

Excerpt Oneiro I

He retrieved two gas cans from his jeep and covered the house, the body and the shed in gasoline, took out his cauterizing lighter and burned everything to the ground.

Nothing was left, not a crust of bread, not a fingernail, not a candy wrapper. Anything that may have survived would be disposed of by the wild desert dogs, the ants, the mice and the scorpions – right down to the bones themselves.

Phil went to his jeep. He had one bottle of cognac remaining. He drank it without savor or pleasure, or even thought. He just sat in the jeep and drank it down like medicine, grimly pondering the clean, clear, cold, star-frosted heavens.

He then plummeted into a dark, fitful sleep. Nightmarish images – most of his own making – haunted and terrorized him relentlessly throughout the frigid, dark hours. Dogs howled, bats flew in every direction, snakes slithered, scorpions copulated, and desert mice scurried everywhere amongst the still smoking debris. Devils and monsters and horror and slaughter. Night's terminator.

Sunrise on the desert this time of year is spectacular. The sun is huge as it approaches its summit. As night's terminator silently raced over the death scene, shadows rose, etched so sharply they looked like black and red and gold lines carefully measured on a bare canvass. The enormous, blinding, reddish gold sun slanted down on Phil, his jeep and his crusty red eyes. Already hot, the night desert winds had subsided and no air moved at all. Any remaining smoke rose arrow straight far into the dry air. Hesitantly, painfully, exhausted, Phil stirred to wakefulness.

The nauseating blend of gasoline, burned wood, seared flesh and charred garbage hung like a haze over the scene and tortured his nostrils.

Once he had acclimated somewhat to the light and the swelter, he re-traced yesterday's horrors in his mind. Nothing occurred he had not carefully

planned in advance. Yet it still sickened him. He felt his entire being a pustulent corruption of evil itself. It was.

Merciful God! Some cognac remained.

Phil greedily poured the cognac down his throat, and then vomited and vomited and vomited until there was nothing more to throw up, and still he vomited. Mistake. Maybe fatal. He shook uncontrollably, sweat poured down his face, nausea induced tears streaked down his sooty face, and he could hardly stand. He was filthy, unshaven and smelled. He just lay there, on the gritty, scorched, burning sand, heating and dehydrating. He needed water desperately, but none remained.

Thousands of feet above the death scene, a bronzed Peregrine Falcon blazed out of the sun probing the unexpected find far below. Its acute golden eyes were as dispassionate and cold as the god that fashioned the setting. The small spectacle swirled and blurred below with multicolored sand, smoking debris, a dusty jeep, scorched stone ruins, and...a *human body*. It moved slightly. The body was disappointingly alive. With the flick of a feather, an unearthly screech, the flash of eye, and an iron clinch of a fierce, sinewy talon the scene was fast forgotten far behind.

Never in his life had he felt such a profound, melancholy loneliness. Terrifyingly... alone. He felt not the presence, not even the whisper of a shadow of a friend, an enemy, a fellow being...nothing. He could not even sense the substance of his own existence. He was deaf, blind, alone, empty, gone. In the midst of darkest infinity he was alone. Not even himself for company. Death would be a mercy.

He silently wept as he slowly, agonizingly buried his hands into the burning sand, raising shoulders, head and unseeing eyes to the streaked, golden-rose hued sky, mouth agape, breathing labored, neck painfully extended upward. Like a dying sightless creature seeking its god and the slightest measure of mercy.

In pathetic desperation he blindly crawled with almost imperceptible movement, instinctively towards the west...the west, impotently fleeing the giant star ascending in blinding splendor from the east.