

*The Book
Of Colin*

Hitana

When you looked at the vast size of this New Mexican desert, you could imagine endless sand but not a great cavern system that existed under your feet. But this is exactly what there was: the so called Carlsbad Caverns.

Colin's vocation was geophysics. He had come from his home in Montana, just to see the caverns. The expedition was part of his vacation, which he spent mostly travelling to several geologically interesting sides.

Being from Montana he was used to a rather cool climate, so he had to adjust to the New Mexican heat. He was really looking forward to coolness of the caverns, because he suffered badly under the fierce heat and already had got sunburnt. He also didn't like the landscape, but the beauty of the caverns would make up for everything he had gone through.

He had planned to explore the caverns on his own and to take his directions from the Audio Guide, but then he had met a woman in his hotel, who had expressed an interest in the caverns which he had found surprising because he thought women usually weren't attracted to things like that.

His field of work was predominantly male and Colin saw himself as a typical lab rat. Outside his laboratory he seemed rather gawky. He knew that he wasn't really attractive to women as he was tall and running stout around the waist, but he still had tried to build up a relationship. So far he had only had one girlfriend for a long time who had broken up with him five years ago and he still wasn't over the split, but when the woman in the hotel asked if he was going to the caverns, her smile was so kindly that he forgot the breakup pain and even managed to talk to her a bit.

Melinda, as the woman had introduced herself, obviously was one of the few women who didn't mind talking to geeks. She also was by nature an adventurous person. This time however she was travelling with a group that had booked for a cavern tour, but someone had fallen ill, so there was room for Colin to join them.

On the next morning a Shuttle bus took the various groups from the hotel to the caverns. Colin, Melinda and the rest of their group were the second ones to enter the caves. Because of health and safety issues only one group at a time was allowed to enter. Before them was a group of noisy Spaniards. Fortunately they only had a short tour, so the second group could go into the natural entrance of the caverns one hour later.

Most of them immediately started taking photos and gazing up at the stalactites. Colin however looked around with very analytical eyes. He knew everything about the formation of these caverns, which made it unnecessary for him to listen to the Guide. Together with Melinda he walked at the tail of the group and explained everything to her. He was pleased to see that she was enthralled by his knowledge.

After a while however she wished to return to her friends in the group and went back to them when they took a break to eat. When they set off again, Colin remained at the tail of the group until they were out of site and sound. He wouldn't have to worry to about getting lost.

Then he came to a point where another tunnel seemed to lead off from the main tunnel but this other tunnel was barricaded. He could however see the glimpse of a dark shaft behind the blockade that led deeper into the earth. He bit his lip. His reason told him it was better not to go there but he was also very curious and bored with the tour.

He switched his flashlight on, climbed over the blockage, entered the tunnel and immediately saw that he had been right: It went far deeper down into the earth. He started to walk and had a close look at the walls. Soon he had forgotten the time and the fact that he was alone in an unknown part of the caverns. A few hours later and many tunnels on, he found something strange:

The walls seemed smoother and the whole tunnel appeared like a tube. But the stone was the strangest: It was a material Colin had never seen before. He grabbed a loose pebble from the ground and smashed it against this material but not a single crack appeared. He touched the material and found that it felt almost soft and warm but still was unbreakable rock at the same time.

Finally he looked at his watch and realized with a shock that he should have been back with the group three hours ago to take the bus back to the hotel. He thought about Melinda, who was probably worried and started to run. Quickly he became aware that he was completely lost. He didn't look at the ground anymore and promptly stumbled over a small stalagmite. The flashlight slipped out of his hand and he heard it smash loudly. Then there was pitch blackness around him.

When he finally got on his feet again he started to feel really uncomfortable. He didn't care for this pitch blackness but didn't know how to find the way back to the main tunnel. He slowly felt his way around and a few moments later kicked against the flashlight. He bent and picked it up but there wasn't anything he could do with it. It was completely smashed.

Although he knew that it was hopeless, he walked on. He couldn't stay here. Colin couldn't tell how long he had been walking around like this then he suddenly heard a cracking sound. He didn't know where it had come from and when he did realize finally it was already too late: With a crashing sound some boulders tumbled down from the ceiling and hit Colin's head. Before he fell unconscious, he saw something strange for a second: It was like a bolt of lightning to which he was drawn. Then there was nothing more.

When he regained consciousness again the first thing he recognized, was a murmuring of voices that came from somewhere. He couldn't understand the language and so he thought that it was another group of foreign tourists. He opened his eyes to see where he was, but what he saw really confused him.

He lay on something soft – a bed? ...and looked at a completely furnished room: a chest, chairs, a table and a book shelf. A lot of the furniture seemed to be made of stone and everything looked somehow...antique. Colin sat up and listened to the murmuring of voices. Then suddenly the pressure in his ears changed and he understood them.

He stood up slowly. His head still hurt but apart from that he felt good considering the circumstances. He walked through the room with a frowning and stopped suddenly when he passed a mirror. He looked at a man with the same green-brown eyes but the rest of his body...wasn't his!

He was still tall but instead of being stout around the waist his body was now muscular and well proportioned. He was looking frighteningly fit and healthy. His black hair had become dark blond with a few grey strands. He had a goatee that was cut in an old-fashioned way and his skin was incredibly pale; even his sunburn had disappeared.

The clothes were what surprised him the most. He was wearing a long grey cloak with silver buttons, under that a bright-beige jerkin with dark brown pants and black boots. Colin felt like a person in a costume drama.

As his gaze wandered down the washstand he stopped again. In the washbowl lay a dagger with dry blood on it. He backed away from the washstand but then a sudden knock on the door made him jump.

“Come in” he shouted with a tremor in his voice but then he realized even that sounded different.

A younger man with an evil-looking face entered the room. “Good morning, Orren. I hope you slept well after the trouble last night? It’s not inconvenient for me to enter, is it? The others are already waiting for new commands.”

Colin...or should he better say “Orren” now, swallowed. He still didn’t know where he was, or what had happened and who these people were. He thought about it for a moment and said: “Tell them I will come in a few minutes. I have to wash first.”

The other man nodded and left the room. Col- Orren...he really should get used to that name, went back to the washstand, swallowed hard and took the dagger out at arm’s length. Then he took the ewer, cleaned the bowl first and then his hands and face before he carefully washed the dagger. Suddenly another part of his memory seemed to flash back. He always carried that dagger with him, just in case. It had been a gift from his father. And yesterday he had...

The pictures in his mind made him cringe: A hand, looking like his own held a dagger like this one and stabbed a man on the ground again and again. A man in a burgundy-coloured uniform...a Maintainer!

And then suddenly he remembered everything: He was Orren, leader of the most important underground organisation in D’ni. He was what Colin would call a mobster. A man without mercy, who threatened or killed people for gain. And outside there his loyal gang members were waiting; men who did almost everything for him. Only in very special circumstances did Orren take a weapon and killed someone. Otherwise he let his gang do all the work.

He was a man of the shadows. Everybody had heard of him, the police arm of the Maintainers had tried to find him for years but if someone had seen him, they wouldn’t be able to report about it as they would be dead. Orren had even managed to bribe the last Maintainer who had chased him, so the man could never arrest him. But the Maintainer’s conscious hadn’t been able to live with his dereliction of duty and so he had double-crossed Orren.

The Maintainer had tried to sabotage the work of Orren’s men and that was why he had to die. As Orren had made the arrangement with the Maintainer personally, he had felt it was his duty to take care of it himself.

For a moment he was shaken. Colin sank down in fear. The place he was in had a medieval feeling to it and the room he was in had no ceiling but then it never rained in a cave. And he also occupied the body and shared the mind of a vicious criminal.

There was only one possibility to explain all this: He must be in a parallel world, but how could that be? He had taken courses in the theory of relativity and quantum physics and knew that time and space travelling was physically impossible. On the other hand he had read a lot of parallel worlds in his youth and what he had read seemed to fit.

Maybe he was living a very real hallucination. Who knew which part of his head the rocks had hit? And then the theory of space travelling seemed logical again. If everything possible could be excluded, he had to accept the impossible.

But now he didn't have time to think. He had to issue his followers their orders but before he left his room, he concentrated on accessing Orren's mind, then he entered the next room. Around the table 20 very different men were seated and all of them looked dangerous to Colin.

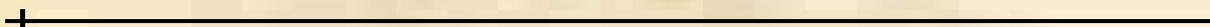
Orren sat down at the head of the table, smiled at them and said: "Good morning gentlemen. I would like to thank those, who accompanied me yesterday for their help. But let's come to business: A few days ago I have received a letter from our contact in the city. It contains the request of man who wants to stop his rival from becoming Guild Master. Fortunately it's only the Guild of Prospectors, so it shouldn't be too hard to bribe some of their high ranking members to ensure that the election results can be manipulated. The man has offered an incredible high payment so we must be careful and do our best. You all know what that means! So now I want you out there working!"

The men cheered and left immediately. Orren stayed seated and smiled contently to himself. Then he called for something to eat and a few minutes later received a plate full of fruits, bread and meat. He also drank a glass of wine with it but Colin didn't enjoy this at all. The wine was far too strong for him and he had lost his appetite after what Orren had instructed his men to do.

Colin couldn't and didn't want to live with this vicious mind. But what could he do? He had considered about changing Orren's character quickly but that would be complicated and very dangerous. The men would realize the change and as a gang leader he couldn't afford to show such a weakness.

But he didn't want to continue with this life of crime. He had to find a way to get out of this business, or even to disappear or to blow the whistle on his gang so that the Police Force could finally arrest them. Unfortunately he didn't have anyone to turn to who could help him. His gang members wouldn't understand his betrayal and would think he had grown weak in his old age. Furthermore they would believe him insane if he told them he was actually a man from the 21st Century.

He was glad that Orren couldn't always encroach on his thoughts all the time. If he needed Orren he would turn to Orren. Apart from that he would try to stay as himself!



Teshan closed the file and shook his head. No one knew to where or why his colleague Jayseem had disappeared. Teshan however, who had read the file assumed the worst: Jayseem was working on the case against Orren and it was known that this mysterious person was responsible for people disappearing.

The investigation had been going on for the last three years and at some time the name Orren had cropped up. Since then the Maintainers had been chasing a phantom, a person who did the dirty work of other people for gain. If Jayseem had found out something important in this case, then that was surely the reason for his disappearance. Teshan however believed that his colleague was already dead. No one who had disappeared previously had ever come back again.

Now the case of Orren had been passed on to Teshan, who was the next best qualified Guild Master. Teshan wasn't too happy about this at the moment because he had an Apprentice named Fahlee and he didn't want to involve him in such a complex and possibly dangerous case. But the Grand Master had spoken and he had to give way. In some way he couldn't complain: If he solved the case he would get honoured with a medal and in the end that was the only thing he could aspire to.

He had been Guild Master for five years now, his marriage was going quite well and he had a good position within society. His will to pursue the fight against crime had however decreased. For ten years he had been with the Police Force and in this time he had solved one brutal case after another. Justice and civil order seemed impossible in D'ni and so the rewards he received after every case were of little compensation.

Teshan shook those dark thoughts off and decided what to do first. Of course he had heard a lot about the case of Orren but he preferred to examine all information the Maintainers had. That's why he went to the archives with Fahlee now.

Fahlee didn't fit into the Police Force in Teshan's view. He didn't have the self-confidence and ability to assert himself. But it was Teshan's task to find out where the young Guildsman should go later. In a few cases the Guild Masters had to do this to recommend new Guildsmen to a certain department. At the moment Teshan believed it would be best for Fahlee to go to the Administration Office. They took care of the post distribution within the Guild House, the organizing and administrating of the archives and other secretarial tasks.

They asked the curator of the archives about files in the case and took them to Teshan's study. There was a lot of information to read, so they split the work and summarized everything important to read it out to each other later. Teshan looked at Fahlee every now and then and realized that he was concentrating intensely. He obviously really wanted to work for the Police Force.

Finally they were ready and Teshan asked his Apprentice to read out his summary. "Orren's existence became known for the first time, two years ago. At this time fifty people had already disappeared and never come back. The Maintainers had collected all the reports of missing persons but in most cases they gave up the search after half a year. Even close relatives couldn't tell where there missing persons might be.

Then a report came in from someone who had a friend whose father had disappeared, and he mentioned the name Orren. Later he also disappeared as well. The informant also said that the son hated his father and had often said he wished he would die!

Later even the informant vanished. Since then the Maintainers had tried to find Orren but they even couldn't find his contacts. It's assumed that he doesn't only have a contact within the general public who receives the requests but also a large circle of followers who are powerful enough to influence election results within the Guilds."

Teshan cleared his throat and read out his summation: "Until today the Maintainers weren't able to find out where Orren lives. Furthermore there is no evidence that he is really involved in the cases of disappearing people. Jayseem who worked on the case before he disappeared, gave a few new information in his reports but it's still not enough. Then he seems to have run into a dead end as his reports don't give any more clues. And soon after that he disappeared as well!"

He stared at the wall for a while until Fahlee broke into his thoughts again. "How shall we ever proceed with this? We have virtually nothing to go on!"

Teshan looked at him and nodded slowly. His Apprentice was right and he couldn't really answer the question but he had to say something. "We have only one possibility. We have to wait until Orren makes a mistake that will identify him. Then we can build up from that."

Orren listened carefully to the report from his men and felt pleased with what they had done. The best thing about them was that they understood how to pressurize people psychologically and not just rely on physical cruelty, that they could negotiate and force people to do as they told them.

To deal with today's petition they had gone to several influential members of the Guild of Prospectors and used various methods on them depending on how they reacted. Some agreed to simple bribery with money or luxury goods, others had to be frightened and threatened with "disappearance". Everyone had heard of this method and understood what it meant.

He was glad to hear that most of the Prospectors had been so scared, that they gladly accepted his bribe. By that they had entered into unwritten contract and would now be under close scrutiny and if they made a mistake that would imperil the request or Orren's gang, then it would bring heavy consequences.

Sometimes he was surprised how well organised his crimes were carried out. Orren remembered how everything had started. He had been 27 years old and was known as a violent person. One day his best friend Kinef had come to him and asked him to discreetly kill his brother. Orren had hesitated at first then asked what he would get for it. Kinef had offered an incredible high amount of gold which Orren had been unable to refuse.

He had done it and he hadn't had any problems with it. Kinef had however refused to pay, so Orren had killed him as well. He had let one look like murder and the other suicide, then he had taken the gold and had disappeared into the safety of the underworld where he had spent a while thinking about his future.

Orren had never been good at anything. His father had been with the Miners, so he had joined them too. That had made him strong for the rest of his life but apart from that wasn't worth much. When he finally had reached adulthood and needed a bit of guidance in life his father had already been dead – killed in a mining accident.

His mother had always been a weak person and so Orren had become lazy and idle and got fired from the Miners. When he ended up years later in the underworld, he had an idea: Why shouldn't he turn his tendency as a violent criminal into a "business"? There were surely more people like Kinef who needed someone to do their dirty work.

Orren had spent a whole year working on his plans and recruiting men, who didn't have anything to lose. From the underworld they passed on the word about their business and soon people started to contact them. In the beginning the clients had come to them directly but that had become too risky and so a contact man was picked out. Soon a lot of people, who frequented low class areas, knew of their organisation.

Because of the high payments Orren could soon afford a better house and more men, who could bribe more people and buy more luxury goods. When he looked back at the last years, he had to smile. All the things he had bought, all the parties he had celebrated. Yes, he had a great life!

And the best thing of all was he had never been in any real danger. His plan was almost fool-proof. Yes, if he or his men made a serious mistake, he could be in trouble but that was highly unlikely. He even kept a watchful eye on Halinn, his second in command to ensure that no more slip ups like the one with Kinef happened.

He felt himself almost untouchable but ever since Colin had appeared, he was careful. In many ways he understood where this man had come from, since he listened to his thoughts all the time. And Orren knew that Colin didn't like his criminal behaviour but what he didn't know was how strong this other man could be. And sometimes he had found himself in a kind of limbo. So Orren had to keep an eye out for himself!

After all his followers apart from Halinn had left, Orren looked at him and asked: "Is there anything new about Shemef?"

Shemef was one of his greatest adversaries. He had built up a kind of anti-organisation against Orren. All people whose relatives or friends had disappeared and for which they blamed him, could come to Shemef who then tried to sabotage Orren's work. For example a man who had been bribed by him was offered a bigger bribe by Shemef to go to the Police and tell them about Orren's organisation. However, as he was aware of Shemef's activities he was able to prevent any danger to himself. Any client who was approached by Shemef just disappeared. Shemef actually didn't help people out of the goodness of his heart but because he wanted money. It cost a lot of money to sabotage Orren and then it was expensive to protect the clients from Orren's revenge.

The personal protection however rarely worked because Shemef's men were a lot fewer than Orren's and so the client more often disappeared and Shemef lost one of his members. In these cases Orren's men were instructed to make an example of their cruelty and they were good at it!

"Shemef could have got us into trouble today. Obviously someone in the Guild of Prospectors got wind that the election results would be rigged and requested Shemef to approach a very influential Guild Master and ask him to refuse to cooperate. We found him with one of Shemef's men and had to get everything sorted out before we could get the Prospectors assurance."

Orren nodded and then asked: “Anything new from the Maintainers?”

“Well after the disappearance of Guild Master Jayseem they had to find a new investigator. Our informant at the Maintainers has reported that Guild Master Teshan has been appointed to do that. He is known as very stubborn investigator. But the Maintainers don’t have any information on us and barely know a thing so we’re safe from them for the moment!”

Colin’s head started to ache because of all this stuff. As Orren he asked Halinn to go now and stood up from his armchair. He had to get out for a while. So far Colin hadn’t seen anything of “D’ni” and although he could refer to Orren’s knowledge, he wanted to experience it for himself.

Orren could walk around freely because there was no one alive who could identify him. Colin was quite surprised when he went out of the house. It was in one of D’nis best quarters. “A criminal living with rich people, what an irony” thought Orren and smiled. Colin pushed those thoughts away and looked around.

He was still in the caverns. The whole structure resembled part of the Carlsbad Caverns, he had seen. Still he didn’t know how this could have existed without anybody’s knowledge.

Then he looked at a surface that looked like lava. Orren’s knowledge told him that this was the glowing algae in the great lake, which had a day-and-night-cycle. From the lake emerged many different rocky islands; some of them seemed to contain buildings. From Orren he could tell these were islands like Ae’Gura, K’veer and Kata.

As he turned around, he could see the city built into the cavern walls. He could name all the quarters and also knew there were other neighbourhoods in the main cavern. And then of course there were the ages...

Colin listened to Orren’s knowledge about ages and the “Art” while he was walking through the streets. It sounded very much like Science-Fiction to him and so he didn’t truly believe it. How could these people have accomplished something that was impossible in the 21st century?

After a while his legs felt tired and all these experiences had been quite taxing for him so he decided to go into a tavern to rest for a while. Fortunately it wasn’t too busy. Colin still felt alien to these people but the barmaid welcomed him so warmly that he immediately felt better.

Colin felt that she was attractive but also too young for this job and yet seemed careworn because of what she had probably experienced. He ordered some ale and looked at her while she was working. The other men in the tavern liked to treat her as if she was dirt. They touched her intimately and made bad jokes about her. Colin saw that she was unhappy and yet said nothing.

The owner of the tavern called her to him after a while, pointed at Colin surreptitiously and said something to her. She grimaced but went to him then and sat down. He looked at her in surprise and even more so when she said: “You can have an hour for 100 copper pieces!”

He frowned and wondered if this tavern also was a house of pleasure. Orren almost screamed at him to take this woman but Colin had never bought a woman's favours before and felt very uncomfortable now. He swallowed and asked carefully: "How do you know that I want to have...some fun?"

"Well first of all you're undressing me with your eyes! Secondly no one just comes here to drink something. So what do you say now? Yes or no?!" At that moment Orren asserted himself and grinned at her lasciviously. Then he gave her a small bag filled with copper pieces.

She took it with her to the owner of the tavern and they split the money, then she came back and said: "Follow me!" They went into a small backroom, with just a huge bed. Orren grabbed her roughly, tore the clothes off her and pushed her onto the bed.

After Orren had taken his pleasure, Colin returned and as she got dressed he touched her arm and said: "I'm sorry." She turned to face him, her face suffused with anger.

"Beg you pardon?! First you're treating me more cruelly than anyone else before and then you have the nerve say sorry?! That's a joke right? Just piss off and take your mercy with you. I'm good for nothing else!"

"Oh yes you are. You probably just ended up here by mischance. Listen, maybe I can help you. I have quite a lot of money and can get you out of here and give you something better."

"Others have said that before but all it would lead to is total subjugation. And in comparison to that I prefer this here!"

Colin took her hand into his, stroked it tenderly and looked at her with a very solemnly. For a moment she seemed to consider it but then she shook her head and pulled her hand free.

"Tell me at least your name", he asked.

"I'm Trisari", she said and left the room. Colin hoped she wouldn't mention to the owner of the tavern what had happened for then he probably wouldn't be able to see her again.

But he really wanted to help her and not just out of kindness but because he knew that she deserved something better. Then on the other hand...she reminded him of his first girlfriend and it was possible that he was falling in love with her.

After he had arrived home, Colin decided that it was really about time to do something against Orren's vicious nature. If he wanted to start a relationship with Trisari it surely wouldn't be very nice if he told her he was a mobster, yet he didn't want to tell her lies.

Then Colin's thoughts were suddenly interrupted. Wasn't it a bit premature to plan doing these things, since he really had to find a way back into his world?

But something told him this wasn't possible. If his realm jump really had really taken him into a parallel world, he couldn't get back. And with Orren's knowledge he actually found it easy to life here. Colin was in a difficult predicament now but he realized that his life in D'ni was preferable to his old life. He even could live happily without all the paraphernalia of his 21st century.

He began working on his plans of action. He didn't want to go to the Police in person as they wouldn't give him a chance to explain who he really was. But that itself presented another problem: Who would believe his story? But that wasn't a consideration now. The most important thing was to give the Police clues so that they could catch him. He knew at some point he had to turn himself in to the investigator Teshan and hope that he would give him the chance to expunge his crimes.

He wasn't too confident about his plans as it all depended on what might happen in the future and how he would react to it. He couldn't really do much because he didn't know if he would be able to totally control Orren, whom he wanted to change for the better, but if not he had to consider trying to destroy him completely.

The first chance to give the Maintainers a clue occurred in the few next days. Orren's men had been out and they caught one of Shemef's men trying to protect someone who needed to disappear. They brought them both to Orren to decide what to do with them.

Colin quickly had an idea, to avoid his men to seeing his changed mind: They would kill Shemef's helper and Colin would put a note to investigator Teshan into the clothes of the dead man. Then they would kill the other man and frame Shemef for the killing. For one brief moment Orren spoke with Colin and asked why he didn't write more about Shemef on the note but Colin forced his thoughts away. This wasn't about blaming Shemef but as a means to blow whistle on Orren!

Teshan looked at the massacre with a calmly face but within him was turmoil. He wasn't really sure if he wanted to know exactly what had happened here. He glanced over to Fahlee, who was white as a sheet and looked as if he was going to be sick.

He sighed and continued with his investigation. First of all he looked at the victim, a man from the Guild of Bookmakers. He had numerous wounds to his chest and stomach. Interestingly he seemed to have fought back against attacker with some success since the suspected murderer also had fatal wounds but they could not formally identify him as he didn't wear a guilds robe or any other insignias on him.

But when Teshan went through his clothes, he found a note which he read with a frown on his face: "This act was ordered by Orren. If you want to find out more, try to find a man called Shemef!"

This surprised him. He had said they would have to wait for Orren to make a mistake but this was weird! It was a confession and a pointer to someone who obviously knew more about Orren. Teshan smiled. With this Orren's days in the shadows were coming to an end! The man must have gone mad or have plans that were unknown to Teshan. The only certain thing was that they had something on Orren now!

He nodded to the Healers, who took the corpses away. Teshan had a short look around the room to make sure he hadn't missed anything then went back with Fahlee to the Guild House. They sat down and Teshan asked his Apprentice to write a report which he dictated. Fahlee was surprised about the note as well and asked: "How shall we find Shemef?"

Teshan smiled when he answered this question: “We will go down into the poorer quarters of the city in plain clothes and listen around in the taverns. I’m sure these are the right places to ask for shadowy people like Shemef. Strange though, that his name has never come up in our files so I wonder what his connection is to Orren.”

Fahlee didn’t seem to like even thinking about low taverns. But he pulled himself together and followed Teshan. They took their Maintainers robes off, closed their insignias in and went out. Fahlee felt naked without his robe on but Teshan didn’t worry about it. He had been investigating in plain clothes before. Through his friendship with Namis he knew how to act inconspicuously so that no one realized he was a Maintainer. He hoped that Fahlee would be able to do so as well. If not he had better just keep quiet.

They spent the whole afternoon and evening checking out different taverns. They ordered something to drink, sat around and listened carefully to the conversations of the people. Often Teshan could tell if they should leave the tavern soon or not. Instinctively he could say where people who knew men like Shemef spend their time.

Their way finally led to one of the shabbiest taverns and here Teshan immediately knew this was the right place. Now he had to take the initiative. They sat down and as soon as Teshan had found someone to talk to about Shemef, he quietly started to dig for information.

Teshan explained to the man, they were now sitting with: “My friend Fahlee here has told me that he was threatened and bribed to ban a man from our Guild who no one likes. However he didn’t agree with it and wanted to stop it but was afraid the man who bribed him would come back to harm him.”

“I have often heard of things like that! The one doing the frightening is called Orren and he’s known for bribing people or having them disappear. But there is someone who is working against him. I can tell you the name of a contact and where he lives. But I can’t promise that it will be safe or kosher!”

He gave them an address and a name. Fahlee thanked him for his help. He was reluctant to go to the Police Force in case they found out about the rival in their Guild and he still wanted to protect his fellow colleagues. The man nodded his understanding saying that many people today preferred to live by their own laws. Teshan had to agree regretfully. Since criminal actions had happened within the Guild of Maintainers, more and more people didn’t trust them and went elsewhere to have their problems solved.

They thanked the man again and left the tavern. It was very late now, so Teshan sent his Apprentice home after they had agreed on a meeting near to the house of Shemef’s contact.

Teshan slumped into his seat at home and lit his pipe up. He had gained this habit from Namis a few years ago. He must have sat there pondering for quite a while, when Shama came and put her hands on his shoulders to give him a slight massage. “We barely see you anymore and then you want to be alone!”

Teshan slowly took the pipe out of his mouth and answered: “You know what I’m like when I’m working on a case.” “Yes but you always seem to be working on a case, because you’re always so conscientious about your work.” He turned his head to look at her but his gaze was cold. “I have always been like that and I thought you would have adjusted to it. I cannot

change my responsibilities within the Guild and I wouldn't want to either. If you can't live with that, that's not my problem!"

Shama withdrew her hands away in shock. She had never seen her husband being like that before. She was really upset and ran away quickly. Teshan's eyes coldly followed her. He didn't regret what he had said but had the unpleasant feeling that this might be the beginning of the end. His family had become strangers to him but that didn't really bother him. He felt that his job came first and therefore needed his full attention.

He spent the rest of the night in the seat. The next morning he woke and stretched to get the stiffness out of his muscles. He walked bristly to the house of Shemef's contact where Fahlee was already waiting for him and they entered the house together. Inside it was dark and dingy and the men sitting around the table could hardly be seen. They sat down at a small table opposite the contact and Teshan told him the whole story. He then asked if it was possible to speak to Shemef personally but was only answered with derisory laughter.

"Shemef only meets the very special cases, or those who want to work for him."

Teshan thought about this possibility for a moment but wanted to try another way first. "Well maybe you can answer my questions just as well. I would like to know something about Orren just to make sure who my friend has to deal with."

"Orren is the boss of a big and very powerful organisation. He takes instructions from people who want to bribe someone to change a decision to favour them and he makes people disappear, which means that they will die. Our organisation was established about a year ago to appose them and try to help people to solve problems the way they want. Most of them think the Maintainers are useless, so we have many people coming to us. Some come for protection, others because they heard of corruption and want to fight against it. So far we have been successful with our business."

Teshan knew that the last sentence was wrong. Orren was aware of Shemef and would normally stop him from doing his work successfully. But he didn't let on and asked his last question: "Have you ever come in contact with Orren's gang, while working?"

The contact nodded grimly and said: "And it wasn't very pleasant. Those guys are really dangerous." Teshan nodded and thought about it. If he wanted to solve this case quickly, joining Shemef's gang might help that a lot. He was sure that Orren had a contact as well but it was too dangerous for Teshan to join Orren's gang himself. Actually he had worked too often with criminals and didn't want to do so anymore but in this case he had no other choice. He didn't know if Shemef's gang was criminal but if they were, they were not as bad as Orren's.

Fahlee however shouldn't know about his plans. Teshan left the house with him, said goodbye and walked away until he was sure that Fahlee was out of sight then he turned around, doubled back to the house of Shemef's contact, entered again and said: "I want to work for Shemef!"



Orren smiled coldly. Sometimes it was worth using all resources! One of his contacts was a mole in Shemef's gang. Through him Orren got to know what was going on in his opponent's organisation but he could also prepare for unforeseen eventualities which allowed him to remain one step in front of Shemef. This contact had reported to him about a man called Fahlee who had been asking for personal protection at Shemef's. He also was aware of an Apprentice called Fahlee in the Guild of Maintainers, who worked together with Investigator Teshan.

Of course there were lots of men called Fahlee but it wouldn't be difficult to find out if this one was from the Guild of Maintainers. Then they also had to find out if that meant Teshan was onto them. He wouldn't be surprised if that idiot Colin hadn't done something that would bring him into danger but unfortunately Orren couldn't really remember.

He gave orders to his informant to find out who of Shemef's gang members watched over Fahlee and where he lived. Then he would deal with him personally...

A few hours later the informant returned with everything Orren needed. Fahlee lived in a small house in the Writers Quarter. His parents obviously gave him a lot of money otherwise he wouldn't have been able to afford such a home. Only accompanied by Halinn, Orren went out. When they arrived in the house, Fahlee's bodyguard immediately jumped up but was stopped, when Halinn threw a dagger into his chest. Fahlee stood there paralyzed with fear.

Orren smiled and went to the young man. "We would like to talk with you, Fahlee." Fahlee looked fearfully at Halinn who held another dagger in his hand. "Look at me when I'm talking to you", said Orren and gave Halinn a sign.

"Are you a member of the Maintainers?"

"Yes", Fahlee answered in fright.

"Show me your insignia and testimonial." Fahlee stood up slowly, went to a chest and took the items out. His hands were shaking when he put them down in front Orren. He just looked at them for a moment and then nodded.

"You have been speaking to one Shemef's contacts and have asked for his help. Was that just a ruse to learn more about me?"

"I think so."

"There was somebody else with you, right? Someone who knows exactly what he has to do to be able to reach his target."

"My mentor, Guild Master Teshan."

"What have you found out about me at Shemef's?"

Fahlee looked into Orren's eyes and saw death there. He thought to himself: "What would Teshan do now?" Then he smiled at Orren and said: "Wouldn't you like to know!"

Orren snorted scornful, overplaying his rising doubts and said: "You already know too much. It is time to show Teshan not to mess with Orren!"

He nodded to Halinn, grabbed Fahlee's wrists and held him so he couldn't fight against them. Then Halinn slashed Fahlee's throat open and Orren let him drop down on the floor bleeding his life away. He left a note to Teshan on the testimonial, then both men left the house.

In the middle of the night he woke up and was Colin again. His cruel acts had haunted his dreams. It was time to end to this! He had an urge to cry on someone's shoulder, someone who would understand him. But he had only shown himself to one other person and that was a woman who reviled him for his cruel side!

Yet he had to see her. He was sure that she would be still working, so he got dressed and left the house silently. In the tavern there were only a few drunken men. Colin sat down and waited for Trisari. She recognized him immediately, came to his table and asked: "So you're in the mood to ravage me further!"

He looked at her so sadly that she immediately changed her mind, for even after she had fallen to so many tricks, had been betrayed, abused and then left, there was still a spark of trust within her. And she just couldn't explain to herself how this man, who had been so cruel, could now be so different. She sat down and asked: "Would you like to talk about what has happened?"

For a moment Colin thought about doing that but she wouldn't believe him. Anyway it wouldn't look good if he told her about his criminal activities. First he wanted her to be able to trust him as a person. He shook his head and said: "Just keep me company."

She took his hand and said: "Let's go somewhere we can be alone." Then she gave a sign to the owner of the tavern, who just nodded. Trisari brought Colin to the room they had been in before. They lay down on the bed together without doing anything for a while. Then he put his head on her lap and she started to stroke his hair.

"What has happened to you", she asked. She just couldn't restrain her curiosity and had to break the silence between them.

"I have pushed the vicious one away."

"The vicious one?"

"Yes...you know what I mean. The viciousness in all of us" Colin answered evasively.

She was silent for a while and he wondered what she was thinking. Then she said: "It's really like there were two different men within you."

"You don't know how true that is" he thought sadly.

"If you can make the vicious one disappear forever, I will take your offer from last time" she said and lowered her head to kiss him. He was pleased that she had understood there was a good man inside him. He thanked her for her company and gave her some money. She tried to give it back to him because she felt she hadn't earned it but he shook his head and said:

"You have to keep up appearances for the owner of the tavern and you need something to live on!" With that he left her. When he had reached home, Colin was very determined to make an end of his criminal life.

Teshan was surprised not to find his Apprentice waiting in front of his study, as he did every morning. Maybe the drinks had been too much for him? But when Teshan asked the Grand Master, who was always informed by the Messengers about the illness of a Guildsman, he said Fahlee hadn't called in sick.

It was uncommon for Fahlee to be late, so Teshan had no other alternative but to look for his Apprentice himself. He went to the quarter where Fahlee lived and knocked at the door of the house but nobody answered. He opened it and almost immediately stepped into a huge pool of blood. On the ground lay Fahlee, obviously dead. The sight shocked him for a second.

He hadn't had a strong relationship with Fahlee but within a teacher-student-setup they had got along pleasantly and worked together well. Teshan swallowed hard and stepped further into the room. In another corner he saw a further corpse. It was a man with a dagger in his chest. For a moment he felt like leaving the house but then he pulled himself together and starting looking for evidence.

Next to the dead Fahlee was a table on which his testimonial lay, which had been defaced by a written note. Teshan took the testimonial and read what was written on it: "Fahlee died because of his knowledge. Do you really want to learn more?!"

Teshan let the testimonial drop back on the table. He had misjudged the situation completely. If it had been Orren then he knew a lot more because of all the spies he must have. Teshan felt that it was his fault that Fahlee had died because he had involved him by making him a client of Shemef. But then Teshan realized that if he had been the client, he might be dead now...

He shook his head in confusion. Not long ago he had received a mysterious clue to Orren and now he had received a threat. What kind of man was he dealing with? Did Orren play a deceitful cat-and-mouse game with him? In which case Teshan had to ask himself if he was the mouse!

Later the Healers removed the corpses and Teshan went back to the Guild House. He was called to the Grand Master immediately, who asked him if he knew what he was doing and that he hoped Teshan wouldn't let the case slip out of his hands. Teshan assured him that he would do everything to solve the case as quickly as possible but he didn't tell the Grand Master of his secret plans.

After a brief interrogation he had been accepted at Shemef's. Of course he would be under close scrutiny and could count with trouble if he made a mistake or if they found out he actually was a Maintainer. But he had to take the risk in order to get closer to Orren. During the day he was a Maintainer, who was following leads in the case of Orren but at night he worked as a spy for Shemef, helping to find out on what Orren was working at the moment.

In the next few days he switched between roles. When he was working as spy, he often spent his time in the taverns finding out more about Orren or trying to get clues that would lead to his gang members. He always managed it to remain inconspicuous, which was really important as he knew what would happen if Orren found him out.

Colin had returned to Trisari. He wanted to explain some things to her before he put his plans into action. She was surprised, but also glad to see him again so soon and took him immediately to the small bedroom.

“I feel I can control the viciousness within me. That’s why I have come back to you. I wanted to tell you that I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you!”

She gawped at him for a moment. She had heard many kinds of spurious offers but this was something completely different. He was serious!

“But I don’t know anything about you.”

“My name is Colin and I have good reason not to disclose anything about me because I knew it would shock you.”

“But how shall I trust you if you don’t tell me about your true self? How can this relationship work, if we live a lie?”

Colin sighed and asked: “You remember how you said that there are two different men living within me? That is really true but in such a strange way that you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“I trust believe you when you showed me your gentle side and if you are as serious about it as you seem, then you can’t lie.”

“Alright...as I said my name is Colin and I don’t think that is a common D’ni name. I come from another world. I’ve landed here somehow and have to share the body and the mind of the criminal Orren.”

She looked at him in shock. “YOU are Orren?” She seemed to have forgotten every other thing he had said.

“Yes. I am him. He is my evil part but I want to him disappear or at least keep him under control.”

“And the other things you’ve said...I don’t know. I just can’t believe you but yet I feel you wouldn’t lie to me.”

“Forget that! That’s the past. All that need you to remember is that I want to change and am already changing. I just want to get away from here. The Maintainers are already on my trail but I want it to seem as if I have disappeared. Before that happens I will give them a clue as to where Orren’s gang members are, so this business finally comes to an end.”

“Where exactly do you want to go?”

“Orren owns a beautiful age. We could live there.”

Trisari looked thoughtfully at the man in front of her. In one way he was right: She had to think about the present and at this moment she loved this man in spite of all the crazy things he had said and in spite of his evil side. She took Colin’s hand and said: “Let me know when you are done with everything.”

Colin smiled and looked relieved, then kissed her and left. There were so many things to do! He was surprised about his own strength of will, which really made it possible to keep Orren under control. But he would need even more willpower for what was to come.

Teshan was very close on Orren's trail now. He watched one of Orren's men bribing someone. He knew he had to go to the person immediately, to make a counter bribe from Shemef. So he waited until Orren's man had gone and entered the house but what he hadn't seen from his viewpoint was another man, who was hidden behind the door. When Teshan entered, he was slugged on the back of the head and knocked unconscious.

Colin was surprised when Halinn came to tell him another spy had been abducted and brought here so that Orren could take care of him personally. Actually Colin had wanted to pass on a clue to the Maintainers about the headquarters of Orren's gang and then disappear with Trisari before the Police Force started to search for them. But now he had to come up with a new plan quickly.

The man was brought to him. Colin told everyone he wanted to interview the man alone and tried to think how Orren would put a pressure on that man. "What's your name!?"

Teshan moaned quietly. He was getting too old for being knocked down and taken away. He looked at the man in front of him and knew it was Orren. Teshan felt afraid and knew there was little hope for him. So he might as well cooperate.

"My name is Teshan and I'm working as a spy for Shemef to catch you."

Colin swallowed hard. The man in front of him was the Maintainer, who had been ordered to find him. "Damn this really complicates it", he thought.

"So you didn't listen to my warning better be careful what you would find out."

"I've been accepted at Shemef's before you killed Fahlee."

Colin pondered. Somehow he had to draw the conversation into the direction of his actual plans. But Teshan would never believe the truth, so he had to force him to help. Colin didn't like doing this but it was his only chance.

"You've been very stupid", he said and drew his dagger. Then he grabbed Teshan by his hair and held the dagger to his throat pressing it in until a drop of bright red blood welled out.

"If I didn't need you to help me then I'd just kill you!"

Teshan panicked. He knew another Guild Master would take over the case, if he was killed but he wanted to live even if that meant to work against his Guild, the law and own ideals. "Right, what do you want", he asked carefully as he didn't want the dagger to go any deeper.

"I want you to help my girlfriend and I escape. I also intend to make people think I have linked to an age to avoid capture, while actually I will really go to my secret private age. I'll leave the fake book opened here and use the other, which you will destroy! But now I must go fetch my girlfriend here and leave a note at the Maintainers Guild House, telling them your whereabouts so they can rescue you. I don't want to kill you. If you promise to do everything

I ask I will show you where I keep my secret records. With that you will be able to find all my gang guilty.”

Teshan was shocked by the last words and wondered if Orren had become deranged. If he knew all his plans he could defeat them in the very last moment, but then he would have to explain why he let Orren escape in the first place. And that was something he couldn't do, as his reputation was so important to him. He couldn't admit that he hadn't been ready to give up his life for the Guild to avoid helping a criminal.

“I will do as you ask.”

“Good. There's a small safe behind the bookshelf, in which I keep all the records of my criminal activities. Now I have to take you back to my gang, whom I will instruct to keep you safe till I return. I have to blindfold you now, so later you can say you never saw my face.”

Teshan resigned himself to Orren's demands. Then Colin took him to the other room, where he told his men he had a few jobs to do before taking care of the spy and left. He was pleased with the results of this conversation and went directly to the Guild House of Maintainers. There he quickly wrote a note on a piece of paper and threw it in the mailbox, of which he knew that it was emptied every hour. This way he would have enough time to finish his business in the city before the Maintainers would storm his house.

Within less than an hour he came back with Trisari and took her straight through into the back room, telling his men he was not to be disturbed. He packed a few things before he took the Korvakh for his private age off the book shelf and opened it then he took the decoy linking book, opened it and put it next to the Korvakh. Trisari touched the correct linking panel and immediately disappeared. Colin stood for a moment then followed her.

Shortly afterwards the Maintainers stormed the house. They immediately arrested the gang and freed Teshan. He told them he would look for Orren, took one of the men's weapons and entered the back room. He looked at the book Orren had pointed out to him before and hesitated for a moment. Then he sighed and threw it into the fire, shouting to the others:

“Damn Orren has escaped to another age!” When he went back to the front room, he looked at the sullen faced men with a grim smile on his face and said: “But you will not escape so easily!”

A few hours later Teshan came back to secure the records Orren had spoken of. When he had found them, he wondered what had changed this evil man. He had seemed totally different to the one Teshan had always heard of. Maybe he had played another trick on Teshan but it was too late to worry about it now.

Teshan later reported to the Grand Master, that he had been investigating Fahlee's death, when Orren's men found him and knocked him unconscious. When he had woken up, he had found himself blindfolded. Orren didn't seem to have been there at first but when he arrived, he had seemed more interested in a woman he had brought with him, or so Teshan had understood from the conversations he had heard.

The gang was tried in front of the council and found guilty of corruption and murder and were sentenced to imprisonment for life in solitary Prison Ages. In his report Teshan admitted that it still wasn't clear where Orren had disappeared to, especially as the Korvakh he had found had been proven to be an unstable and very dangerous age. However it was still being investigated and he said that he hoped Orren would soon be apprehended, yet in his mind he was thinking of all the lies and injustices he had committed.

When Teshan finally returned home, he apologized to Shama in the hope that it would ease the problems they were having. He already had enough difficulties with his job and couldn't afford having problems in his private life as well.

For Colin and Trisari the age was idyllic and over the next few years four children were born which made their happiness complete. Occasionally Colin felt Orren's personality coming to the fore, but his control was now much stronger and usually a walk was enough to calm him down and push Orren away.

When he looked back, he found that so much had changed. He couldn't only control Orren but had also found riches beyond his wildest dreams and had turned the life of an unfulfilled Geophysicist to that of a contented family man, although it had come in a way he could never have imagined.

The End