"

The Archivist chuckled: "I meant no offense, young one." He closed his massive book. The President thought the lettering on the cover was Latin, but it was clearly some older script.

"I assume you are here for the tour," the Archivist said, folding his hands together.

"Indeed he is," said the Director. "but, before we go and see him...."

Him? thought the President.

"...I thought you might give our new President a brief history of the world."

"Well, or course," smiled the Archivist.

"Now wait just a god-damned minute," protested the President, turning towards the Director. "You. You have just taken me on a tour of hell, showing me things that MORE than reinforce my intention to shut you down, and now you've trotted me down to your cute little hidden library to give me a god-damned history lesson? Mr. Director: You're fired. I will see to it that you are arrested before I leave this place."

The Director chuckled. "Mr. President, if you'd listen for just a moment-"

"NO," shouted the President, "you listen to me, jackass!"

The Archivist calmly looked back and forth between the two men as they exchanged words. The President continued:

"Director, my very first, MY VERY FUCKING FIRST executive order will be to destroy this whole, illegal, immoral, disgusting, outlandish bullshit organization of yours! You can fucking count on that, Director!"

"Mr President," said the Director, in a completely serene voice, "again, the work we do here is very important."

"The HELL it is! You were supposed to be nothing but an intelligence collating agency, then you turned into a spy agency, then into a dirty tricks agency, and now you are a god-damned hell-on-earth agency. Your little basement, man cave from hell is coming to an end. I will see to it, Director."

The Archivist cleared his throat: "So you do know a little history."

The President swiftly turned towards the old man: "Excuse me?"

"I've heard you're a lover of history, Mr. President, a bit of a student," said the Archivist, in a calm tone.

"Go to hell, old man," said the President. The Archivist registered no reaction to the insult. The Archivist smiled and spoke: "I understand you graduated from Bard with a major in world history and a minor in anthropology. Masters in poli-sci from Harvard. A Senator for twelve years. So yes, I do assume you are a lover of history."

“What are you getting at, old man?” asked the President.

The Director coughed in his throat, eagerly awaiting what was coming next. This would not be the first time. He loved this story.

The Archivist smiled, and pushed his large book off to the side. "Please, Mr. President," he said peacefully, "sit down."

The President looked sternly at the Director, who nodded to him. Aw, hell, thought the President. He took a seat opposite the Archivist.

The Archivist leaned in forward. "Mr. President," he began, "You know the history of the world as conventional academia has taught you. You know the sanitized, sterile history of this world, the safe history." The President tilted his head to the side, wondering what bunkum this old man was going to spout. "Let me," the Archivist continued, "tell you what real history is."

The Archivist began his story. He explained that most of it was culled from retrieved scrolls from the library at Alexandria, but there were other sources. It was indeed the insanity the President suspected. The Archivist told him of ancient, unknown, unearthed arcana. He told the President of a time before man, when the Great Old Ones waged their war with the Archons. He told the President of the War of the Last Age, when Man and Spirit fought their final battle. He told the President of the last King of Earth, Lord Tovias the Final. Of the coming of Isaquah, the Wendigo. The Archivist's stream of balderdash continued. The President learned of the Nephilim assault on the Tower of Babel, the Great Flood of the Last Archon that nearly destroyed humanity, the Children of Atlantis building the Great Pyramids, King Solomon's building of the Great Nexus Temple, the fabricated legend of Christ that the Order of Osiris perpetuated in order to control mankind, and of the Illuminati's creation of America.

The President leaned back in his chair. He stared at the Archivist for a moment, then to the Director, standing off to the side, then back to the Archivist. Finally, he spoke: "That is the biggest load of bullshit I have ever heard in my life. I really, I mean really, am shocked that you have a kook for a historian beneath your illegal experiments. This is just too much. If it didn't involve your execution for treason, Director, I would laugh right in this old fart's face. Archons... Jesus... Enough of this ancient aliens bullshit." The President stood up.

"Director," he said, "it's time to go. Get me the hell out of here so that I can get to the White House and sign that executive order, after I have you arrested. Now."

The Director said nothing for a moment, then turned his head towards the Archivist. The Archivist leaned back in his chair, and sighed deeply. "Well," he said to the Director, "you might as well take our new President down to see him."

"What the hell are you talking about, you old nut?" the President asked.

"There are still two levels below us, Mr. President. I really think you should finish the tour before you make up your mind," said the Director.

"Fuck you, Bill," barked the President. "My mind is already made up. Get me the hell out of here."

The Director paused for a moment, deep in thought. He spoke: "Mr. President, every single President of the United States since Truman has seen the ninth level. You would be the first not to. Please, let's just finish the tour, then you can get to the White House, and do what you need to do."

"Fine," said the President, "More information I can use to send your ass to the death chamber."

The Archivist smiled.

"Alright then," said the Director. "Let's continue."

They made their way to the elevator. "Goodbye, Mr. President," said the Archivist. The President did not reply.

The Director and the President stepped into the elevator. "Mr President," the Director started.

"Don't."

"Yes sir," said the Director. He sighed deeply, and pressed the button for floor eight.

This elevator descent was interminably long. Much more time was passing on this next phase of the tour. The tension of silence was palpable. Finally, the President spoke:

"Why is this taking so damned long?"

The Director paused before responding: "We need to be further down, closer to the mantle, where it's warmer."

"What? Warmer?"

"He prefers it that way."

"Who, exactly?"

Before the Director could answer, the elevator jolted to a halt, and the doors opened. The two men stepped into a large chamber.

The blast of heat nearly floored the President. He shrank to his knees, shielding his eyes from the intensity of the light. He looked up at the Director. The Director was standing completely still, completely calm.

Before the two men was a large cavern of flame and burning magma. A large pit, some fifty or so feet below them, churned with intense heat and roiling rock. The President immediately began to sweat. The cavern was large, brilliantly lit by the rising flames. Just in front of them, an earthen walkway led directly to the center of the enormous, rock hewn cave. The President could only guess at the material of the walkway, how it could survive in this fierce heat. This was not the worst of it.

The stone walkway led directly to a level platform of rock in the center of the burning pit. The conflagration would occasionally lip flame at the edges of the stone island. At the center of the isle was an impossible sight.

An immense collection of pulsating tissue, perhaps thirty feet across, was undulating in a vile rhythm, sitting at the the center of this hellish place. Eyes, mouths, and various appendages would sporadically burst forth from the mass of bloody tissue, then retreat into the bulbous mass.

"Yaldabaoth," said the Director. "Last of the Archons."

"No," whimpered the President. "Impossible. You're messing with my mind. You've done something to me. This is wrong."

"Nope," said the Director. "This is where he lives."

The President was trembling, and grew nauseous as the Director put his arm around him and slowly led him across the earthen walkway, closer, towards the unthinkable creature. Each step of the President felt as heavy as lead. As they grew closer to the abhorrent thing, the putrid stench of rotting flesh overcame the President. He tasted bile in his mouth. As they stood in front of the creature, the President began to tremble uncontrollably.

The Director was completely at ease: "All hail Yaldabaoth!"

There was a disgusting, tearing sound as a mouth, full of yellow, jagged teeth, formed in the mound of undulant flesh. A terrible sound filled the chamber, loud enough to reverberate across the cavern walls, a gurgling, disgusting voice that sounded like the death rattles of a bull elephant:

"DIRECTOR. YOU HAVE COME TO SEE ME AGAIN."

"Yup," said the Director. "How ya doin', old boy?"

"I AM THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS, LAST OF THE ARCHONS."

The Director wiped the sweat from his brow, with a small hankie he took from his pocket, as he continued to steady the President. "That's why we love you, old timer."

"WHO IS THIS HUMAN YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO ME?"

"This," said the Director, "Is the new President of the United States of America. I've taken him on a tour today. He's really enjoyed it. Right, sir? He gave the shaking President a slight jolt.

"INDEED," said the Archon, "EVERY LEADER OF YOUR EMPIRE HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO ME, TO SEEK MY BLESSING."

"That's why we're here, Your Majesty," said the Director.

The President struggled to speak: "How... How is this possible..."

The Archon bellowed: "THE NATIVES OF THIS LAND SHOWED YOUR PEOPLE MY DWELLING, MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO. I HAVE ALWAYS BEHELD THE IMPERIAL LEADERS OF THIS DOMINION."

"I don't understand...." The President was nearly weeping.

"Let's do this, great one," said the the Director.

A limb of tissue, a narrow appendage, dripping ooze, spewed forth from the mass of flesh. The President, on his knees, raised his head, and froze in horror as the tendril approached him. Mucus dripped from the President's nose as a heave of vomit emerged from his stomach. The tendril touched the top of the President's head, and rested there. The President felt a surge of heat from the creature's touch. A coat of slime began to cover the top of his head as the creature held its appendage in place.

The Archon left his protuberance on the President's head for a moment, then rapidly withdrew it. The enormous mass of flesh pulsated for a moment, changing colors from dark red to fiery orange to opaque yellow. Another mouth formed, with a single, enormous eyeball erupting from the tissue above it. It stared straight at the Director before the hideous mouth spoke:

"NO."

The Director tilted his head to the right before responding: "No?"

"NO," said the Archon. "TAKE HIM BELOW."

The President passed out.

The Director carried the President back to the elevator. He propped his collapsed frame against the lift's rear wall. As the doors closed behind them, the Director reached into his jacket, and pulled out a small vial. He held it under the President's nose. The leader of the free world quickly regained consciousness.

"What... What the hell was that..." managed the President.

"I know," said the Director. "He can be a bit much." The Director lowered himself to his ankles, just before the President's sagging body. "Well," the Director said, "I sure hope you've enjoyed the tour, Mr. President. It's just about over."

"Who was that..." the President said, spitting up bile.

“Oh, him?” said the Director. “That's Yaldabaoth, last of the Archons. They used to rule this planet. I'm not sure, but they may be extraterrestrial. They never really told us.”

“I... I... Don't understand what's happening to me...” stammered the President.

“Yes, I know,” replied the Director, as he again pulled the handkerchief from his suit pocket. He wiped the sweat, vomit and mucus from the President's face. He pulled a small flask of bourbon from his other pocket, unscrewed the lid, and, after taking a brief swig of his own, offered it to the President. The President declined, waving the flask off.

The Director smacked his lips a couple of times as he put the flask and handkerchief away. He stared at the President for a full minute, a vacant glare of evil lost on the President's closed eyes. The Director began to speak:

“I've seen your kind before, sir,” he said. “Gonna come in to Washington. Change things. Make things better. Get rid of the bad stuff.” He cracked his neck left and to the right, before rising to his feet. “Sometimes, Mr. President,” he said, “things just don't work out that way. I think you're beginning to understand what we're working with here.” The Director closed his eyes, tilted his head back, sighed deeply and whispered, as if in prayer: “God bless America.”

“Inaugural Ball...” the President mumbled.

“I understand,” said the Director, “Tour's almost done. Then we get you to the White House. Don't worry, sir. Everything is just gonna be real good.”

The Director pressed the final button, floor nine. The elevator began its final descent.

The doors opened into a large warehouse. The Director, guiding the shuffling President, stepped onto a metal scaffolding, a series of walkways that spanned the chamber in an extensive grid. A concrete floor was twenty feet below them. Interspersed among the grid was an expansive series of small, cylindrical chambers. At the top of each chamber was a hatch, an access to the pod below. The President, barely lucid, his mind reeling, could see a single human form in each of the hundreds of pods, suspended in some sort of liquid. They seemed to be motionless, slowly floating.

“There... there are people in these pods,” stammered the President. “Are they alive?”

“Yes, sir,” said the Director. “Well, technically.”

“Where are we?”

“Don't worry about that, sir. There's a pod at the end of this walkway. Let's take you to it.”

“What for?”

“Hang on sir, answers are coming.”

The President was shaking, barely conscious as the Director helped him along. Eventually, they reached the end of a long reach of scaffolding. The President looked up. There, standing before them, out of his hazmat suit, was Dr. Foule. The Director nodded his head.

Without saying a word, Dr. Foule began manipulating a control mechanism at the edge of the steel railing, wired to the nearest pod. Instantly, the pod below them began to rise. A blast of steam erupted from the floor, baptizing the party, as the mechanisms of the facility raised the pod. In a brief moment, the capsule was at the level of the scaffolding. The Doctor opened a gate in the steel railing. There seemed to be another access point, a door on the side of the pod. The President attempted to peer through the liquid, but he could only make out a vague human form, with a smaller form next to it. They looked somehow familiar.

Dr. Foule worked at the control panel. Suddenly, violently, the door to the pod swung wide open. The liquid came pouring out, drenching the feet of all three men. The President found the stench of the fluid repulsive. He gagged. The Director struggled to keep him upright.

The figures inside fell forwards, out of the pod, and collapsed to the steel, grated floor.

The Director spoke to Dr. Foule: "Get him up and running, Doc." The Doctor nodded, knelt down to the human form, produced several medical instruments from his frock, and began to work.

The President watched, stunned. He turned to the Director: "What is this? Where are we?"

The figure on the floor began to move. The Doctor began to help the creature to its feet.

"Mr. President," said the Director, "This is a cloning lab."

The President found himself amazed that he could still be shocked, after all he seen this day: "A what? What the hell are you talking about?"

The Doctor steadied the figure, who now stood fully upright.

The President froze with fear. The smaller form was a perfect replica of Kaleb, his dog. He turned to look at the human figure.

"It's a cloning lab, Mr. President," the Director continued, "We can make anyone we choose to here. A complete, perfect replica. One that will do exactly as we say."

The President of the United States was staring directly at a perfect, identical clone of himself. The Doctor nodded to the Director.

"I'm sorry it came to this, sir," said the Director, "but it's much better this way. Better for us. Better for America." He reached into his jacket, pulling out a small pistol.

"I don't understand..." sobbed the President. He wept like a defeated man.

"Mr. President, meet your replacement," the Director said. He aimed the pistol directly at the President's forehead and pulled the trigger. The President's head exploded in an eruption of blood and tissue as he fell over backwards, over the steel railing, crashing to the floor beneath them, dead.

The Director turned to the Doctor: "Alright, load him up with the right memories. Let's make him a bit more receptive to our operations. And put a chip in the dog's head; we'll need ears in the Oval Office. Thanks, Doc."

The tour was over.