

XPERTS



The Telekinetic

Hermann Maurer

Translated from the German by
Ann Backhaus

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Visit the Website www.iicm.edu/Xperts for the latest on new books in the XPERTS collection!

Preface to "XPERTS: The Telekinetic"

This is one of the novels in the XPERTS Collection, a collection of novels that I am coordinating. I am also author of this particular book, "The Telekinetic". However, other writers from all over the world contribute books to the XPERTS Collection, following an outline agreed upon between the authors and me, thus making sure that the books fit into a general 'master plan'. I am reading and editing each of the books as they progress.

Each novel is completely self-contained, yet there is some coherence due to a set of persons that appear in each of the novels at some stage, usually playing a pivotal role. The books in the collection are an unusual mixture of adventure, human emotions, supernatural powers ('parabilities'), science fiction with glimpses into the future, and all this interwoven with often detailed descriptions of interesting places from across the world, be it USA, Canada, the Arctic, Europe with its many different environments, Brazil, Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, India, Bali, La Reunion, Borneo... you name it!

Some of the books have been written originally in English, others in German, but they are generally available in at least those two languages. I want to thank all my friends for their continuing support, the Austrian publisher Freya and the US Publisher Booklocker for excellent cooperation, and my US agent Dr. Andrew Burt for his endless patience.

An early version of this book has been read by a number of friends, providing invaluable feedback. I am sorry that I have not been able to take up all suggestions, but this book would not be what it is without encouraging remarks from Lisa Maurer and Heinz Greuling. I am grateful for constructive criticism by Henriette and Renate Zirl. For details concerning style I am grateful to Guenter Schreier and Joerg Muehlbacher. I am also particularly indebted to Johann Guenther and my long term friends Peter Lechner and Vera Muench who have invested lots of time helping me. Remaining mistakes and inconsistencies are my fault. And let me also state very explicitly that all persons are fictional and have no counterpart in real life. However, most of the geographical descriptions are true to reality, or at least were true, when I was there.

Send me some feedback, positive or negative, to hmaurer@iicm.edu, will you!

Enjoy the book!

Hermann Maurer, Graz / Austria, June 2004

1 The Discovery

Early June 2003

Marcus is twenty-two years old when he discovers he can do more with his mind than just think. And even thinking will never be the same.

Marcus Waller is almost at the peak of Hochtör - a beautiful mountain in the North Eastern limestone ridge of the Austrian Alps. He pauses to look down at the difficult overhang he has just scaled. Andrea, just a rope's length below him, is hanging a bit to the side of the overhang.

Marcus rechecks the belay to make sure it's solid. He turns and raises his arm to wave to Andrea to continue. Suddenly there is a sudden rumbling noise above. A boulder has broken away from the peak and is falling toward them. From his vantage, he sees that the boulder will miss him, but will likely hit Andrea. And if it does, it will kill her.

In an instant they both realize Andrea's danger but she has no way to escape. Not being able to swing away because of the overhang or to change position in time, Andrea can only press her body and head as close to the rock as possible, a basic climbing rule, and hope the boulder will not hit her directly. Her helmet can take some impact, but not a direct hit.

Marcus freezes as the boulder passes him, a few feet away, and heads directly for Andrea who is no longer looking up. Marcus sees that Andrea will meet her fate in a few seconds, and all he can do is watch. With her hands pressed hard against the rock face, Andrea feels the vibration of the boulder as it bounces toward her. She quickly extends one hand to wave goodbye to Marcus. Her wave is a gesture Marcus will never be able to forget.

Marcus' thoughts are desperate - cursing the rock, the circumstances, everything. Suddenly, something strange happens. Marcus feels as if he is touching the boulder with his hands. But how can that be? His hands are hanging limp and helpless at his sides. The hands touching the rocks are like someone else's but something inside himself tells Marcus the hands are his own. He notices that the boulder isn't moving as fast as it should be. In a slight trance, he also realizes that he's somehow controlling the speed of the boulder, slowing it as it descends. Now, the boulder is about forty feet above Andrea and it begins to tumble even slower. Her body, although pressed tightly against the rock wall, still lies directly in the boulder's path.

Marcus looks around. Something has changed. As he watches with bizarre uncertainty, the boulder floats downward in slow motion, like a snowflake. He takes another look around. The whole world and everything in it seems to be moving in slow motion. The larch trees that swayed in the morning wind

do not move, the swallows are frozen in mid flight and the shouts of the marmots sound like deep, slow rumbles. It's odd but Marcus feels like something of himself has taken control of the boulder. But the rock is so heavy he could never have been able to move it with his own hands...but now it is slowing!

Marcus is at a loss. He can't believe he's controlling the boulder with his thoughts but how else can he explain what's happening? But something is telling him that he, with just his thoughts, is in control. Then there is something else. Not only has he slowed the boulder, he also slowed time! Has he slowed all time or just *his* time? Is everything - clocks, cars, people - right now moving in slow motion, or is this his perception?

Dazed and confused, Marcus wonders if the stress is making him imagine all of this or is this part of his desperate hope to save Andrea? But confusion is overridden by a strong desire to save Andrea. He knows he must divert the boulder. But even with all this confusion, instincts tells him not to do this too overtly. No one, not even Andrea must know he is controlling this big chunk of stone.

Marcus directs the boulder closer to the cliff and then let it accelerate. A few fragments break off and fall toward Andrea. Her helmet deflects them. The boulder bounces off the rock wall like a billiard ball hitting a cushion, then it disappears behind Andrea, not touching her. Everything including time is back to normal.

"That was a close call!" shouts Andrea. She is visibly shaken. Marcus tries to find words. "Yes, Andrea, it looked awful," he says haltingly. "Some luck, to have bounce off like that."

Marcus' mind is racing. Andrea doesn't mention about the time slowing. Certainly she would have said something if she had noticed, he thinks. Thus, time must have only changed for himself!

Andrea, frightened, is impatient, "Marcus, please belay me so I can climb up, now!"

Marcus is still reeling. He hesitantly calls out, "Andrea, stay where you are for a few minutes. Let's rest and calm down. You must feel as shaky as I do!", then he continues, "Think of the Eskimo rule!"

Of course she knows the rule that Marcus is referring to. It says that in an agitated state, persons should remain stationary because they are likely to do something foolish or rash, not thinking clearly. Now, Andrea is feeling scared and she won't feel safe until she is standing at Marcus' side, on the peak of this mountain.

Andrea tries to calm herself, knowing that Marcus is right. It's amazing how he always keeps his cool, even in the most extreme situations, she thinks. His level headedness is one of the main reasons Andrea feels secure

when Marcus is leading a climb. Andrea leans into the cliff face again, trying to forget how just moments before she clung to it for her life.

A few minutes pass and Marcus calls to Andrea telling her to climb. When she reaches him, Marcus can clearly see she is still shocked. They stare intently at each other, their hands joined. Both of them are relieved but shaken and want to get the cliff behind them as soon as possible. Marcus climbs the last stretch to the peak, while Andrea waits. While he is belaying, Andrea follows quickly and adeptly.

"We did it!" they yell almost simultaneously. Without words, they embrace each other. After a moment, Andrea speaks. "I was so scared." Marcus, still holding her, whispers into her hair, "You had every reason to be."

"The boulder hit the rock face above me, when I thought it would hit me", Andrea wonders. "Yes, it was almost a miracle," Marcus answers. "I still can't believe what happened." When he speaks the word miracle he feels the disbelief reverberate through his body, making him shudder.

After today's close call, they are not in the mood to enjoy the picturesque mountaintop. They look, but do not see the spectacular valley of the Enns River, from where they hiked, or the backdrop of the distant glacier-covered Dachstein mountain. There is no mountaintop snack as usual. And Andrea also notices that Marcus isn't writing, with his usual flair, into the book hidden in the cross.

In the European Alps, a sturdy cross marks the highest point of each mountain. The cross always contains a cache with a book in which climbers record their name or the name of their climbing party—recording the route, the next stop. These books are more than just niceties. Entries in these peak books have saved lives, providing valuable clues for rescue parties looking for missing persons. Despite being teased by his fellow climbers, Marcus usually writes poetry in peak books, embellishing the climb to the top. Today, he writes little.

Marcus and Andrea had planned to rest when they reached the peak. Although the wind is cold, the climb in direct sunlight kept them temporarily warm. The morning's clouds are now gone, leaving the skies clear, crisp and blue. But this doesn't change much how they feel. Instead of resting, they both feel unsettled and are anxious to get the difficult part of the descent behind them. Because of the sense of urgency, they take a shorter route, bypassing the Hess hut, one of the nicer huts in the Hochtör region: It offers excellent food, cozy lodging with hot showers, all topped off by a spectacular view dominated by the east face of the Hochtör. Such luxury is rare at this remoteness and height so climbers relish in it. It's also from the Hess hut, climbers can select from more than half a dozen hikes and climbs of varying

difficulty. This time, because they want to return home without delay, they bypass the Hess hut. They choose the direct descent via the "snowbowl".

Before descending Marcus and Andrea scan the mountaintop. Both are looking for the empty spot from where the boulder has come from. It had tumbled so suddenly and unexpectedly, they wonder how it could have come loose. Maybe a climber stepped too close to the mountain's edge.

Eventually, Marcus sees a gap in the rocks near the edge of the cliff face. The positioning of the remaining boulders looks like a perfect fit for the one that tumbled down. Together they move closer to the gap. The ground is damp! Marcus keeps staring at the spot, his mind racing. If this is the spot the boulder came from, it couldn't have been an accident. Someone must have pushed it over the mountain edge. He looks over to Andrea and sees she's thinking the same thing. No one speaks. Neither Andrea nor Marcus want to believe the boulder's fall was started deliberately.

Below and quite a distance down, they see a hiker walking quickly on the path toward the Hess hut. His head is down and arms are swinging. They also notice how fast he walks. It is clear that this man could have been near the peak when the boulder started its plunge.

They silently turn away from the mountain peak and make their way over to the snowbowl route. They descend the difficult section quite easily and soon reach a lower, gently rolling meadow. At this time of year, the sun has melted enough snow to form a small lake.

Around the lake, the meadow is brought to life by the snow and sun. The grass is swaying gently and the footpath feels like a carpet compared with the jagged mountain climb. Vivid colors of the meadow are also a stark contrast to the grey and white of the rock. Blue gentians have sprung, creating a violet tint over the meadow. Marcus notices several other spring flowers still in bloom - snowdrops, primroses and daphnes. The daphne bush is one of Marcus' favorites. He enjoys the bright flowers that appear long before the first green leaves. The alpine rhododendrons have started to bloom in the sunny spots of the meadow. Their tight buds give little hint of the scarlet flowers that will soon burst forth. Soon, the slopes will be ablaze with color.

Walking in the meadow, amidst the flowers, it is easy to forget that Graz, Austria's second largest city, is less than 40 miles south. The Styrian capital is known for its inner medieval city, which is a world cultural heritage site. But here in this Hochtorn meadow, Graz seems worlds away.

Marcus and Andrea are alone. Because of the difficulty of the snowbowl route, few climbers come to this meadow. From here, Marcus and Andrea will have an easy downhill hike through meadows and forests.

Finally, they start to relax. Marcus takes his bivouac bag from his backpack so they can sit on it in the meadow without getting wet. He jokes,

however, that they cannot stay too dry. He takes out his thermos of hot tea and adds a good helping of rum. While Marcus is preparing the drinks, Andrea is cutting two slices of fresh bread, to eat with sausage, cheese and sweet green pepper. For dessert, she's brought bananas and oranges. Neither of them realize how hungry they are until they bite into their sandwiches.

When they finish eating, Andrea and Marcus lie back, feeling the sun on their faces. They do not talk much because the incident of the morning is still too fresh in their minds. She wonders how she escaped inevitable death and Marcus is still grappling with what happened—how could the inevitable have been prevented through the power of thought? He continues to replay and relive the incident on the morning in his head.

He picked up Andrea at the train station in Liezen. They made the short drive, both staring out of the windows. Marcus couldn't help thinking how each ride is like the first. The scenery is mesmerizing each time. The whitewater canyon of the Enns River, the meadows in blossom and the distant snow-capped mountains. All that is what makes the trip so special. Today, patches of early morning fog added to the beauty and awe of the ride. After parking, Marcus and Andrea began their hike to the Haindlkar hut. This easy uphill trek warmed them despite the cool air. He remembered how low the sun was in the sky, creating lovely early morning shadows.

After reaching Haindlkar hut, they had a hearty breakfast because the difficult part of the hike was about to begin. By the time they left Haindlkar hut, gusts of wind so common in this area had arrived. The thought of the bright green larch trees swaying in the wind as the swallows dipped and darted through the air, makes Marcus smile.

Then, he and Andrea continued as they greeted some chamois and listened to the sound of whitewater rapids in the valley. The sights and smells of the trail reminded Marcus of previous hikes in this limestone ridge, known locally as Gesause. Like many climbers before them, they had frequented the area, a favorite training spot for Alpinists because of the choice of trails from easy to difficult.

They followed the track to the Hess hut where there is a well-known gap in the trail which prevents many climbers from taking this route. The gap is only about three feet wide, but the vertical drop is hundreds of feet. What would be an easy hop over at ground level becomes impassible for many hikers at this height. The cliff face, which climbers walk along, is to the right and nothing is on the other side. Marcus had hiked there before but for Andrea this was new. Marcus wondered how Andrea would react. He knew of experienced climbers who turned back at this point.

If Andrea had a reaction, Marcus didn't notice it. She jumped the gap as if skipping rope. It meant nothing to her. When Andrea jumped the chasm,

Marcus felt proud. Andrea knew this spot was coming and had made up her mind to do whatever she needed to. Marcus always smiles when he thinks about Andrea. She always impresses him with her willingness and persistence in tackling new things. She is full of observations and interesting comments during their trekking discussions. And, he thinks, it doesn't hurt that she's sexy and attractive--even in ordinary climbing clothes. She started the day in typical hiking gear - shorts and a tied-blouse, showing her tanned legs and a flat stomach under and the small of her back as she climbed over rocks on the trail.

After lunch, both in their own thoughts, Marcus softly strokes this lower part of Andrea's back as they lie in the meadow. They roll together soon after lunch, both lost in their own thoughts.

Marcus shifts gears again and returns to the events of the day. Soon after the gap, they had left the trail and unpacked their climbing gear to start some serious climbing. They had wanted to take one of the most difficult routes, approaching the Hochtor peak from the West. From the side they were on, Marcus remembered looking at the limestone spires that begin in the valley and reach skyward. They looked like polished teeth, gleaming in the morning sun.

After roping up, Marcus had taken the lead.

His mind sticks here-- he climbed too slowly? Perhaps if he had climbed faster, they would have reached the mountain peak before the boulder had fallen. Whenever he had reached a place to be able to provide a solid belay for Andrea, she had been waiting and would quickly climb up.

'Faster, if only I had climbed faster,' thinks Marcus.

Again, the boulder creeps back into his thoughts. Marcus keeps asking himself if his mind played a part in saving Andrea's life. The boulder headed directly for Andrea's head is still driving his thought. Had he really diverted it with the power of his mind?

Only twenty two, Marcus has been studying physics for three years. Today's events do not make sense. Although he reads a lot of Science Fiction and has a particular interest in parapsychological phenomena, he is not convinced. The phenomena that are often written about, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, teleportation, and telekinesis, have not been proven through scientific means. When asked about existence or non-existence, Marcus simply would state, "reality would be more interesting if parapsychological phenomena existed."

But now, Marcus' need for proof has him deeply confused. Is there any way to explain what happened to him and Andrea today *except* as parapsychological phenomena? What about telekinesis, the power to move material objects with the power of the mind - is that what happened?

'I had telekinetic power today,' thinks Marcus, 'or I am about to go crazy.'

Protected from the breeze, Marcus is beginning to sweat slightly from the June sun. He's instantly transported from the past to Andrea, who is lying next to him.

Marcus looks for distraction from his thoughts. "I'm going for a short swim." Within a couple of minutes his clothes are off and he's in the cold water of the small lake.

Like Marcus, Andrea is not shy. Without a second thought, she strips off her clothes, throws them onto top of Marcus' then follows him into the water. The chill of the water quickly clears their heads. After a few minutes, they sprint back into the meadow, without towels. They quickly lie down on the bivouac bag to get out of the breeze. They had hoped the sun would dry and warm them but the afternoon breeze has picked up, and small gusts of wind are now passing over.

To keep warm, Marcus and Andrea cuddle. Marcus is stroking Andrea's hair and pressing her tightly to his chest.

"Andrea, I was so afraid back there. I didn't know what to do."

She responds to the pressure of his body. Andrea recalls their hikes and times together. They have never been this close, or this intimate. But she is still alive. Today, there were several occasions when she did not think that she'd see another day.

Andrea feels drowsy and lightheaded. If she did not know better, she would think she was floating in mid air. She has never had a close call, so she doesn't recognize the symptoms of a strong dose of adrenaline. She also doesn't object to Marcus' arms around her or his gentle touch. Just hours before, it seemed unlikely that anyone would hold or touch her in that way again.

To stay warm, they crawl inside the bivouac bag. Andrea and Marcus feel good lying beside each other so closely. Andrea feels Marcus' hands as they slowly begin to explore her body. Moving over her back, hips, breasts, and further down into the bag. Then she feels goose pimples on Marcus' skin as she moves her hands over his back, then toward his belly and lower. With each second, their bodies become more entwined. His mouth finds Andrea's and they kiss with an urgency that reflects the day's intensity. As they become more excited, they lose sense of time and place and their movements become faster and more certain. Then their eyes meet.

In Andrea's eyes, Marcus sees his own desires. She is enjoying Marcus' body as well as the excitement and intensity. It's as if he's the first and last man with whom she will make love. Marcus, who has dreamt more than

once about Andrea melts into her eyes. He smells and strokes her hair as his hand travels downward, causing Andrea's nipples to become hard.

For Marcus and Andrea, the world has become emotions and excitement. They roll over clumsily a few times, laughing and kissing, feeling each other's lips, tongues and bodies. Their pleasure climaxes amidst the fragrance of the flowers and the brisk wind of the meadow. Sweaty and happy, they lie in each other's arms.

Unfortunately, their happiness is fleeting. Still in the backs of their minds, other thoughts take root and nag at them.

Marcus has a throbbing headache. He suspects it has something to do with his effort to stop the boulder. He wants to share his experience with Andrea, or someone, but he feels that this could be dangerous.

Marcus looks at Andrea and wonders if his fondness of her and his desperation caused this T-power (as he now calls it) to be activated. He does not know what to think - is he a superman or a monster? What opportunities and dangers will come as a result of these new powers? Or is this a one-off - something bizarre that happened once only, and will not happen again? Can he use his T-power at will? How often? How strong?

As he continues to gaze at Andrea, Marcus thinks of how bright, sexy, and attractive she is. He can think of many characteristics that he finds desirable in Andrea, but until today they had been nothing but good friends. Their spontaneous lovemaking was beautiful, but was it wise? Love or something like it had never crossed his mind with Andrea. Tony, Andrea's boyfriend, had always given Marcus a reason to think twice about Andrea. He often hiked with them, only missing today because he was studying for an exam.

Andrea's thoughts are similar to Marcus'. The lovemaking was beautiful but it left her feeling a bit guilty. Now, she is questioning it. Andrea thinks more about her situation. *'I'm studying medicine in Innsbruck, and Tony keeps asking me to marry him. Marcus is a great climbing partner, and is amazing sexually, but he studies in Vienna.'*

Andrea returns Marcus' gaze, but now she can see he is somewhere else. Andrea thinks he's worried about something. *'We just made love, but he's not here with me. He's looking at me, but he isn't really seeing me. Maybe we should just erase this day from our memories, like it never happened. Besides, who knows how often I'll see Marcus, and when I do Tony will probably be with me as he would have today.'*

Eventually, it gets too hot in the bivouac, so they decide to untangle and dress. Their attention is now on each other, ignoring the meadow's fragrances or colors. Once packed, they start walking through the meadow and before long they are running. Marcus insists that running requires less

energy than walking. So they run - jump and laugh - reaching the road in just 40 minutes, instead of the usual 2 hours.

In Johnsbach, they cool down by splashing their faces with cold creek water. Then they walk to the Gasthaus near the climbers' cemetery, where Andrea shivers with an eerie thought. 'I almost ended up in this creek today.'

She brushes off the thought by thinking of the hearty meal waiting for her in the Gasthaus. She will have her usual Austrian soup, salad with pumpkin seed oil, a glass of cider and coffee. Andrea can already taste the Styrian pumpkin seed oil, a favorite of hers because they have no shell. They are extracted from a pumpkin grown only in Styria. She remembers not liking the first few times she tried the almost black oil. But at the recommendation of friends, she persisted until she acquired a taste and strong desire for it. It wasn't until years later that Andrea discovers that pumpkin seed oil has more to offer than just health benefits.

After the meal they begin the walk back to the car. The route takes them from Johnsbach to a short canyon before reaching the main road. As they cross a bridge, Marcus sees a large trout in a deep part of the creek. Wanting to share this with Andrea, he describes the location of the fish. But Andrea can't see anything. She even balances on her toes, eyes following Marcus' extended arm but she still doesn't see any fish. Marcus is aware how difficult it can be to spot trout, but frequent fishing trips with his father and uncle have given him a keen eye for such detail. Still, Andrea sees nothing and jokes with Marcus about whether anything is really there. Marcus is annoyed by the joke and doesn't appreciate the doubt. By this time, a car has stopped and the driver is also trying to point out the fish to Andrea. While the driver is describing and gesturing, Marcus turns his concentration to the trout. Without making a move, Marcus feels the fish in his hands. It's fighting to free itself but there's no chance it will escape from Marcus' grasp. Next, Marcus lifts it just above the water's surface and lets it fall back into the creek causing a splash.

"Yes! There it is!," shouts Andrea, happy to see what everyone is now seeing.

The driver shakes his head, "I've never seen a trout jump like that."

Marcus agrees. He did not plan to grab the fish—he did not think that he could. "It really *was* strange, wasn't it?" Then he makes a mental note to himself to be more cautious in the future with his T-power; otherwise he will give himself away. He finds that he is both fascinated and horrified by what just happened. His hands also failed to notice that the fish was wet and slippery. What other strange T-power properties is he about to discover?

"I've got a lot to learn," he mumbles to himself.

Andrea hears him. In response, she looks at Marcus, who's turned pale. Before she can ask him anything, the driver offers them a ride to where they are going. The driver is obviously attracted to Andrea, who is unwittingly seductive, with her tussled hair and tanned skin. Marcus, on the other hand, is still pale. As they drive the short distance to the car, he adds the occasional taciturn remark.

As they get out of the car, Andrea says "thanks for the ride."

"No problem," returns the driver. Then he gives Andrea his phone number. "Call when you're in the area." It's obvious to Marcus the invitation is really only extended to Andrea.

Andrea and Marcus change from their hiking gear. Marcus is amused with Andrea's apparent lack of modesty, completely unaware her actions are causing near accidents on the road beside them. Andrea smiles, seeming to enjoy a bit of exhibitionism. He thinks back to a recent, similar situation in which she was changing. That time, however, Marcus took a few quick photos of Andrea as she changed. Although Andrea was upset when she caught the flashing of the camera, she did like the photos when she finally saw them.

Now, Marcus drives Andrea back to the Liezen train station, where they wait for the train to Innsbruck. As they wait, Andrea is bubbly, talking, in a good mood in general. But Marcus is busy toying with the idea of telling her everything. He is polite and kind, but he's absent-minded. She's disappointed that Marcus is somewhere else in his thoughts rather than with her - especially with everything that has happened between them. But Andrea can't know Marcus is toying with the idea of explaining what happened, hoping that by talking with her he might be able to see more clearly what he should do next.

The chance to talk slips by. The train is on time. Marcus kisses Andrea. Their tongues touch, they both think back to the sunny meadow and their bodies intertwined in the bivouac. Although they look intently at each other, neither brings up a date for a next meeting.

As Marcus drives back to Vienna, his thoughts are in turmoil. What *really* are his pseudo-hands and his T-power? At the beginning of the day, he had never heard of such words, and now he finds himself using them as if they are part of him. Marcus can see interesting, entertaining and fantastic possibilities, but he also senses danger.

As is often true with Marcus, he only suspects a fraction of what is likely to happen to him. In this case, limited vision is good for Marcus.

While Marcus is driving to Vienna, a man at the train station in Liezen discovers to his chagrin that yes, there was a couple here fitting his

description. The woman has taken a train in the direction of Salzburg, and the man has driven off. Nobody can remember the license plates of the nondescript car, but someone thinks the car might have had Viennese plates.

The man decides to alert colleagues in Salzburg about the arrival of the woman, giving a clear description of Andrea in her climbing gear. He realizes she had probably changed before boarding the train but it is all he can give them.

What the man overlooks is that although Andrea has boarded a fast train, the train stops about half way to Salzburg so passengers can change trains, as Andrea will be doing. This oversight in detail shows that even members of the ESP (European Security Police) are not perfect.

Andrea will not be found by operatives in Salzburg.

The man from the ESP is lucky there is a later train to Salzburg, or else friends who have been waiting in Liezen for him for most of the day, would be very upset

2 The Special Unit

Early June 2003

Klaus Baumgartner is a parascout. To be more exact, he is the only parascout of the ESP's PPU (ParaPsychological Unit) in Brussels.

Incidentally, he is on holiday in his home country of Austria, in Liezen, not far from the Hochtorn mountain. Klaus never would have dreamt that this holiday would completely change his life.

While at university, Klaus studied computer science and law. After graduation, he joined one of the European Commission groups in Brussels as a specialist in computer security. Klaus quickly climbed the ranks and before long was running the unit, which reported directly to the Commission Director. His job was both challenging and well paid. Come to think of it, Klaus's life was "better than good".

The combination of a prestigious job, good looks, and "charm" (an attribute Austrians give themselves!), was found by many women to be attractive. Adding to that his appetite for literature, music and his pleasant disposition, made Klaus irresistible. There were many times when he had more girlfriends than he could handle. While some men would relish this "problem," the scheduling conflicts caused Klaus stress.

However, when Klaus met the Irish Erica Donne, it was easy. Everything clicked immediately for both of them. It was a wedding with possibly the largest number of ex-lovers and ex-friends (on both sides) ever. Now three years later, both Klaus and Erica still seem to be well suited and almost perfectly happy.

Klaus's boss, Dirkmann, only recently filled the position as Commission Director. The title fit him well, fulfilling his desire for power. The position was the direct result of being at the right place at the right time, a luck that Dirkmann had refined to a skill.

Not long after becoming Commission Director, Dirkmann decided to create a new secret organization reporting only to him. This group, as envisioned by Dirkmann, would fight enemies of the state, helping to cement his ongoing position as Commission Director. He called the group the ESP (the European Security Police) and he staffed it with two hundred people. Dirkmann knew the European Union administration was in such infancy that the relatively small budget for two hundred staff members could be absorbed easily and unobtrusively into the Commission budget. No higher ups would suspect anything.

Dirkmann alone knew of the existence of his special ESP force. No other member of the European Commission or the European Parliament was aware such a group existed. He told no one about this group and the ESP was

accountable to Dirkmann alone. At times he, like many other high-ranking members of the European Commission, likened himself to James Bond. And this special secret group gave flight to his fancy. With the ESP at his beck and call, Dirkmann was confident he would remain the head of the Commission for a long time.

Early on in his career, Dirkmann realized that to remain on top meant producing surprise successes from time to time. This was clearly easier to achieve with secret information, especially juicy tidbits about political enemies. If a colleague would be seen to be challenging his position, Dirkmann would simply drop a few hints about politically sensitive "skeletons in the closet." Inevitably this silenced any opposition. He naively overlooked the possibility that these same rivals could someday, somehow, obtain and publicly release similarly unflattering information about himself.

Within the ESP Dirkmann wanted a smaller, hand-picked group with complete loyalty. He envisioned an elite unit of about twenty people. They could be useful for protection and more importantly for surveillance, not of state enemies, but of political rivals. Dirkmann saw this group digging up rival's information, which he could keep on tab, to use when necessary. However, the formation of such a group would have to wait until the opportune time.

Only he and the head of the ESP unit, George Adler, knew the aim of the ESP and even then Adler only knew snippets of information given him by Dirkmann. Dirkmann had selected Adler carefully, after watching him closely as they rose through the ranks together. Adler was a first-class administrator, but more importantly, he was completely loyal. As a backup, Dirkmann also knew one of Adler's biggest weaknesses and kept it close at hand, just in case.

Although Dirkmann painstakingly appointed each of the six ESP unit heads, he had not seen much action from Klaus's group, which was a squad specializing in electronic monitoring. Klaus sensed Dirkmann's glare, and although Dirkmann had not criticized him, Klaus felt pressured to produce.

The equipment used by Klaus's squad was cutting edge. The intelligence gathering techniques were so advanced that Klaus could easily have begun a traveling circuit of speaking engagements. He could, that is, if his group had produced any successes, but they had not. In fact, they had not produced anything of interest. Even worse, Klaus would think when he felt particularly self critical, his squad lacked real passion. *Look at Jan de Keep's group, how does he manage his group so well and produce intelligence?*, he thought.

Individuals in Jan de Keep's group were far more "colorful" than the staff in Klaus's squad.

Jan de Keep, the Dutchman with whom Klaus compared himself, headed up a group that sought intelligence through more traditional means. Using small bugging devices or cameras, Jan de Keep's group kept producing successes - surprise successes - the kind that Dirkmann liked. Perhaps it was Jan de Keep's temperament, easy going and good natured, that enabled him to so successfully run his group, which was known for its conflicting personalities.

After observing Jan de Keep closely for months, it became clear to Klaus that Jan de Keep seemed to have a certain "aura." He watched others, to see if they too noticed this aura, but they did not. Klaus alone seemed to notice this about Jan de Keep. A member of another unit, Justo Campo from Spain, also seemed to have something special about him.

In the midst of his observation, Klaus witnessed something strange - something he needed to investigate further. One day while Klaus, Justo and a colleague were in Justo's office, the colleague threw one of Justo's plants on the floor, in a fit of frustration. Justo kept dozens of small potted cacti in his office. They were everywhere, cluttering the desk, the windowsills, the computer, the printer and the chairs. And every week, Justo brought more potted plants into his office. Justo's colleague had had enough. He was endlessly moving plants from here to there to open the window, to set down papers, sit on a chair. One day, in a burst of anger, the colleague snapped and threw the plant.

What struck Klaus as being strange wasn't the plethora of potted plants or the colleague's anger, but rather what happened to the pot. It did not break when it hit the floor. Adding to this strangeness was what Klaus saw in Justo's aura. When the colleague threw the pot, Justo's aura opened - it grew dramatically and instantaneously.

Klaus thought about this event for days afterward, trying to make sense of it. Finally, he thought he would ask Justo. Klaus invited him to dinner, plied him with several glasses of beautiful Spanish Rioja wine, then adeptly turned the conversation around to that day in the office. Justo reluctantly explained he had saved the pot from breaking through "mental energy."

Klaus's ears pricked up, *What did he mean by this?* wondered Klaus.

As if reading Klaus's mind, Justo continued, "I can move small objects by just willing them to move." His speech was already slightly slurred.

"Mmmm," murmured Klaus sipping from his wine glass and appearing only slightly interested. "And you can do this any time you want?"

"Yes," replied Justo. "I don't use it often - it's not easy. I really have to concentrate."

Klaus couldn't contain his disbelief and interest. "I bet you the best bottle of Rioja that you can't move your wine glass without touching it," Klaus challenged Justo.

Justo had drunk and said too much. He knew to *not* tell anyone about his strange power. He looked across the table at Klaus - could he trust him with this information? Klaus was looking back at him, enjoying the good wine and conversation as much as Justo. Justo liked Klaus - he trusted him, and he felt relieved to have finally told someone about his strange power. Justo accepted Klaus's challenge.

Justo concentrated on the glass of Rioja in front of him. Klaus's eyes moved slowly from Justo's face to the glass. The glass slowly started to rise and hover just above the table. It moved several inches toward the table's edge and then set itself down again.

Klaus smiled and congratulated Justo while ordering two bottles of the most expensive Rioja. They talked for several more hours, about travel plans, sports and politics - everything but what Klaus had just witnessed. Klaus acted as if what he had seen was commonplace, but what he thought was very different. Klaus was aware that he'd just seen something that could revolutionize the world. If not the world, at least his career.

The next day Klaus asked Adler for a meeting. He said it was urgent.

At the meeting, Klaus explained to Adler that he had discovered the ability to recognize a special aura around certain persons. Klaus was sure that the individuals with this aura had some unusual mental abilities he could only describe as parapsychological phenomena. Adler listened but kept silent.

Klaus knew he had to present evidence of his claim if he were to convince Adler, so he told Adler of the previous night's events. Adler sat up in his chair, then leaned slightly forward. Klaus continued, pointing out Jan de Keep's ability to influence people, including his staff, to such an extent that they seemed to act against their own wishes. At this, Adler started to smile. Adler realized the enormity of this find - he had to report it immediately to Dirkmann. Adler asked Klaus to keep this top secret until they had discussed it with Dirkmann.

The fact that Dirkmann found time for a meeting with Adler on the same day told Klaus all this was big.

Dirkmann wasted no time in coming to the point. It was time to form his elite, hand-picked force. Dirkmann explained to Adler that the ESP had a budget set aside for a unit he hoped to build from highly elite, talented persons. The unit was the PPU (ParaPsychological Unit). The task of the unit would be to find mentally skilled persons that Dirkmann described as "psychic persons, mutants, that kind of thing." Once assembled, this group

would be known only to Dirkmann and Adler. Only they would assign their missions. And no one, except Dirkmann and Adler, would know of the unit's existence. Caught up in Dirkmann's enthusiasm, Adler readily agreed to his expanded responsibilities.

Dirkmann met with Klaus. He wanted Klaus to be the first person appointed to this elite group. Klaus's role would be as parascout, an individual who could recognize special mental powers in others. Dirkmann's offer, however, did not stop there. He offered Klaus the position of Unit Director. Clearly Justo and Jan de Keep were other staff for the group - Justo as telekinetic and Jan de Keep as emotioactivator.

"If you accept the assignment," explained Dirkmann, "your job would be twofold. You'd have to scout for other talent and you'd have to make sure the unit would work as a team."

At this point Dirkmann paused, "Harmonious collaboration - that would be your biggest challenge."

Caught off guard with this offer, Klaus sat quietly. Before he could answer, Dirkmann continued, "Money doesn't matter. I've got enough earmarked for the PPU, for you as Director, for offices, equipment, whatever you need, and hopefully for many future recruits."

Klaus was flattered by the offer, but also instinctively wary. The conditions were generous, too generous. "Why is this unit so important?" asked Klaus.

Dirkmann sighed. He tried to keep his voice level, but a brittle, almost condescending, tone was there, thinly veiled. "Take the Cuban missile crisis. We know that a nuclear war was avoided because Chrustchev placed a female emotiopath close to Kennedy. She informed Russian intelligence that JFK was serious. What did you think happened? Why do you think the stalemate was broken?"

Dirkmann talked more quickly. "And what about the American spy plane? Didn't you think it strange when the plane just crashed - seemingly for no reason? The Russians used a very strong telekinetic person to down that plane. And there's more. Other cases. Other unexplained events."

Dirkmann paused, then continued, more slowly. "Thus the secrecy. A handful of persons with parabilities are more valuable in diplomacy and warfare than silos of missiles or missile-destroying missiles."

Klaus knew well the events that Dirkmann spoke of. He had followed them, thought about them. They did not make sense. Although Dirkmann's account of them seemed far-fetched, it made more sense than any media report or conclusion he had arrived.

"You spoke about the emotiopath who was close to Kennedy. Is that what Jan de Keep is - a person who can influence others?" asked Klaus.

"No," replied Dirkmann. "Jan de Keep is an emotioactivator. An emotiopath can feel the emotions of another person. In a way, it's a weak form of telepathy. An emotiopath can't read another person's thoughts, but he or she can recognize subtle changes in emotion."

Klaus had other questions. In the few moments that he sat silently after Dirkmann's offer, dozens of questions came to mind. He had questions about the downing of the U.S. spy plane and the secrecy in which it was shrouded. And what about the two Russians involved in the incident? Or the Russian emotiopath - what happened to her after the standoff? The dots weren't connecting. And Dirkmann saying he couldn't remember all the details wasn't helping.

For several days later Klaus used his authority to scour government databases for information and answers to his questions, but he found little. He could find nothing about the Russian emotiopath's role in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, where she was deployed, or the parabilities she had. The only related information he could find was that she was executed at a later date for spying for the U.S. Other leads he followed led to other databases which he couldn't gain access. He did not have clearance. Likewise, when Klaus sought details on the Russian telekinetic involved with the U2 plane incident, he encountered similar detours and roadblocks. The telekinetic's death in a huge explosion was documented as a huge loss for Russia.

The secrecy around the tragic death of the telekinetic left Klaus ill at ease. He continued to dig for information. Apparently, the telekinetic had been able to move large objects over great distances. In the U2 plane incident, at least from what Klaus could piece together, the telekinetic was in another plane about seven miles from the site where the plane went down. Although seemingly unbelievable, the telekinetic apparently caused a metal block to hover in mid air so that the U2 hit it. The impossibility of a metal block floating in mid air at an altitude of 56,000 feet left the Secret Service baffled for years.

The United States' explanation of the U2 incident was Russia's development of effective anti-aircraft, possibly even anti-missile, defenses. In response, Star Wars, under President Ronald Reagan, was devised--a technological reaction to a non-technological weapon.

Other activities of the Russian telekinetic were briefly summarized as 'important.' It would be years before Klaus would learn what really happened to the two Russian parakeets.

Disguising his unease as curiosity, Klaus asked Adler if he could find out more information on the two Russians. Adler, like Klaus, ran into access and authorization limitations. Why was information on the two Russians so tightly guarded?

The next time Adler met Dirkmann in private, he directly questioned him about this secrecy.

Dirkmann shot up from the table. "Why is this so important?" Then he paced the full perimeter of the room once, then sat back down. He looked intently at Adler, holding his gaze, "no one is supposed to know what I'm about to tell you. Do you understand?"

Adler nodded.

"Both people were very powerful," explained Dirkmann. "The emotiopath discovered more about Kennedy than anyone thought possible. Kennedy wasn't bluffing - he was dead serious and would have stuck to his ultimatum. Kennedy would also have sunk those Cuban-bound Russian ships - missiles and all. Left to itself, that situation would have quickly and certainly escalated into the next world war."

"That same woman used her parabilities on other occasions, including to spy on the then Soviet leaders," continued Dirkmann. "She didn't like what she learned, so she decided to work against the government behind the scenes."

Dirkmann hesitated a moment, then continued. "The emotiopath found that working behind the scenes was easier than she thought. Through her parabilities, she discovered personal secrets of many of the leaders. These secrets were so personal and scandalous, she forced them to cooperate with her. The final turn came when she joined forces with the powerful telekinetic."

Dirkmann paused, as if remembering something, then continued, "Paratalents are often attracted to each other and have much in common. They're powerful, yes. But they're also outcasts of society. They don't fit in. They're useful to us, but they can also be dangerous."

Adler noticed a change in Dirkmann's tone as he continued. "When supervising the PPU, you're going to have to think about this. They're not like you and me. They're a different people. All of the persons in the PPU are our staff, but they're also our potential enemies. If necessary, we must act against them. And if necessary, we must be ruthless."

Adler still held Dirkmann's eyes, but he felt cold inside. Dirkmann's distrust of his own fledgling group, his elite force, including Klaus, deeply disturbed Adler.

"Anyway, back to the two Russian talents," Dirkmann continued, once more composed. "The woman got too powerful. Using fake records, the Russians accused her of spying for the U.S. She was sentenced to death. By that time, the two people had joined forces, so naturally the telekinetic used his powers to help her. All attempts to peacefully stop him failed. So, it became clear that they'd have to eliminate both of them. But, this was easier

said than done. Eventually, they bombed an entire village to the ground. There were thousands of "collateral casualties," as we call them, to kill just one telekinetic. And even that death was a near miss."

Dirkmann stopped. He got up and got himself a drink of water, then returned to the table. "I don't want to go into further detail," he said. "I don't remember it all anyway. But it became clear to me that mutants are dangerous. They're rare, but they're dangerous. The Russian woman and the telekinetic - they're a warning to us."

"Considering the options, it's certainly preferable to have them under close supervision and on our side, than to not supervise them." Dirkmann's tone was lighter now. He was clearly back in control.

"That's why I created the PPU. And that's also why Klaus Baumgartner shouldn't know the full story. You should help him build a strong PPU. Help him build loyalty. But never - *never* - forget that they or other paraoutsiders can turn on us. An unconditional allegiance can't be taken for granted. I'd advise you to prepare for all eventualities. You can be assured that I've already started preparing."

After his meeting with Dirkmann, Adler decided not to tell everything. Adler had to work at it, but eventually he convinced himself that Klaus didn't need to know the truth. It will only be much later, when Adler has to coach Klaus about Marcus, that the full story will come out.

Despite a slight reservation about not having the full story about the Russian paratalents, Klaus accepted the appointment. That was how he became the Unit Director of the PPU, a top secret unit with only four staff: Justo, Jan de Keep and two administrative support staff. His budget and his brief were unlimited and unrestricted.

Klaus quickly realized that paratalent was rare. He was lucky in recruiting one more female member, Sandra Hill, an emotiopath. Dirkmann insisted that Sandra be subjected to a post-hypnotic block so that she could never read the emotions of Dirkmann, Adler or Klaus.

Despite the PPU's small size, Klaus was able to prove the unit's value within weeks. Early one morning he received an urgent page requesting assistance to secure an airplane that had been hijacked. In an exchange for sick hostages with healthy ones, Sandra and Jan de Keep got on board. They paired remarkably well. Sandra read their emotions and Jan de Keep cleverly manipulated what the hijackers wanted to do. A triumphant Dirkmann appeared to the public as the hero who put his life on the line to save the hostages.

In the early days of the unit's existence Klaus felt decidedly uncertain about his unit. Would it be employed for useful purposes? Using the PPU in the hostage situation significantly impacted Klaus. It reassured him of the

unit's usefulness - its ability to save lives. It also showed him that Dirkmann was in it for more than his own gain. Yes, Dirkmann's position was strengthened in the process, but it seemed a nice consequence, not Dirkmann's driving aim.

Shortly after the hostage situation, Sandra assisted the European Union. The EU was holding high-level international negotiations, in which Sandra's emotiopathic skills proved invaluable. Dirkmann was instrumental in getting Sandra deployed for these talks. While Dirkmann's action increased his political exposure, it also showed the positive influence that individuals from Klaus's group could have. Klaus decided that Dirkmann was basically OK.

Had Klaus known himself better, he would have realized he had selective vision when it came to Dirkmann's requests. Klaus wanted to believe his unit could make a difference in national and international affairs. Moreover, he wanted to know that *he* could make a difference. While busy looking for examples of Dirkmann's lofty aims, Klaus, overlooked a wealth of evidence that pointed directly at Dirkmann's desire for personal gain. Klaus's team, for example, was repeatedly asked to spy on political opponents of Dirkmann. Although uneasy when asked to conduct such jobs, Klaus would later refocus his attention on the results of the hijacking or the EU discussions.

He decided to put his trust in Dirkmann. Klaus found that he *had* to decide. He could not work effectively if he continually questioned his role or Dirkmann's motives. To help him cope, Klaus began to repeat a saying he often heard from Dirkmann, *the aim justifies the means*. This mantra replaced Austrian poet Grillparzer's, which Klaus had regularly quoted only a year earlier, *right is never wrong, and wrong is never right*. Earlier, Klaus would never have argued that the aim should be used to justify the means. But that was a year ago, before the PPU.

It is during this time, in the initial set up of the PPU, that Klaus and Marcus first meet. Marcus is going to climb the Hochtorn mountain after picking up his friend Andrea from the Liezen train station. Klaus is coming to the same train station to pick up friends, a dozen people from high school days, who are arriving from Salzburg. He has invited them to a day's reunion in Liezen. Klaus is surprised and touched that after so many years his friends are still willing to travel over two hours by train to meet up with him. Not only has he been incredibly busy and distracted the past couple of years, he hasn't been good about returning phone calls or e-mails.

The train pulls into the Liezen station and the platform fills with people rushing about. While looking for his friends, Klaus notices a beautiful, dark-blond young woman with a backpack. The woman gets off the train and

smiles broadly, rushing over to a young man, who embraces her in a hug that envelopes the woman and the backpack.

Upon seeing the man, Klaus feels a jolt run through his body. Despite the distance - the couple is almost three quarters down the platform from Klaus - he notices a distinctive, strong telekinetic aura around the man, the same type of aura Klaus sees surrounding Justo but at least one hundred fold stronger. Klaus immediately notices the man's aura is still 'closed', i.e. the guy is not even aware that he has telekinetic powers. Klaus has been desperately looking for paratalents without luck, and here, during his vacation, he finds someone with parabilities beyond what he has imagined.

Klaus momentarily forgets everything - his friends, their reunion, the plans for the day - he just sees this telekinetic and needs to talk to this man. He has to activate this man's powers and must convince him to join the PPU. It would justify his role as Director. Klaus is making his way through the crowd, never taking his eyes from the telekinetic. He is getting closer. He catches a few words - Hochtör, West face - and then he is surrounded by his friends from Salzburg.

Klaus's friends are talking and laughing. They want to know why he's ignoring them and they ask him general questions. How is he doing? How is he enjoying Brussels? What a great idea to meet up. In the midst of all the back slapping and hearty greetings, Klaus loses the telekinetic and becomes frantic. He knows he needs to follow this man to the Hochtör mountain but he doesn't know how to leave his friends who've just arrived.

His mind flicks through options. He thinks of the big room and bowling alley he has reserved in the Gasthaus Lienzer Hof. Klaus decides to take his friends there, shower them with drinks and food, then ask for a few hours leave to take care of pressing business. Untimely and unfortunate, yes, but the business is urgent, he'll explain.

Klaus's friends notice how distracted and nervous he behaves. They have not seen him for several years and wonder whether his new job in Brussels is working out. In the brief phone conversations when setting up the reunion, they know he has been working long hours. Maybe he just needs a vacation.

When they reach the Lienzer Hof, Klaus announces that he has both good news and bad news for them. The good news is that the day is his treat - the bowling alley and everything they eat and drink. The bad news is that he has just received notice that he is needed for a special task. The job is in the area so he will not be away long, but it is something that he has to do this morning. Klaus promises to return in a few hours.

"You better," grumble a few of his friends, "or we'll order the oldest and most expensive champagne and cognac they've got, and we'll eat enough to last a week!"

A few jokes later, Klaus escapes relieved.

On his cell phone, Klaus contacts the Austrian Ministry for Defense and requests a helicopter to pick him up at the local landing station at the hospital. The dispatcher confirms the request, then tells Klaus the helicopter can be there in forty minutes. He thinks back to pre-PPU days. He would never have imagined he would be using special codes to book Air Force helicopters.

Klaus slips unnoticed by his friends back into Lienzer Hof, where he changes into mountaineering gear. His plan is to take a helicopter up the east side of the Hochtorn mountain where he remembers a fairly flat spot half way between the Hess hut and Hochtorn peak. The helicopter can land and let Klaus out to continue the rest of his agenda. Coming from the east, he will not be noticed by climbers taking the west route and he'll reach the peak much earlier. The ascent is much easier from the east, according to Klaus's memory of it. The East face is rocky, but the path is good. Difficult sections are made passable by metal ropes and ladders. Klaus smiles as he thinks his climbing experience is guiding him. He never thought his previous passion for climbing would be useful for anything beyond weekend enjoyment.

The helicopter pilot wants to approach Hochtorn from the Johnsbach area. However, Klaus's local knowledge cautions against this approach. The climbers on the West face might notice the helicopter and become curious or suspicious. Klaus instructs the pilot to detour via St. Gallen and Hieflau, a circuitous route but one that is certainly out of eye and earshot of the West face climbers. As they approach the flat spot where Klaus wants to land, the pilot refuses. It is not flat enough and it is much too dangerous.

"I can drop you at Hess hut," the pilot suggests, not really giving Klaus other options.

But Klaus knows this will not work. If he is dropped off at Hess hut, he will have no chance of being at the peak before the two climbers he is pursuing. He insists on being taken higher up. Again, the pilot refuses, saying there is no place to land higher. As they argue, Klaus grabs a rope ladder tucked behind the seat, and insists the pilot hovers the copter just above the flat spot. The pilot scoffs at the suggestion. He will not let Klaus lower himself on a ladder.

Klaus switches the helicopter's frequency to a station reserved for high-level ministry calls. After a brief, mostly one-sided conversation, the pilot nods silently. Whomever he has on board is important. He can get out when, where and how he likes!

Before Klaus leaves the cabin, he gives the pilot instructions to fly directly eastward. The pilot smirks, knowing he has no choice. There is very little fuel left and the east route is the shortest distance.

Exactly as Klaus predicted, Andrea and Marcus do not notice the helicopter. However, the innkeeper of the Hess hut makes a snide comment to one of his chefs about a VIP landing, probably trying to reach the peak without much effort. The chef remarks how good that today is Wednesday. Few climbers are on the mountain midweek, so few patrons will be bothered by the helicopter's noise and air pollution.

Klaus makes a mental note to do more climbing. He reaches the mountain just slightly short of breath. Although he runs daily, he is not used to high altitudes.

Careful and crouched low, Klaus makes his way toward the edge to lay flat and peer over. He sees the two climbers he is tracking below him. Klaus is excited they're still about an hour away—so far, he's done his job well. He has enough time to replay the details of his plan, which he's fine tuned in the helicopter on the ride up.

As the two climbers approach the mountaintop, they have only two options in the last 300 feet. They can go the overhanging rock route, which is a bit left of where Klaus now lays - but that route is difficult for everyone but fairly tall climbers. The woman is not that tall, so that route would be difficult for her. Klaus bets on the second option, climbing further left than the first route, skirting fully around the overhang. Taking this route means two belay points. The first point of belay will be directly below where Klaus is now positioned. The second will be to Klaus's left, well away from the overhang. Klaus chuckles aloud when he thinks to himself how the man will probably lead the climb. If Sandra were here, she would call him a chauvinist and cite at least half a dozen examples to counter him. She'd make sure he would pay for that comment.

Klaus continues with his plan. If he guides the boulder into the woman directly below him, it will certainly kill her. The man, who will have belayed ahead of the woman will be safely out of the boulder's path. He will also be able to see what is happening before it actually happens. Klaus is confident this will activate the man's telekinetic powers if he cares for the woman. The man will instinctively activate, or open, his powers to deflect the boulder. Klaus reflects back to the train station, where he watched the couple embrace. It was obvious to him that they cared deeply for one another so the man is bound to use his powers to save the woman.

The climbers will be shocked about their near miss with the boulder, but they will continue their climb to the top. If Klaus then confronts the man with the knowledge of his newly discovered telekinetic powers, he is sure to talk. He will be shaken and will not know what is going on but Klaus can guide and support him.

Klaus believes the man will accept a job offer with the PPU, perhaps not immediately, but eventually, without too much delay. It is, after all, a much better option than being publicly revealed and made to feel an outcast. Such labels - outcast, outsider, freak - stick for the rest of one's life.

Klaus looks around and finds a loose boulder among the larger, solid rocks. He pushes his shoulder against it, moving it out of its small depression, then braces himself so he can release it at just the right moment. Then he waits. Which route will they take? The decision will be a close one.

Klaus is two for two. The climbers take the route that he predicted and the man is leading. The man climbs around the overhang, according to Klaus' plan. He is still about 150 feet away from him, which is too far for Klaus to sense his aura, but Klaus is fairly certain the climber is the man from the train station. The woman is now directly below Klaus, about 300 feet away. He must act now, without confirmation of the telekinetic's aura. Klaus pushes his shoulder into the boulder. The boulder leaves its perch and tumbles toward the woman.

The boulder gains speed as it gets closer and closer to the woman. Klaus holds his breath. To his horror, Klaus sees that the man does not change the boulder's direction. He feels his heart throbbing in his throat. This guy is not using his telekinetic powers! Why?!

Relieved, Klaus suddenly realizes his miscalculation. As he watches the boulder, he sees that it's going to hit the mountain wall just before the woman, then bounce over her. The woman will not be in danger. Klaus's immediately reaction of relief is quickly replaced with annoyance. This whole exercise was for naught because there was no need for the telekinetic to activate his powers.

As Klaus is berating himself for his mistake, while Marcus is confused about what's happening. Marcus' hands are somehow changing the boulder's trajectory just enough to miss Andrea. Klaus does not know that he *has* activated Marcus' powers, and Marcus is instinctively smart enough not to make his powers obvious by completely redirecting the boulder. Instead, Marcus uses time dilation, a technique unknown to Klaus, to slow his time. This gives him ample opportunity to make a decision.

Klaus's only telekinetic experience has been with Justo, whose powers are weak in comparison with Marcus. Time dilation, for the time being, is Marcus' secret.

Although Klaus is frustrated, he is not willing to give up. True, he believes he hasn't activated the man's latent telekinetic powers, but he still has a chance to find out more about the telekinetic. Klaus decides to hurry to Hess hut and wait for the two climbers there. Then, he'll play out the rest of the afternoon.

Klaus assumes the climbers will arrive at the mountain peak shortly, where they will rest from their climb and recover from the near miss with the boulder. They'll then make their way over to Hess hut, where Klaus will be waiting. He can find out his name and address from his Alpine membership, which gauging from his climbing ability, he will certainly have. Klaus can think more about a strategy from there, then decide what to do.

Klaus hurries toward Hess hut. While he's busily working on Plan B in his head, he misses the unmarked snow bowl shortcut. The snow bowl track was not there a few years ago when Klaus last hiked in this area. For this reason, he does not know the climbers have a choice, and will take the more difficult shortcut down the mountain, avoiding Hess hut completely.

When Klaus reaches Hess hut, he tells the innkeeper some fantastical story about the helicopter. The story, along with a hefty tip, seems to suit the innkeeper, who does not ask any questions.

Since it will be at least 90 minutes before the climbers reach Hess hut, Klaus sits behind the hut, out of the wind, enjoying the sun and the conversation with other mountaineers. Although the day has not gone as planned, it has gone well enough because he's found a telekinetic with powers far stronger than Justo's.

Because he doesn't want to appear suspicious or anxious he doesn't keep his eyes focused on the trail. Besides, they must pass him because this is the trail for them to take.

After two hours, Klaus smiles to himself, thinking of the celebration the two must be enjoying after reaching the peak safely. The two climbers should arrive shortly.

After three hours, Klaus shifts his chair so he can see the peak trail leading to the hut. Then he asks the others about alternate routes. When he hears about the snow bowl track, he grabs his jacket, throws a cursory smile, then rushes down toward Johnsbach valley. His heart pounds as he walks briskly down the mountain. By now the two climbers must be making their way back to the Liezen train station.

At the road, Klaus tries desperately to get a lift to the train station but nobody stops. He tries his cell phone but cannot get a signal. When he finally gets a signal, Klaus calls a taxi cab from Liezen. Of course he knows the expense, he replies curtly to the taxi dispatcher, but it is urgent that he be picked up as soon as possible.

While Klaus impatiently tries to get back to Liezen, Marcus and Andrea are sitting in the Gasthaus recovering over a hearty meal. And by the time Klaus finally arrives at Liezen station, he is too late. The woman matching his description has already left by train in the direction of Salzburg. The man,

whose car has Vienna license plates, left around the same time, about twenty minutes ago. Klaus is beyond frustrated.

Klaus sits down in the train station, which is slowly emptying, to make a few calls. The day has been a disaster. Nothing has turned out as planned. As he looks around, he decides to salvage what is left of his day. His friends will probably be angry with him for leaving, so he has to make it up to them.

Klaus thinks back to a red-light party he attended a few years earlier in this area. He gets on the phone and within minutes has organized a party - a no-holds-barred party. For a hefty tip, the girls will come wearing little more than the champagne bottles they will be carrying. He waits outside and after the girls arrive, they all go to the Gasthaus. The evening will be a success with his friends, and he is sure that they will accept another reunion invitation in the future.

3 Experiments

June/July 2003

While driving back to Vienna, Marcus' mind bounces from one thought to the next. There is Andrea, whom he has always admired, but with whom intimacy was taboo because she was the girlfriend of his good friend Tony. What happened between them this afternoon was completely unexpected, but amazing. There in the meadow he had felt like he floating on pink clouds.

And yet, at the same time, he had been preoccupied with his new T-powers. He thinks back, his face and neck getting warm. He feels acutely embarrassed he acted so badly with Andrea. They had made love and it was beautiful but he was so confused with his new powers that when he relaxed as they lay together, his mind had wondered. He is convinced that he thus ruined his one and only chance to win her over.

After a few moments, he wonders *if* he should try to win Andrea over. Should he win *anyone* over right now when he is grappling with his new powers?

Marcus' thoughts keep returning to his new T-powers. How should he deal with these powers? It would have been nice to talk with Andrea about his powers. She had shared this experience with him. How should he act now? What do the powers mean? Will they change him? There are so many unknowns he wants to discuss with Andrea, or his parents, or his friends. But what can he tell them? He knows so little about his powers.

"First," Marcus thinks to himself. "I'll learn more about my powers. For twenty-two years I'm normal then suddenly BANG, I'm a superman? Not likely."

Marcus begins to analyze himself. "Can I repeat my powers at whim? Are they a freak occurrence? Are they under my command or do they happen randomly? How fast can I move my "pseudo-hands"? Can I precisely control their actions? Can I use them anytime or only in times of stress?"

Marcus pauses a moment, then thinks about the fish. 'The trout. I flipped the trout out of the water to show Andrea. That means I can use the hands at will and not only under stress. Or was that a freak incident as well? And what about the headache that pounded in my head when I was resting with Andrea? Is it something like an ache from an overexerted muscle? If I train myself, can I avoid the headache?'

This line of questioning is calming Marcus' anxiety and sending his mind off in the direction of possibilities. What if he really does have these powers? And what if he can control them and use them at will? It dawns on Marcus that these new powers might be exciting, interesting and fun. They can change his life!

Marcus' momentary excitement is tempered with a small, but persistent feeling of unease. Will others accept him if he has these powers? Or will he be a freak, a circus side show? Or worse, will he be imprisoned because he has powers others do not? If he defends himself using his powers, might he be killed?

Marcus shudders. He has a sense that his powers might be as life threatening as they are life saving. What can he (and others) expect of him if he has these powers? If he can save the lives of persons, is he not obliged to do so? How can he systematically do so without giving himself away?

Marcus stops for dinner in one of the Autobahn restaurants near Linz in Upper Austria. His meal comes, but it sits untouched, getting cold. He drinks glass after glass of wine while he thinks. What happened to him today will change his life. Does he want this? Will it be easier to ignore his T-powers and lead a normal life? *Can* he ignore his T-powers? If he cannot, is he prepared to live his life as an outsider - powerful, but outside?

Marcus has reached a dilemma. As a scientist he knows that his experience is fairly unique and he should investigate it. As "just Marcus" he is afraid that if he follows up, he will venture into a new, unorthodox life that he may regret and from which he may not be able to return.

Marcus feels stuck in limbo. It is late and he knows he cannot make a decision now. He's too tired and has further to drive.

When Marcus gets behind the wheel of his car, he knows he shouldn't drive. His mind is numbed and he's had too much to drink. But he feels as if he is on automatic pilot now. He starts driving in the direction of Vienna.

At the bridge which crosses the Enns River into Lower Austria (still about eighty miles from Vienna), there is a road block. The police are checking for drunk drivers and speeders. He is driving too fast and he knows that he is easily over the 0.5% alcohol limit. He may lose his license over this. One of the police officers raises the red signal, indicating that Marcus should stop. Marcus reacts without thinking as he wills the arm of the officer to go down. He feels his pseudo-hand gently guiding the officer's arm to his side. The red light is lowered. The other hand of the officer raises and waves Marcus through. Marcus drives through the checkpoint, awed by what he has just done.

As Marcus passes, he hears snippets of a conversation between the officers through his open window. "Why did you wave this guy through? He was way over the speed limit!" Marcus catches the momentary look of bewilderment on the face of the officer whose movements he controlled. The officer himself does not know why he let this driver pass through. The driver was clearly speeding. It was as if his movements were controlled by something outside of him. Marcus has already driven through when the

officer gives his reply, "Well, this guy is a friend of mine. I owe you one now." None of the officers pursue the question any further. They all wave friends through every now and then, and it is good to have one owing.

Although Marcus' reaction was spontaneous, it is now clear that he can use his T-powers whenever he wants. He has only realized these powers today, and already they are becoming second nature. His T-powers are part of him whether he likes it or not. His life has changed and he cannot go back.

With this realization, Marcus decides that he must investigate his powers systematically. "I wonder what I am capable of doing," mutters Marcus as he parks his car near his apartment in the Koellnerhofgasse in Vienna's center.

Being a physic's student comes in handy. This helps him to understand how he must perform his T-power tests in a systematic fashion. He decides that his apartment will work well as his laboratory. Although Marcus is tired from the day, his mind buzzes with possibilities. If he lies down now, he will not be able to sleep. So, he starts a first series of tests.

He can readily move objects without much time delay. However, the faster he moves them and the heavier they are, the more effort he expends. He also notes that the more T-power he invests, the more his thought-time is sped, as compared to real time. Marcus thinks back to the time delay he experienced earlier in the day with the falling boulder. Was that today?! It seems so long ago!

The next target is his sofa, which easily weighs over five-hundred pounds. He lifts it off the floor using his T-powers, but it is difficult and seems to take a long time. When he checks the clock, he realizes only ten seconds have elapsed. Marcus' personal time feels much longer than the ten seconds.

Marcus is intrigued by the relationship between subjective and real time, together with the object's size and the speed with which he moves the object. As he tests the relationship, he logs his findings on a rough diagram. He is puzzled at the inconsistent findings. Even the same tests, repeated, turn out different results.

Marcus paces the floor, deep in thought, between tests. He looks again at the plotted numbers then realizes what he's missed all along. There is no direct relationship between individual time and effort. Instead Marcus can *change* his individual time simply by willing it. He tries it again, this time with a book. He reads the book ten times faster than he normally reads, then he reads it thirty times faster – he is able to change his individual time!

Marcus plops himself down into the sofa and smiles. He can see this new development greatly increasing his study potential. With his new powers he can increase his subjective time and can learn in only a few minutes in real time material that would have normally taken him days. With this finding

Marcus decides to call it a day. It is now 2:00am. He lies on his bed and is asleep in an instant.

Marcus wakes early, feeling tired. The little sleep he did have was interrupted with dreams. Now awake, his mind starts racing to other tests, experiments, possibilities, dangers. He knows there are many things about his powers still to investigate, but he also knows that he must take care of himself so that he feels better. At the moment he feels like a taut rubber band, needing a release.

The coffee shop across the street from his apartment seems like a good spot to sit and think more about his testing strategy. Marcus orders his usual, a Vienna breakfast, a grand title for a cup of coffee, two pieces of bread with butter, two slices of sausage and a thin slice of cheese. Marianne, a waitress he knows from previous visits, brings the basket of bread to his table. Marcus, feeling mischievous, uses his T-powers to return the basket lightening fast into her hands. "Marianne, can you please leave the bread here?"

Marianne looks down and realizes her apparent mistake. Flustered she apologizes and returns the basket back to the table. Once again, Marcus plays the same trick on her. This time, however, Marianne catches herself.

"I'm so sorry," Marianne apologizes. "I had a bad night last night, I must still be sleeping! I did it again!"

"No problem," smiles Marcus. "But you could make this up with a little kiss, couldn't you?"

Marianne smiles. She and Marcus often flirt and tease each other when he comes in. She bends over to quickly peck Marcus on the cheek. Although her kiss was innocent, she feels a light tingling in the small of her back, her shoulders and her breasts. She blushes and quickly looks at Marcus who is smiling up at her. Marianne has always found Marcus pleasant, but she has never been physically attracted to him and her body has never reacted physically to an innocent kiss.

He's observing Marianne closely, watching her reaction to his pseudo-hands. He says light heartedly, "Hmm, that was a nice kiss. I think I'd like to do that again!"

His response gives her time to regain her composure. She smiles and says, "Me too." She takes the money Marcus has laid on the table, for the breakfast, then retreats to the kitchen. As she passes the small backroom mirror, she notices that her face is still slightly flushed.

Marcus goes back to his apartment with three new findings. First, with the food basket, he has learned that he can manipulate items with such speed that his movement is not noticed. Second, Marcus could have easily taken

his money back from Marianne without her realizing it. "I am a potential master thief!," he quips to himself.

Marcus' third realization is much more interesting and quickly replaces his first thoughts. He can use his pseudo-hands to invisibly touch the body of others. "Here are interesting possibilities!," he can't help thinking. His T-powers have transformed him overnight from an average physics student to a super Casanova. He knows Marianne has never *really* thought about him as anyone other than a regular shop customer but today, she's noticed him. And he enjoyed her reaction and surprise as much as she did!

As he is replaying Marianne's reaction in his head, he walks to the window that faces the coffee shop across the street. He opens the window and leans forward. Before long Marianne comes to stand in the open door of the shop. The shop is empty and she has a few moments to think about Marcus and their kiss. She looks over toward the apartment building. Marcus waves. Marianne smiles and waves back. Marcus uses his powers to again touch Marianne's back, then slides his hands gently over her breast and slowly toward her thigh.

Marianne is completely surprised by the sensations she's experiencing while looking at Marcus. He has never aroused her before, yet her reaction is instantaneous.

Marcus waves for Marianne to come over, then gently squeezes her thigh with a hand and disappears behind the window curtain.

Next, he calls up the coffee shop and orders a tea with lemon juice and a serving of hearty goulash soup to be delivered to his apartment. Because he's frequently called in orders, nothing is suspected.

Marcus then rushes to take a hot shower. Afterwards, he puts on his green bathrobe and gets into bed with the daily newspaper. He reads the front page headline, and reads it again. Marcus is so excited at what might happen next, he can't concentrate. The thought that Marianne might come within minutes to deliver his order, and the possibility of using his T-powers on her again is almost too much to bear. He shuts his eyes and enjoys the image of Marianne responding to his T-powers. Then, the doorbell rings.

Marianne has come to deliver his order. He's surprised to discover that she has opened two buttons on her blouse and there is nothing underneath. He also notices with the help of his pseudo-hands that she is not wearing a slip underneath the soft skirt that falls just above her sandals.

Marcus has always found Marianne very attractive, but there has never been a click, or she has never clicked with him--despite his hopes. The possibility of seeing Marianne naked, having sex and pleasing her is too strong to resist.

Without conversation, he takes the order from Marianne and places it on the table. As he reaches out to take her hand, he uses not one, but three hands to touch her body in different spots. He embraces her and kisses her passionately, adding the touch of his own hands to those belonging to his powers. Marianne is overcome with an unbelievable physical sensation and returns Marcus' passion.

Marcus suddenly steps back from her. "I've always wanted to see you naked. Will you take your clothes off for me?," he asks. Marianne doesn't take her eyes off him. She slowly finishes unbuttoning her blouse then slips off her skirt. For the next half hour Marcus experiments with his powers. His hands are in total physical abandon, acting and responding to each other.

"I have to go back to work," Marianne complains softly, dreading the thought of going to the coffee shop now.

"No need to go back today," explains Marcus. "I hope you won't be upset with me but when you dozed off, I had one of my friends call your boss and say you've had an emergency and needed to go to the doctor. Are you mad?"

Marianne is too content to be mad. The soft sheets of Marcus' bed and his warm body are all she feels at the moment. As Marianne reaches up to kiss Marcus, he runs his hands up the entire length of her body. She shudders against him.

Over the next few hours, they take turns leading each other into new sexual realms.

When they part, Marianne takes with her the sensation of hands all over her body—caressing her. Marcus follows Marianne with his pseudo-hands, losing her only when she reaches the subway at Schwedenplatz, almost a quarter mile away.

Marcus relives the morning over and over. He has experienced with Marianne what he has previously only read about on the internet and in books. One thought starts to interrupt his daydreams: he, Marcus Waller, has an incredible power over humans. He has an incredible power over Marianne.

For some unknown reason this thought also disturbs him, "I've got so much more to learn about my powers." He used three pseudo-hands on Marianne. Does he have more? Whatever, even sex will never be the same.

During this period with Marianne, Marcus neglects his friends, family and his university work. She believes Marcus is preparing for a major exam, so she is looking after him lovingly, bringing food from the cafe. They spend much of their time together in bed, becoming adept at reading each other's sexual desires and moods. Out of bed, however, they begin to realize that they have little in common intellectually or emotionally.

They try discussing their interests. Their conversations, however, feel stilted and contrived. Marcus scolds himself for using Marianne as a test ground for his powers. Marianne now notices the absence of the incredible sensations of being caressed all over when having sex. She begins to wonder if they ever existed. Perhaps she created them in her mind, a rebound reaction to her recent split up with her boyfriend.

As days pass, Marcus and Marianne grow more distant. Physically, they occasionally enjoy each other as they did in their first encounter, but more often their sex becomes problematic. Marcus is distracted with study, or Marianne is tired from work. The days they spend with each other pass slowly. They have little to say to each other and when they do speak their words have a sharp edge.

Marcus feels tension with Marianne and rebukes himself repeatedly for having seduced her. He throws himself into further investigations of his powers. He discovers an inexhaustible number of pseudo-hands. After much practice, he also discovers he can manipulate ten of them simultaneously by associating each one with a finger. Other pseudo-hands either act separately like many thin strings or combine together like a giant octopus arm. He outlines a number of further investigations to define these pseudo masses.

Marcus is surprised at how he can distort the hands from a very small size to the size of a baseball mitt. The malleability of his hands leads Marcus to other ideas. How soft or how hard can he make his hands? He progresses easily from snapping pencils to breaking sizeable branches. He can easily drive a nail into a piece of wood or loosen a screw. He begins grinding his own coffee beans for his morning coffee. Each new discovery brings with it a mix of emotions - victory and horror. Why does he have such a formidable array of powers? Where will they stop?

What he finds particularly puzzling are the feelings that come from his hands. Initially he feels only resistance, such as when he lifts an object like his sofa. He does not feel texture or form or he can't distinguish, for example, between the buttons of his shirt and Marianne's nipples. With practice and concentration, however, Marcus heightens his awareness of physical sensation. He learns to mould his pseudo-hands around objects so he can distinguish shapes and subtle textures.

Another round of tests brings Marcus' hands into contact with heat and cold. One evening Marcus warily thrusts a hand in and out of a candle flame. More courage testing show that his pseudo-hands only feel temperatures above 150 degrees and below -50 degrees Fahrenheit. Boiling water feels lukewarm. However, very hot temperatures - those approaching his limit - result in an extended period of pain. Are his hands healing? Re-growing? Microwaves and hard radiation have similarly unpleasant side effects.

Sometimes Marcus finds himself giggling like a child at these discoveries. He can, for instance, reach around corners, grab things that are out of view. However, he's shocked when he accidentally reaches through a wall rather than around it.

The first time his pseudo-hands pass through a wall he feels resistance. However, he learns that if he increases the speed or pressure of the push his pseudo-hands slip through more easily and also moved freely once on the other side.

Testing the limits, Marcus goes into a jewelry shop. He reaches a pseudo-hand into a closed vault and moves a diamond watch from the front to the back of the vault. But he can't pull it back through the wall. Marcus walks out of the jewelry shop with a sigh of relief. 'At least I can't rob a bank or a vault.'

Sometimes during his testing, such as when he was in the jewelry store, Marcus feels as though his powers are controlling him, rather than he defining his powers.

Marcus' fear is somewhat alleviated when he finds himself in another situation. A Doberman is racing across a park toward a group of young children playing ball and the dog's muzzle has come loose. The owner is running, two street lengths behind, yelling at the dog but his shouts blend into the general hubbub of the busy street traffic. If it isn't stopped, the dog will reach the children and will likely maul one or two as they try to run.

After taking in the scene, Marcus feels he has no choice. He reaches a hand into the Doberman. He shivers at the strange sensation he feels. Without knowing much about veterinary medicine, Marcus' pseudo-hands get lost inside the dog. He thrusts two more into the dog and searches until he feels a beating sensation. Marcus wraps three hands around the heart of the dog and presses them together until the heart stops beating. The dog whines then collapses dead. The owner reaches the dog which dropped only fifteen feet from the children.

Marcus is close to tears. He leaves the scene, which is now a throng of crying children and running mothers. How can he live like this? He can prevent accidents. He can work as a surgeon without a knife and without invasive surgery. He can help. He can make people happy. But how can he do this? He is just one person in more than six billion.

Later that evening, Marcus goes to the library. Using the anatomy books and his powers, Marcus explores the inside of his own body. He looks at page after glossy page—muscles, organs and other complicated systems. During his investigation he finds a small kidney stone, which he disintegrates without hesitation. When he leaves the library hours later, he finds he can

easily recall the images. He has learned a lot in a short time. 'Maybe I should be a doctor,' he muses to himself.

Marcus' meetings with Marianne are becoming more infrequent. One evening when he returns from the library, he finds Marianne waiting in his apartment.

"Marcus, I've come to return your key," she says.

Marianne is sitting on the sofa. Beside her is a glass of wine, empty. She's been waiting for some time. Marcus looks at Marianne and sees again how beautiful she is. He notices she is wearing the same flowing skirt that she wore when she first came to his apartment.

"I know," responds Marcus.

He sits beside her and takes her hand. They've both known for awhile that it will not work, but neither could break it off.

"I've gotten back together with my ex," Marianne says softly while looking at Marcus. "I used to think we didn't have much in common, but we do."

Marcus looks at Marianne. He remembers their lovemaking and feels a longing to again explore her with passion and energy and experimentation. But she is right. They have little in common. His passion has turned into something else

Marcus finds it odd, but that evening, he and Marianne enjoy their conversation more than they ever had during their time together. They finish the bottle of wine and begin another. Then they part with a kiss reminiscent of their first meeting. Although Marcus has had plenty to drink, he keeps his hands to himself. He knows that he'll miss her.

The next few days Marcus finds himself easily distracted. Even his investigation stalls. He begins attending physics classes again, but only sporadically. He looks into medical classes but finds them less insightful than what he can pick up from library books. He wants to learn how to help people medically and practically. But he is finding that medicine, as taught in Austria, is not based on everyday application. The training is first and foremost theoretical, rather than practical. The information that he is seeking cannot be gained readily in any medical school.

Marcus becomes frustrated and lonely. He curses his T-powers because they make him an outsider. Occasionally he uses his powers to play a prank, such as when he rings the bell in Vienna's Stephan Cathedral. The authorities can't figure out how the bell rang by itself. Marcus knows the newspapers report such pranks, but he does not know that such reports are collected by the PPU, confirming Marcus is still in Vienna.

Sometimes Marcus uses his T-powers to help others, such as when he saves a cat from drowning in the Danube Canal. The little boy who witnesses

the cat's drowning is devastated. The smile that shines from the boy's tear-stained face when the cat is saved miraculously is priceless.

At other times Marcus uses his T-powers for himself, to momentarily forget his solitude, cajoling the services of two professional ladies. On the way home from an evening physics lab, he seduces the women with a smile and his pseudo-hands. They in turn invite him to their apartment, when they get off work. He goes home that evening thinking he will not take them up on their offer. However, the next morning when he gets up with every intention of going to his physics class he ends up at their door.

Since his breakup with Marianne, Marcus can't get back on track with his physics classes or the testing of his powers. He walks about Vienna, thinking about employment opportunities—highly successful surgeon, gigolo or magician. He even entertains thoughts of becoming a thief.

Finally his restlessness gets the best of him. He must do something. He can't just wander about like this. Marcus decides to talk about his powers with his father.

The drive from Vienna to his hometown of Eisenerz, close to the Hochofer mountain, is relaxing and pleasant. Just having a change of scenery lifts Marcus' spirits. Life feels more intact. He decides to make a brief detour to Lake Leopoldstein.

Marcus loved this spot as a child. He stands at the bottom of the formidable rock face of the Seemauer and he watches the water pass underneath the bridge where the river leaves the lake. While enjoying the walk by the lake, he meets a group of people celebrating their recent graduation from high school. They have just finished a grueling hike and are resting beside the lake. They are laughing and joking with each other and pull Marcus into their group. Marcus finds one of the girls, Maria, attractive. She exudes something akin to confidence, only much stronger. Marcus is particularly drawn to her. What kind of attraction is this? It feels different from what he felt with Marianne. Yet he finds Maria equally sexy.

Some of the men in the group are trying to impress the women by skipping stones across the top of the water. Most of them can manage two, at most three, skips before the stone sinks. Marcus watches them for awhile, paying special attention to Maria and her reactions. Then he approaches the men and starts giving them tips on their throwing technique. He keeps this up until he annoys them so much that they challenge him to do better. Marcus picks a stone. The men exchange quick glances. The stone Marcus picks is much too thick. It can't bounce any more than once or twice. Marcus throws the stone forcefully across the top of the water. They gasp, almost in unison, at the stone, which skips five times across the surface of the water. The men look at each other—it's all they can do.

"Did that skip all the way across?" asks Maria.

Marcus switches from being cocky to being modest. "I spent some time with the Navootka Indians on Vancouver Island in Canada, and they taught me all kinds of tricks like this one. Sorry, I guess I acted a bit ... like a showoff."

As the group starts to talk amongst themselves and ask Marcus questions about the Navootka Indians, he thinks back to his trip to Vancouver Island - a short Canada/U.S. trip that he took with his parents. He also thinks back to his student exchange days in Colorado. Marcus knew he didn't *exactly* spend much time with the Navootka Indians, but it's a good story. And the group finds it entertaining.

Marcus shows the group a few other tricks—like hitting one stone with another stone—in mid-air. He also tells them several Native American and other stories before making his way back to his car. He wants to leave them with the impression he's nice, but unusual. He thinks he has accomplished this much. As he was leaving, many in the group give him their telephone numbers and tell him to call if he gets back to Graz. Maria, however, hesitates. As he passes her, Marcus pretends to accidentally drop his wallet and keeps walking. He hears someone running up behind him.

"You dropped this," says Maria, handing the wallet to Marcus. There's a piece of paper attached to it.

Marcus looks at the paper. "Call me," she says.

"I will," Marcus responds.

As he looks up from the paper, into Maria's face, he again notices that there is something that separates Maria from her friends.

"There's something about you that I'm curious about - that I'd - like to know more about," he says, almost self consciously, "I really want to meet you again."

"Promise?" asks Maria light heartedly.

Marcus laughs. "Promised. How about a nice dinner? But," he continues with a twinkle in his eye, "I *am* a couple of years older than you? Do you have courage to go out with an "older" man. And one more thing—I have a test."

"Sure," teases Maria back. "Age and courage aren't always related. What's the test?"

"Open the top three buttons of your blouse," flirts Marcus.

Maria opens the top three buttons, all the while holding Marcus' eyes with a defiant gaze. Although Marcus does not move his eyes from hers, he can notice the soft curve of Maria's breasts. Marcus feels himself blush and he suddenly feels insecure.

"My turn," Maria laughs, seeing Marcus' embarrassment. "Your test is this. Explain how the stone you threw skipped only once over the top of the water, then dipped *into* the water, *but*," she emphasizes, "it re-emerged and kept skipping."

Although he's standing in the fresh air, Marcus suddenly feels short of breath. Has Maria seen his telekinetic powers? Impossible! The stone was too far away from shore. She must be guessing.

Instead of answering, he quickly looks at his watch and begins walking away. Looking over his shoulder he says, "Maria, thanks again for picking up my wallet. I'm looking forward to dinner with you. I'll call you in the next couple of months."

She smiles and buttons her blouse. "See you then. Don't forget or you'll regret it!"

Maria runs back to the group. Marcus watches her, stopped momentarily by her last words. Did her words contain a veiled threat or a sexual innuendo?

By the time Marcus reaches his parents' house, the meal is already waiting on the table. His mother's specialty, boiled beef and Styrian pumpkin, tastes delicious. Marcus enjoys the food and their company. Although he's relaxed, he's still thinking—looking out the window onto the western slope of the iron mountain, the Erzberg. He thinks fondly back to the Barbara Chapel and the creeks and crevices he used to explore as a child.

Talking with his father about his T-powers after the meal will be good for him.

Marcus' father, who had been promoted recently, never gives Marcus a chance to talk. He excuses himself shortly after the meal, goes into his office and shuts the door. Likewise, Marcus' brother and sister stay only to help wash dishes, then go their separate ways. Marcus and his mother sit alone on the back porch of the house. He likes talking with his mother, but he is annoyed. He had planned, he *needed* to talk with his father. Marcus doesn't believe his mother can help him with his T-powers.

During their conversation, Marcus notices his mother rests her right hand, rather protectively, over her stomach. Marcus uses a pseudo-hand to scan the inside of his mother's stomach. To his horror he finds a large growth in her stomach.

"How are things going otherwise Mom - you know - health-wise?" asks Marcus innocently as he looks out across the backyard.

"Fine," she answers.

Marcus glances at his mother. "You look a little different than the last time I saw you. Have you lost weight?"

"I guess I sometimes have an acidic stomach," says his mother. "I don't think I've lost weight though—maybe a little."

"Maybe you should get your stomach looked at - you know, just to make sure it's not an ulcer. I've got the address of a good hospital. A physical will only take a couple of hours. Then you'd know if antacids are enough or if you need something stronger."

While Marcus is talking he is investigating the growth in his mother's stomach. The growth is attached to the lining of the stomach in only one small spot. 'This is good,' thinks Marcus. 'They'll be able to remove it easily.'

Suddenly he catches himself. "They?" No. With one pseudo-hand, he takes a firm hold of the thin part that attaches the tumor to the stomach lining. He severs it just above the inner skin of the stomach. He grinds it up into small particles, much like he does with his coffee beans each morning.

While Marcus is directing his hands, he is closely watching the face of his mother. She keeps talking, unaware that anything is happening in her stomach. Marcus is confident that an X-ray will show a small scar. And a biopsy won't reveal anything cancerous. She will probably receive medication for acidity.

As it gets dark, they move into the house. Marcus gets his rifle and hunting permit from his old bedroom and walks through the kitchen. "Why are you taking your gun to Vienna?," she asks.

"A friend has invited me to go hunting with him, just north of Vienna," lies Marcus.

"If your father finds out that you've gone hunting without him, he'll be very hurt. He'd love to go with you."

Marcus' answer is curt. "You don't have to tell him that I took my rifle. Besides, he won't have time to go anyway. He didn't even have time to talk with us this afternoon, *despite* the fact that we haven't seen each other for months."

As Marcus is speaking, he knows he should not be saying this to his mother. It's not her fault. But he's hurt his father did not make time to talk. The need to talk to someone about his T-powers has been growing. Now, restless and compulsive, Marcus returns to Vienna unable to talk about his powers with anyone.

But at least the trip wasn't a complete waste of time, he thinks. Marcus looks at his mother. 'At least I've been able to help my mother. I don't think she'll need an operation now.'

Then he realizes his surgery skills are by necessity restricted to a few persons. The trip has helped him clarify that. He also met Maria on the trip which causes him to think about her. He admired her courage, her look of defiance, and her final words. He smiles and feels a warm sensation inside

his chest. He will call her, but he will not seduce her as he did Marianne. Anyway, if he wants any woman, it has to be Andrea. And she is with Tony. His life has become like an afternoon soap opera—this makes him laugh.

The trip away from Vienna was good for Marcus. On Monday morning, back in Vienna, he begins further exploration of his T-powers.

Surprisingly, Marcus finds that he cannot penetrate, manipulate or even touch certain materials. The highest on his list of untouchables is lead. He cannot penetrate or move even thin sheets of lead with his pseudo-hands. Marcus later discovers that he can scratch lead, but that's all. His pseudo-hands penetrate heavy steel doors and thick concrete as easily as his real hands pass through water. For some reason, lead is outside of his powers.

Then by accident, Marcus finds he can use his T-powers on himself. He stands in front of the mirror and plays with his face. He bends his nose then pulls his eyes into slits by pulling up their corners. He makes his hair stand on end and he pulls his ears out at funny angles, all things that he can do with his real hands, but which look ghoulish when done with invisible hands!

Although Marcus can easily lift objects such as people, he cannot lift himself. He decides that the law of action-reaction must apply to his T-powers. He extrapolates that he will not be able to pull himself out of quicksand - if the need ever arises - with either his real or his pseudo-hands. Marcus starts investigating other avenues of movement. To his amusement, he finds he can stand on a scooter and push himself along with his pseudo-hands. He notices the shocked looks on the faces around him. Then he zips past them while standing motionless on his scooter! It must look like a ghost is pushing him uphill. Marcus' mind sticks on the image of ghosts. Might ghost stories stem from T-powers rather than the supernatural?

His life-changing event on the Hochtorn mountain happened in early June. Now, it is only six weeks later. To Marcus it feels as if much more time has passed. So much has happened and he's discovered so much and yet there's so much more to learn.

When Sunday rolls around, Marcus decides to take the day off. He remembers how recharged he felt after he took the trip out of the city the previous Sunday. As he walks down the street to get the paper, his T-shirt sticks to his back. The heat of summer has arrived. He decides to spend the day swimming and reading on the island in the Danube River.

It's still early when Marcus arrives at the beach. Most of the best spots are still unclaimed. The upstream section of the island is for sandcastles and family picnics. He walks past a couple of families watching the children trailing small buckets of sand and water behind them.

As Marcus walks downstream, the island becomes less conservative. He remembers the first time he walked to the furthest downstream part of the

island. He saw a variety of nude body shapes and sizes. He was bothered by the voyeurs walking around, trying (unsuccessfully) to hide their cameras. They ruined the open and natural feel of the beach.

He knows the midsection of the island the best. He walks on one of the paths through the meadows to find a relatively secluded spot. He sees a woman resting her head on a man's stomach. The man is lazily playing with her hair. Three girls with brightly colored bikinis share a beach blanket. By the look of their tanned faces, they must visit often. Just to the left of these girls is a young woman who's carefully rubbing suntan lotion all over her body.

Although Marcus enjoys his neighbors in this section of beach, he continues to his favorite spot. As he approaches a small crest, he spots his favorite trees, near the north of the island. He also sees a woman who he thinks is pretty, but something's also unusual about her. Unaware of Marcus, she is lying on her back, immersed in a book. She is wearing large sunglasses that hide much of her face.

Marcus spreads out his beach blanket just a short distance from the woman. He puts on his swimsuit then goes for a swim. The water is cold, but refreshing.

About half an hour later, the woman puts her book down and takes off her sunglasses. She turns away from Marcus as she takes off her top and slips off the bottom part of her bikini. Then she lies on her stomach. Marcus props himself up a bit and sees the cute backside. He wouldn't mind seeing a little bit more.

Suddenly he has a crazy idea. He has never tested whether his pseudo-hands can hold water. He has the perfect opportunity to combine investigation with fun.

Marcus quickly looks around. No one else has come to this section of beach yet. He submerges two hands into the Danube, about sixty feet away. He forms them into the shape of a bowl. He lifts them just above the water. It works! He watches an unusual sight as a giant blob of water rises out of the Danube, floats six feet above the ground then hovers over the back of the woman. At this point Marcus opens his hands.

She gasps and jumps with a scream as the water splashes all over her. Then she looks around but no one is there! She looks up trying to figure out where the water came from—nothing.

Marcus gets up and hurries over. "What's wrong?" he asks, trying desperately to suppress a grin.

"I, I don't know," she stammers. "I just got doused with cold water, but I have no idea where it came from!"

Marcus looks into the sky and murmurs something about airplanes that sometimes drop ice blocks that change to water as they approach the ground. He was not really paying attention, he explains, but he thinks he might have heard a plane pass overhead. Marcus suggests that she swim in the Danube while he tries to dry her towel and blanket.

The woman walks toward the Danube, still obviously flustered from the unexplained water ball. Only when she returns does she seem to realize she's naked. Marcus tries to act nonchalant about the woman's nudity. He offers her his towel since hers is still wet.

"My towel is fairly dry," he says, handing her the towel.

"Thanks for your help. I'm Greta." She takes the towel from Marcus, then puts on her bikini while Marcus watches. She no longer seems flustered, and she doesn't seem to mind him watching. Greta joins Marcus on his dry blanket where they talk for quite awhile about the strange incident. They eventually move onto different topics. Time passes quickly as they talk and swim and talk some more. Before they know it, it's getting dark. Marcus feels ravenous and invites Greta to join him at Martinelli's, one of Vienna's best Italian restaurants.

"I don't have anything planned for this evening. It was nice of you to help me today...yes."

With this Marcus feels a pang of guilt. Greta laughs, "I guess I don't have to be coy with someone who's already seen me naked! I usually like to keep *some* things like that for very good friends!"

Marcus swears to himself that he will not use his T-powers again with Greta. It is more than enough he's just abused them for a good entrée.

Marcus' T-powers are not necessary. He and Greta get along well during dinner, without his powers. Greta finds the Palace Harrach in which Martinelli's is located, beautiful and enchanting. She also enjoys Marcus' company. He's passing all of her tests with flying colors. Likewise, Marcus is intrigued by Greta. She has an uncanny way of quickly understanding his views, even before he explains them! They joke about being on the same wavelength.

Both Marcus and Greta are single. Neither is interested, at the moment, in being in a committed relationship. They reach this agreement around midnight, after several glasses of wine, while they are in the M1, a bar high above Kaertnerstrasse. They also agree that they enjoy each other's company. Yes, they will see each other again soon.

Marcus takes Greta to her apartment on the Graben, not more than a few minutes' walk from where he lives! The Viennese kiss-kiss on alternate cheeks is followed by a more intimate kiss and a long, solid hug. For a moment, Marcus is tempted by his physical desire for Greta, especially since

it is obvious that she's been testing him throughout the evening. However, he lets go and wishes her a pleasant sleep.

As Marcus walks home, he decides that he does want to see Greta again. He is glad that he did not stay with her tonight. Although it was a hard decision, he wants to take it slowly, especially after the whirlwind relationship with Marianne.

Greta cannot sleep. As she pours herself a glass of water, she's reminded of the day's beginning. She still cannot explain how water fell on her as she lay on the beach. She was lucky that Marcus was nearby. He seems like a nice guy, she thinks.

Greta toasts the air with her glass and smiles as she thinks about the games they played with each other on the beach. She acted as if she forgot she was nude when she reacted to being doused with water. Well, that was only partly a game - she *had* forgotten momentarily. Anyway, Marcus had seen her nude. Although he acted as if he had not noticed, she knew that he had. And she was fairly certain he liked what he saw. Greta was impressed that Marcus didn't try to exploit the situation then *or* this evening, when he said good-bye to her at her door. She knew she had drunk too much which made her lose some of her inhibitions. Marcus could have taken advantage of the situation, but he had not.

Greta tired most of her tests and Marcus had passed them, one by one. First she doubted the quality of her drink. Marcus responded appropriately, tasting her drink by sipping through her straw, something that always increased closeness. Greta particularly liked Marcus' reaction to the paper test, one of her favorite tests. She had put three tiny pieces of paper in her hair when she went to the restroom. She wanted to test his attention to detail and give him an opportunity to play with her hair as he removed the paper. This test was one of Greta's favorites because it tested observation and affection at the same time. And there was her "trip" test when her high-heeled shoe got caught in a crack. Greta smiled as she thought of this test. Marcus had reacted quickly, catching her as she fell toward him. And there were more - the gimmick with the unknown friend, the red condom that "accidentally" popped out of her bag as she looked for her keys and the book trick.

Greta was sure Marcus was aware of her game. She closely watched him throughout the evening. He usually reacted with a slight smile and a flirtatious gesture. Take the sting as an example. He thoroughly investigated the sting and its neighborhood. After his investigation, he came up with an unusual statement. He said that it looked like a sand flea bite, which might itch for days. Marcus happened to have a "sting stick" with him for just such

bites. He warned Greta that the waxy ointment might sting briefly, but the itch would go away. Greta felt no sting at all. (Unknown to Greta, Marcus applied a lip wax he uses when his lips get too dry.) As he applied the ointment, he held her snugly around her hips. Greta was fairly sure that Marcus had seen through her ploy and was just playing along.

Marcus did well on the paper test. He conversed with Greta about poor restroom tapestry, which sometimes peels in little flakes - all the while gently parting her hair and looking for the pieces of paper. Greta was surprised when he found eight little paper flakes, not the three she had put there. He had removed each one separately, always touching the nape of her neck in the process.

The unknown friend test had almost backfired on Greta. Marcus said he knew the man Greta pointed out and asked her if he should ask him to join them. If Marcus was insecure or jealous, it didn't show.

The clincher was the book test. When Greta had asked Marcus if he wanted the book she had mentioned, he said yes - a typical response. But, Marcus then asked her to bring it along the next time they met! Greta couldn't believe Marcus was so inexperienced he didn't see through the book ploy. Surely he must have realized he could have used the book as an excuse to come into her apartment with her!

"It is clear that he likes me," Greta tells herself in the bathroom mirror as she gets ready for bed. "He seems eager to want to meet again. But he also keeps a distance."

Greta pauses, steps back from the mirror. "That's OK. I want that too."

But something unsettles Greta. She paces for a little while, hanging up her clothes. What is it that's bothering her? 'Yes, I want the distance too,' she muses. He gave her his towel, he chose a nice restaurant and he did other things. He even called an end to the evening by not coming into her apartment. Suddenly, Greta realizes she's figured out the problem. She likes him, but feels he is leading the dance. Greta sashays across the floor of her bedroom, smiling, playing. In her mind, *she* leads the dance, not Marcus.

Marcus, like Greta, cannot fall asleep immediately. He thinks about the day and is glad he used his T-powers only to meet Greta. He is slowly constructing an entire picture of his powers, their possibilities and their responsibilities. As he is dozing off he remembers he hasn't yet tested how easily his pseudo-hands can be hurt. 'That will be my next round of tests,' thinks Marcus. 'And then I should know almost everything about my T-powers.'

Everything? Well, everyone is allowed a mistake every now and then ...

4 The Time Phenomenon

June/July 2003

In the next series of experiments, as Marcus describes them in his journal, he targets the vulnerability of the hands and the extent to which he can manipulate. He partially fills a large bowl with water, he adds several drops of blue dye to color it a rich midnight blue, then places a pseudo-hand into the blue water. The hand displaces the water in one spot in a sphere-like shape. With his thought, Marcus can easily change the shape of the hand, making it larger and smaller, longer and wider. He can also create pods or finger-like outgrowths that stick out from the main section of the lump. "This is the shape - a hand-like shape - that slowed down the boulder on Hochtör," thinks Marcus. *That's* why I've called them pseudo-hands. But really, I can form them into all kinds of shapes.' He continues experimenting. The bluish water eerily changes shape with each different thought.

Marcus is often amused with his discoveries. He can, for instance, reduce a pseudo-hand to the size of a pinhead or shape it into a thin, needle-sharp form with which he can scratch wood. He changes a hand into a flattened razor-sharp form and whittles away at the bark on a tree outside the apartment. He can also increase the size of a pseudo-hand so that a single hand almost fills the entire bowl. However, he is puzzled that even when he merges a number of hands, he cannot make them larger than the bowl.

Marcus already knows that his pseudo-hands are watertight. He tested this on the beach with Greta. The outcome of *that* experiment was unexpected! Marcus now tries to hold water separately in each of ten pseudo-hands. When this works, he moves them across the room, changing their shapes as they move. Marcus laughs as he watches the morphing blue shapes parade around his room.

All this also works with most other liquids, including acids, brines, gasoline and honey. An exception is leaded gasoline! After more investigations and repeated references to the periodic table in a library chemistry book, Marcus journals his difficulty with not only lead, but also with similarly grouped elements such as hafnium, zirconium and tin. These elements have a natural resistance to Marcus' T-powers. This finding leads him further down the chemistry path and soon understands why he cannot penetrate certain types of wallpaper or walls. Manufacturers sometimes use lead chromates and lead nitrates as ingredients in wallpaper colors. Likewise, lead sulfate is a basic ingredient in white paint often used to paint walls. Even minute quantities of lead significantly reduce Marcus' T-powers.

Not one to easily give in, Marcus continues to test his powers with lead. He tries to lift, move, re-shape it, *everything*. But he can't. The most he can do is scratch it with a needle-shaped hand.

One afternoon between tests, Marcus sits on his couch, lazily tossing and catching a small piece of lead with his real hands. He recalls his afternoon with the high school graduates at Lake Leopoldstein and how fast he threw the stone across the lake. It did cross the entire lake! He had not meant it to travel that fast, but it had. He should test his throwing powers more. 'But how,' thinks Marcus, 'was Maria able to see that the stone dipped into the water rather than skipped over the top? I'll have to find out when we go out for dinner.'

To try his throwing powers, Marcus uses the meadows and forests in the Vienna woods as his testing grounds. It is easy to find a secluded spot by driving just out of Vienna a few miles and since it is mid week, there is even less chance of running into anyone.

Each morning that week, as others drive to their Vienna offices, Marcus hops in his car and drives to a wooded spot about 14 miles out of the city. He is outfitted with ballistics testing gear, his journal, his rifle (just in case there are questions) and lots of enthusiasm. He wonders if the exploration of his T-powers will be a lifelong job!

Marcus discovers he can throw stones up to the size of a fist and at such speeds that they can penetrate large trees. And he can do this from hundreds of feet away. During these trials Marcus also notices a loud, high-pitched bang when he throws these stones. It is not the impact sound and he can't figure out what's making the noise. Repeatedly he tests and repeatedly he is puzzled. Finally it occurs to him that like bullets leaving the barrel of a rifle, the stones are moving faster than the speed of sound, thus creating a small sonic boom.

Although Marcus is nervous about his next set of tests, he knows he must perform them. He must shoot at his hands to see if they can catch or deflect the bullet.

Marcus shoots, thrusting a pseudo-hand into the bullet's path. Success! Marcus' hands can redirect fast flying objects, but there are exceptions. He cannot stop buckshot once it begins to spread and there is another catch to these high-speed tests—they take all of Marcus' T-power. Each evening he returns to his apartment exhausted.

On the third day of Marcus' experiments, he is so immersed in his journal, comparing rifle bullets with small thrown stones, that he does not notice the forest ranger until he is standing beside him.

"What do you think you're doing?" shouts the ranger. "Why do you have a gun and where's your license? Where are your identification papers?" Marcus is caught by surprise. He has a hunting license, even though he and his father mostly hunt on their own land. Marcus fumbles through his papers, looking for his license. A smirk breaks on the corners of the ranger's

mouth. He thinks that he can nail Marcus. It can be an example for others. Before the ranger can finish his thoughts on the exact amount he is going to fine this hunter, Marcus stands upright, producing the license. The document seems to make the ranger feel more at ease, but he is still far from friendly.

Marcus is glad that he has gone to different spots every day. There are only a few branches that are damaged from the day's tests. He tells the expectant ranger the first thing that pops into his mind.

"Last week I was hunting with my father in the Eisenerz mountains, and I shot a chamois" says Marcus. He pauses, then continues. "My bullet left a large, irregular hole. At first I thought it was just a one-off, maybe bad bullets, so I bought a new box of ammunition in Vienna. I wanted to try out the new box of ammunition to see if I have problems with the gun, or if the problem was with the bullets."

Marcus shows the ranger his cartridge belt, saying, "You can see that I only have two shots left, but the gun is still acting strange. Have a look."

Marcus leads the silent ranger to a low hanging branch and shows him shot holes.

"See, here is an ordinary looking clean hole," says Marcus. "But look at this," he continues, walking a few steps from the branch to another tree. "Look at how this hole is torn through." Marcus points to a spot where he has thrown a stone through a large, thick branch.

"Same rifle, same ammunition," Marcus lies. "But the holes look completely different, almost as if the bullet tumbled badly."

With some astonishment the ranger inspects the holes more closely. "I'll be damned," he remarks. "I haven't seen anything like this before."

"Please, try it yourself," invites Marcus, handing him the gun.

The ranger's first shot passes through a branch, leaving a clean, straight hole. As he aligns the rifle's target sites for his second shot, Marcus' heart begins to race. He, Marcus, has to perform an impossible feat. He concentrates on the bullet in the rifle's barrel, trying to control it with a hand. When the ranger fires the rifle and the bullet leaves the barrel, Marcus uses all his power to rotate the bullet sideways. The bullet makes a whirring sound and then rips a gaping hole through a large branch.

The ranger is shocked. "What?!" he mutters as he walks toward the branch. "You better get this rifle checked by a specialist."

The ranger hands the rifle back to Marcus, then continues. "This doesn't mean that you can keep firing around here. This is provincial forest reserve."

"I'm sorry. I know you're right," concedes Marcus. "But this place is remote. I'm not causing anyone any harm. I *have* damaged some trees and branches, but I've paid for that."

"What do you mean 'you've paid for that'?" asks the ranger.

"Down the road a couple of miles, near the Road Closed sign, is a metal box with a sign asking for donations," says Marcus. "I put three-hundred Euros in there. I thought that would more than cover any damage I might do while I'm figuring out what's wrong with my gun."

The ranger doesn't believe him. He has just come from that direction and the box was empty.

"When did you put the money in the box? Forty-five minutes ago the box was empty, as usual," grumbles the ranger. "Nobody puts money in that box, even though they come and use the trails and the facilities. I can't believe I overlooked 300 Euros."

The ranger looks at Marcus and decides to call his bluff. "Come sir," invites the ranger. "Let's check the box together. If your donation isn't in the box, I may have to report you to the gaming authority for shooting in the reserve."

As they near the donation box, Marcus distracts the ranger by asking a question about some deer tracks. Marcus uses a pseudo-hand to quickly get 300 Euros out of his wallet and slip it into the slit in the donation box. Marcus is lucky that he just withdrew the cash to pay rent on his apartment. Marcus lets the ranger walk ahead of him to the donation box. He cannot wait to see the look on the ranger's face when he sees the three-hundred Euros.

For a moment the ranger just stares at the money. Finally, he says, "I didn't believe you. I still can't believe it. I just checked this box."

The ranger extends a hand to Marcus. "What you did isn't entirely legal but at least you're honest and your donation is generous," concedes the ranger. "Anyway, next time you want to try out your rifle, find me first. Get the right permissions. It'll save me time and it'll save you money."

Marcus gets into his car, parked right next to the ranger's car. As Marcus pulls out of the parking lot he thinks about the close call.

By the time Marcus parks in Vienna, the incident of the morning has already lost its edge and he's thinking about the next round of experiments. Marcus involves himself in such elaborate series of tests that he forgets about most other things. He rarely thinks about Marianne and he forgets to call Maria for dinner or Greta for another date. Andrea, whom he often wonders about, is now only a fleeting, occasional thought

However, he calls his mother to ask if she has had her hospital appointment yet. He is pleased to hear that she had seen a doctor and the examination had gone well. The doctors were puzzled by a small scar on her stomach lining. It looked as if her body had gotten rid of some growth at the location of the scar, a bodily reaction that is not common, but also not unheard of. The good news is that there is no sign of cancerous growth. The

doctors have given her a mild antacid, and she's surprised at how much better she feels.

Marcus hangs up relieved, yet his happiness is subdued. He can easily help others, yet even if he did nothing but aid others, he would only be helping a relatively small number of people. There would have to be an army of people with T-powers to really make any impact. He suddenly feels as if he now sees the bigger picture. Are there others like him? They may be in hiding, much like he is. If there are others like him, together they could make an impact. This thought plants itself firmly in Marcus' head and from now, it will haunt him.

Marcus would turn into a complete recluse, ignoring everything and everyone else, if not for Greta, whom he has nicknamed "the beauty of the Danube." After a comfortable silence, Greta calls him. She is not shy in taking initiative. Then she shows up at his doorstep and insists that he go out with her, accepting no excuses and ignoring Marcus' reluctance to leave his study. On one occasion they dine in an Italian restaurant almost directly below his apartment. During their dinner, Marcus realizes that he enjoys just the simple act of talking and listening.

After dinner, Greta and Marcus drive out of Vienna into the surrounding hills, Vienna's Hoehenstrasse. They park at the Kobenzl Lookout and walk arm in arm into the forest. Although they choose the spot for its seclusion, hoping to explore their intimacy a little further, they find that many other Viennese have the same thought. More than once their kisses are cut short.

On another occasion Greta takes Marcus to an inn in the Prater, the entertainment park of Vienna. She tells him this is one of her favorite spots. She often comes here during the summer evenings to read.

Marcus reciprocates by showing Greta his favorite coffee house and pool parlor in the Judengasse. The adjoining bar serves the largest variety of drinks in all of Vienna.

Greta is becoming an important influence in Marcus' life. She's a welcome break from his tests and her strong imagination keeps Marcus entertained. Greta is able to read Marcus and knows he is immersed in something requiring high levels of concentration. She mistakenly attributes this to his upcoming final physics exams.

Marcus finds that although he forgets himself while in his T-power tests, he looks forward to the breaks he spends with Greta. With her he can relax as the summer days and evenings pass quickly. One Sunday they drive back out to the island in the Danube where they met, a place they both remember fondly. They catch up with each other's friends for picnics and barbecues, they sail on Lake Neusiedel, a prairie lake just outside of Vienna.

Greta loves sailing and unbeknownst to Marcus, she is obtaining a certificate for sailing in coastal waters. With this new qualification, she shows up at Marcus' door one evening with an atlas. They are going to make plans to go to Greece to sail among the islands. Marcus is easily swept away in Greta's enthusiasm.

They also both share a love of music. However, they soon discover their love is for different types of music. Greta reluctantly joins Marcus for a musical, something Marcus enjoys immensely. She finds herself pleasantly surprised at many of the musicals that he chooses. Likewise, he grudgingly tags along to concerts, Greta's preferred choice of music, and Marcus finds that he is quite enthralled at times.

It is at a piano concert that Marcus decides to use his T-powers. He has not used them in the presence of Greta, since their first meeting. Greta raves about the long-haired pianist to such an extent Marcus feels jealous. He decides he will use one of his hands to hit a couple of wrong keys during the concert. Although Marcus must admit that he does not really notice anything, Greta and the reviewers do. As a result of this prank, the reviewers meet in the foyer following the concert and a lively debate ensues. Marcus scolds himself for being childish but smiles at his joke nonetheless.

Greta is enjoying the time she spends with Marcus, but wonders about their relationship. How long can she have a friendship with a man without having sex with him? Marcus has thought of this question himself, but he finds himself thinking about Andrea. He wants to know how she feels toward him. Does she think about him? Does she love him? He doubts it, but he still wonders.

Marcus also has a gut feeling that although he and Greta get along well, they are a mismatch. Besides sailing, Greta doesn't like nature adventures, hiking, climbing, scuba diving, or bungee jumping, which Marcus only recently decided he must try. Even if he has not had time recently for outside sports, he knows that he wants to be able to share them with someone. None of this he can share with Greta. He also does not want this relationship to be based on sexual convenience, as with Marianne.

Greta decides to be patient with Marcus. She's sure he likes her. And she knows she arouses him. She enjoys his attention when she lies naked next to him on the beach blanket when they visit "their" Danube Island, and she enjoys his reaction when she puts lotion on him and as he reciprocates. During these times Greta knows that they feel more than comradeship. There is something special - something different - going on with Marcus, and she is willing to wait awhile longer to find out what it is.

On the very day when Marcus receives the good news about his mother's health, they spend the evening sitting on Marcus' balcony. They drink

Styrian wine and talk well past midnight. Marcus insists that Greta spend the night, rather than go home. Greta does not object. They share the same toothbrush. They share the same bed, platonically. The summer's night is very hot and they sleep on top of the bedcovers naked. When they wake in the morning, Marcus sees Greta lying beside him in his bed. She wakes and smiles at him. Something like a dam inside Marcus breaks and they spend much more time in bed than planned.

After that morning, their relationship changes. Greta, with her intuition at full peak, takes the lead. She looks after Marcus, but does not smother him. She is content to leave him alone for days while he is working. She does, however, exert pressure on him to take the oral and written physics exams. After all the work that he is investing, why would he not take the oral examinations? He has talked about it as long as she has known him.

Greta does not know Marcus' time is not being spent with physics per se. However, he does pick up his physics studies again and prepares for one of the more difficult exams. One day he announces to Greta, "I've signed up for the exam tomorrow."

The studying is one thing, but taking the examination is another. The professor giving the exam belongs to the old school of thought. He expects his candidates to come dressed the part, in suit and tie. Marcus is not a suit-and-tie person, but he conforms. He gets up early, shaves and dresses. Greta, who now spends the occasional night if invited by Marcus, does the inspection. She rubs her hand along his smooth chin. Yes, she is satisfied.

Marcus walks through the inner city toward the Boltzmannngasse, the street of the physics institute of the University of Vienna. The road is named after an Austrian physicist, Boltzmann, and Marcus enjoys the walk there. He knows the route well, as he has made it hundreds of times to classes and lab sessions. He likes the contrast between the new city buildings and those of the university, which was founded in 1365.

Marcus is thinking about the buildings when he comes to the intersection of Garrison Lane and Waehringer Street. He sees a man on a motorcycle turn into Waehringer Street. The motorcyclist does not see a rapidly approaching streetcar!

The motorcyclist is going too fast and will be hit by the streetcar within seconds. He will be critically hurt, possibly killed unless Marcus intervenes. Marcus increases his individual speed to think quickly, 'What can I do? How can I save the man without anyone noticing?'

The world around Marcus has almost come to a standstill. He plays out various scenarios. He cannot stop the streetcar because he doesn't have the power. Even if he could, everyone would see it, and it couldn't be explained away other than it being a miracle. He can change the trajectory of the

motorcycle so that it will not collide with the streetcar but that too violates all principles of physics and will be a give-away of his powers.

Marcus decides to put gravel from the side of the road into the grooves of the streetcar tracks. He does this so quickly that no one notices. He then helps the driver of the streetcar activate the brakes faster than is humanly possible and this combination slows the streetcar considerably. Marcus also changes the trajectory of the motorcycle slightly so when the streetcar hits it, the motorcycle acts as a buffer to the man. He uses all his powers to further slow the streetcar, then he puts pseudo-hands between the metal of the motorcycle and the motorcyclist to cushion the man's impact.

Marcus realizes he has prevented massive injuries and possibly death. When he is done, he feels exhausted and he has pain in his pseudo-hands. Marcus takes this suffering as a warning.

Marcus merges into the crowd that is quickly gathering. Feeling certain that no one has noticed him, he leaves the crowd and continues walking toward the physics institute. Had someone noticed him during the incident, they would have thought his intense and concentrated gaze rather odd.

Intrigued, Marcus rubs his chin. He feels beard stubble where only moments earlier was smooth skin. Somewhere deep inside there's a twinge of acknowledgement and resignation. He has suspected that his powers were not without cost. Now, it's clear.

Marcus thinks back to the incident. When he increased his individual speed, he gained time to think and react. That increased passage of time and must have aged him accordingly. This must be why he is often exhausted. He often feels as if hours or even days pass during his experiments, but when he checks the clock usually only minutes have elapsed. Meaning, in reality, he isn't twenty-two years old. Marcus is in fact older as a result of all the experiments he has been conducting.

Marcus continues walking. This time, instead of noticing the buildings, he has turned inward to look at the consequences of his powers. When he uses his powers he is cutting his life expectancy.

Marcus makes a mental note to quantify this power-time aspect as soon as possible. How he uses his powers in the future will depend on what he finds. Although Marcus is unsettled - he again feels the hair stubble on his chin - it curiously satisfies him to know that he cannot use his powers without a price.

Marcus passes the exam not through hard work or preparation but through his powers. The professor is convinced to put a passing grade in his notes. Later, when reviewing the exam results, the professor is confused by this. Why was he lenient with this unprepared student? By that time, however, Marcus has his paperwork. He has passed.

Greta has planned a celebration for the evening, confident that Marcus will pass. Marcus is impressed by the extravagance and imagination that Greta displays in her plans, but he is also distracted. His mind keeps returning to one question, 'How exactly am I paying for my powers?'

Greta finds Marcus' distraction annoying, especially after all she has done to plan a special evening for him. She has also been trying to talk with him all evening, but his answers are disjointed and rarely on topic. Finally, she stops trying. Marcus notices this and feels badly. He buys red roses from one of the street vendors who comes into the restaurant. Temporarily, Greta seems to forgive him.

The next morning Marcus turns on the TV to catch the tail end of the day's headlines. There was a near fatal collision between the streetcar and the motorcycle! They have labeled the incident a series of miracles.

The first miracle is the gravel. It is highly unlikely to have gravel in the streetcar tracks during the middle of summer. But gravel was found in a single location, namely at the site of the accident. The reaction of the streetcar operator is cited as another miracle, and he is being labeled a hero for his speedy response. Of course, the driver doesn't know how he could have responded so quickly. Luckily the media is interpreting his statements as modesty rather than physical impossibility. The third miracle is the motorcyclist. He is being called a genius in how he maneuvered his motorcycle such that he used the metal as a buffer between the streetcar and himself.

Unfortunately, the media do not drop the story as quickly as Marcus hoped. They like the human element to the story. They also have nothing else to report on. As a result, the interviews of the streetcar operator and the motorcyclists as well as eyewitnesses appear everywhere. The eyewitnesses are the most damaging to Marcus. They all state their disbelief with what happened and the word miracle keeps popping up in their descriptions.

As he listens to the interviews Marcus is afraid that someone will mention him, a young man standing breathless, trance-like at the scene of the accident. But he is relieved when the U.S.-Iraq situation re-ignites, pulling attention away from the Vienna accident. The whole incident makes Marcus uneasy. 'I had to save the life of the motorcyclist,' Marcus tells himself repeatedly. 'But if I have many more of those close calls, I'll be called out. It's just a matter of time.'

As he learns more about his powers, Marcus becomes more and more frightened of what might happen if his powers are discovered.

Marcus focuses on quantifying the time-power phenomenon. He is surprised how straightforward it appears to be. First, he cannot avoid a certain time dilation if he uses his T-powers. The more power he exerts, the

more his subjective time increases. Second, he can increase and decrease his personal time even without using his T-powers. He can speed his time by a factor of ten thousand and he can slow it down by a factor of almost twenty. Applying this he discovers that if he increases his time by a factor of forty, he can read a three hundred-page book in about five minutes.

If a book's topic is complex or hard to follow, or if he wants to memorize the book's contents, he may require more time. Marcus estimates his natural ability to be an hour per page for memorization. This is cut to seconds using his T-powers. If only he had known this before he had done his physics exam!

This discovery allows Marcus to now understand how he memorized the medical charts in the library. He also sees an end in sight to his physics degree. He can complete the degree as quickly as he wants, even if subjectively the effort is not reduced.

In situations where Marcus needs bodily support, such as turning pages or walking, he cannot use arbitrarily high speeds. These are physical constraints and limitations to what he can do. When he walks leisurely, for example, he times himself at about three miles per hour. Increasing his individual time twenty times means he would be walking at almost sixty miles per hour. The air resistance is like a very bad storm.

Initially, Marcus can't see any advantage for slowing his personal time, until he ends up in a long line at the grocery store. When that happens, he sees a use. Long waits make him impatient. He can slow his personal time when he has long waits, such as on international flights or train rides. He can travel for hours and feel (and age) as if only minutes have passed.

Throughout a series of tests, Marcus is conscientiously aware of the costs in terms of shortening his life span. He has rigged a makeshift watch which measures subjective and objective time. This watch also reminds him of the cost of his powers. He has to be selective about using them.

All this testing makes Marcus think of at least one other important piece of the power puzzle he is missing. Is there any way to detect his T-powers? After a battery of experiments, he is fairly certain that his pseudo-hands are invisible in most cases. But, they *can* be noticed when they come in contact with a liquid. However, the connection between him and the pseudo-hands is not visible.

Learning and making money - these become Marcus' new pursuits. He wants to use his powers to speed up his study. And he wants to find a way to make money. Like most students, he is a poor physics student who likes good food and wine.

After imagining different scenarios, Marcus buys a roulette game. He experiments with influencing where the roulette ball stops....

5 The PPU in Vienna

End of July 2003

When Klaus Baumgartner returns to Brussels, he hesitates telling his boss, ESP Head Georg Adler, about the discovery during his Austrian vacation. On the one hand, a telekinetic as powerful as the one he observed would be a tremendous asset to the PPU. On the other, that same telekinetic is not with him because he made a series of mistakes. That might look bad. Not only did he lose him, but he cannot even identify *who* it was that he lost.

Klaus' respect for Adler and the importance of his find convinces him to speak. He tells Adler the whole story, not masking facts.

Adler doesn't reproach Klaus. "You were on vacation Klaus. You were with friends. Don't beat yourself up over this," he says. "Let's just go from here. We need a plan to find the telekinetic to make him join the PPU. It's probably safe to assume that he lives in Vienna. That means we need an office in Vienna and you should relocate there until you find him."

Adler thinks a moment, then continues, "You should be able to find him without much trouble. You're a parascout, so you'll notice him if you get in his vicinity. I'd also check newspapers and listen to the radio for any strange incidents. If the telekinetic discovers his parabilities, he's bound to experiment with them. He might even give himself away."

The bureaucracy in Brussels is not known for its efficiency. Ask anyone who has anything to do with the European Union. There are many stories, some of them urban legends and some true. For this reason, Klaus is surprised when it only takes four weeks for the PPU to establish their Vienna offices.

This unusual speed is a direct result of Dirkmann's involvement. As Head of the European Commission and founder of the ESP and PPU, he is personally vested in the matter. As a result it pushes through quickly.

Adler and Klaus are basically satisfied with the infrastructure and support they receive. Adler, however, feels an increasing discomfort with Dirkmann, questioning whether his interest in the PPU is for its benefit to the EU or to himself. Dirkmann is using the PPU increasingly less for actions that benefit the EU and its citizens, and exponentially more for spying on political opponents. Dirkmann's bag of political tricks he pulls on rivals is filling quickly from the work he is requesting of PPU staff.

After a particularly successful PPU project, Dirkmann is more affable than usual, and says over his wine glass, "A toast. To the up-and-coming boss of Europe." Adler is horrified at Dirkmann's slip. Dirkmann's true motivations are revealed. It is true that the European Union is run centrally,

one could even say undemocratically. The parliament in Strassbourg is a figurehead. A select few individuals in the European Commission tightly control the real power. And Adler is repulsed to think that those few people can be manipulated by a single person, Dirkmann, whom Klaus is enabling.

Adler thinks Klaus is naïve, and for this reason Klaus frustrates Adler. Klaus does not appear to see the misuse of staff and money by Dirkmann for his own promotion and benefit. Klaus seems to think that the PPU is working for the good of humanity.

"Maybe I should warn Klaus," debates Adler with himself. "Do I have hard proof to accuse Dirkmann?" He pauses, then continues, "No. I have nothing on him. Suspicion and gut feel, yes. But that's all," Adler assures himself, "Maybe it's too early. I'll wait. But if things escalate, I'll have to have a talk with Klaus off the record."

In the four weeks the PPU is sorting out office details, Marcus is learning about his T-powers. Everyday he learns new things, and sometimes he has fun. Marcus fondly thinks back to ringing the large bell in Stephan's cathedral, or plunking a few wrong keys during the pianist's recital. Although these things are simply fun they are clues for the newly arrived PPU staff.

Klaus scours the last four weeks of the Vienna newspaper, looking for anything out of the ordinary. With occasional, random snippets of unexplained happenings, Klaus is sure the telekinetic is still in Vienna.

Klaus realizes the telekinetic will have changed significantly since he last saw him in Austria. At the Liezen train station the telekinetic's aura was closed. He did not know about his parabilities. From the reports in the newspaper, the telekinetic has now discovered his powers and is experimenting with them.

Klaus makes a point of going to the most popular performances in Vienna, the theatres and concert halls, with the hopes of finding the telekinetic. This part of the job - a perk really - is one that Klaus enjoys.

Although he is vigilant, Klaus does not see the telekinetic anywhere. At this point, Klaus knows that he could not recognize the telekinetic by sight in a crowd. He could, however, recognize that telekinetic's aura anywhere.

One evening at a concert Klaus overhears a woman saying, "This is my second performance. I'm curious if he'll make a few mistakes like he did yesterday. It was the weirdest thing - impossible really to hit the sequence of keys that he did."

Klaus's ears perk up. Klaus gets up from his seat and looks for the Director of the concert hall. The Director is easily spotted, out front greeting guests. Klaus pulls him aside and requests a few minutes of his time. During their discussion the Director says, "It was very strange. It has never happened before. He is, after all, a master pianist."

The director continues, "The pianist insists he didn't hit the keys in question. He claims that someone else hit a few extra keys while he was playing. Obviously, none was standing anywhere near him. He actually thought about stopping to look around." The Director also looks confused, not sure what to believe, his ears or the pianist, who was adamant about a "ghost" accompanist!

"Of course," continues the Director, "we thoroughly checked the piano for ridiculous things, like mice or a weasel, but not surprisingly we found nothing. Apparently the pianist must have had a temporary lapse of concentration or something. I can't think of any other way to explain it."

All of this shows that the telekinetic is still in the area. He was actually in this very same concert hall just the day before. And the bonus, he is still playing pranks and making himself known, at least to the PPU!

Klaus learns even more intriguing information in his weekly check-in with police and forestry rangers. He speaks with one ranger who tells him a story about illegal shooting experiments in his section of reserve. "Come on, I'll show you the damage this guy caused," invites the forest ranger.

Klaus and the forest ranger venture out to where Marcus was "testing his gun and ammunition." The ranger shows Klaus trees that have been "shot down," some neatly and some with frayed, gaping holes. The ranger speaks angrily about the man and the destruction that he left in his wake. The ranger forgets to mention his personal encounter with Marcus and the three hundred Euros Marcus left as a donation to cover tree damage. The ranger's "amnesia" goes as far as forgetting to enter the three hundred Euro donation into the forest preserve's book of accounts. Who would believe that someone donated three hundred Euros anyway?

Despite his responsibility, namely leading the investigation to find the telekinetic, Klaus does not have good interrogation skills. That is why he does not probe the ranger on the contradictions in his story. If questioned properly, the ranger might have revealed that he had met Marcus. The ranger could have given an accurate, detailed description and possibly even a name because he had checked out Marcus' hunting.

The forest damages alone do not interest Klaus. However, the different holes are another story. The clean-edged holes look like they were made from a bullet. But what caused the gaping jagged holes? Klaus has a theory, but it seems farfetched and unlikely. He will call in specialists and see what they say. They will either confirm his wild thoughts or reign in his imagination regarding this telekinetic. Klaus thanks the ranger and agrees to return the following day.

Klaus returns the next day with a group of weapon's specialists from the Austrian army. The holes also puzzle the specialists, and they debate for

several hours, measuring, calculating and arguing. Finally the specialists agree. The holes have been created by stones or other projectiles hurled at trees at extremely high speeds. They cannot discern how the speeds were reached or what threw them, but they obviously had incredible rates of acceleration. And the damage they caused is obvious. Klaus's suspicions are confirmed. Although he does not voice his theory, he is certain that his telekinetic threw stones while testing his powers. This person could be an incredibly powerful ally or an equally formidable adversary!

Dirkmann's reaction is direct. "You must find this person."

Klaus continues reading through the pile of daily newspapers he has accumulated. When he learns about the traffic accident and the list of associated miracles that saved the life of the motorcyclist, he smiles and thinks, "Yes, this is my telekinetic's work alright." Klaus admires the telekinetic for his humanitarian gesture. He has clearly saved the life of the motorcyclist while keeping the cover on his powers. This is quite a feat.

Klaus walks to the scene of the accident to have a closer look. Although he does not expect to see anything now, some time after the accident, he is still disappointed he sees nothing unusual at all when he arrives. Houses with shops and apartments line Waehring Street. At the entrance to Garrison Lane there is a small park that belongs to an English School.

Klaus continues walking and comes upon Strudelhof Lane. He recognizes the name of this Street from Heimito Doderer's epic novel "The Strudelhof Stairs." He has read this novel twice and considers it one of Austria's best known pieces of 20th century literature. At the corners of Waehring Street, Boltzmann Street and Strudelhof Lane, Klaus sees a large building with a strange, almost triangular layout. Klaus asks a passerby the name of the building, and he finds out that it houses the University of Vienna's institutes of chemistry, physics and mathematics.

'Of course! The University of Vienna!' thinks Klaus. The man he is looking for looks like a student. And the description of his car, by individuals in the train station at Liezen, would fit the budget of a student! Likewise, the concert hall had reduced prices for students, which would have made it affordable. Yes, his telekinetic might be a student right here in this building?

This is the first sign of hope that Klaus has since his arrival in Vienna. He knows the telekinetic is in Vienna, but it has been like looking for a needle in a haystack. Klaus works out a plan on his walk back to his apartment. When university classes resume in fall, PPU students will enroll in all major classes. If his speculation is correct, he will find the telekinetic in one them.

Caught up in his enthusiasm for his new plan, Klaus fails to fully investigate the day of the accident and even the accident itself. What was the telekinetic doing in the area? Does he live there? Was he passing through?

And if so, why? Had he checked further, he would have realized that on the day of the accident there were a series of physics oral exams happening. Klaus is unknowingly retracing Marcus' steps. With his clearance, Klaus could easily have gotten a list of exam candidates, and Marcus' whereabouts could have been determined. Marcus is lucky that Klaus is a parascout, not a detective. Klaus' oversights buys Marcus time.

Sometimes Klaus thinks he should be more up front. He wonders whether Marcus would come forward voluntarily if he knew about the PPU. Klaus half seriously contemplates putting an advertisement into the local papers saying something like: "Looking for persons with parabilities for interesting and well paid jobs."

Klaus only thinks about placing an ad when he is frustrated from dead end leads. He knows from experience that paratalents hide their powers. The more powerful their talents, the more they try to hide them, fearing they may be held against them. From what he has garnered from Adler, paratalents feel like outsiders, societal outcasts. More often than not they are feared, rather than appreciated, by society.

Klaus knows this feeling, but only to a limited degree. It is true that he has parabilities, but he is only a parascout. His talent does not infringe on other people, except people with parabilities. His situation is different.

Klaus is convinced, however, that paratalents would want to work with other paratalents. They can be surrounded by colleagues, such as those in the PPU, who understand the problems of having parabilities. Sandra told him once that she gladly worked in the PPU group.

Klaus never finds out if it is the PPU structure and colleagues that keep Sandra satisfied with her work, or he himself. She does say, however, that she feels ill at ease with most people. She can read their emotions, which makes friendships almost impossible. She cannot, for some reason, read Klaus' emotions so she feels relaxed with him. Klaus does not tell Sandra about the post-hypnotic block placed on her, which prevents her from reading his emotions. He decides Sandra does not need to know this extraneous information.

Klaus' actions confirm to Adler that Klaus is naïve. Klaus does not see that severe limitations would be imposed on the telekinetic if he joined the PPU. He would have to follow orders from Dirkmann, Adler or himself. And he would be restricted from revealing his telekinetic powers to anyone under any conditions.

If he were in the PPU, Marcus would have been unable to rescue the life of the motorcyclist in the miracle accident. This is a fact that Klaus overlooks.

6 Power and Money

End of July and early August 2003

Marcus is now starting to be aware of extent of his powers. Because he must hide them, this makes him one of the loneliest people in the world. He is afraid that he will give himself away one day when in a silly mood or more likely, when trying to help someone. This ability to help others creates a tension in Marcus. He can help others, even humanity. But to pursue this he must remain free, independent and most probably alone.

Regardless of his heightened awareness and caution, he realizes that one day he may be found out. If his powers are uncovered, he must be ready to act. He may need secret hiding places, fake documents, aliases and enough finances to move freely and quickly. He cannot rely on his parents for such money, which would be substantial. But he's sure that he can get as much money as he wants using his T-powers. Of course, those ways seem to border on the illegal or immoral.

Marcus takes inventory. He can move objects faster than anyone can follow with their eyes, which he did with Marianne at the café. Thus, he can be a pickpocket. He can even steal money from people as they pass the apartment building, from the safety of his apartment. Or, he can distract sales clerks in a jewelry shop. But all those options are just different forms of the same thing - stealing. And stealing isn't a tasteful option. For one thing, it is illegal. And secondly, a legacy of being the most successful thief or pickpocket is not one he wants.

If stealing is his only viable option, then Marcus would rather steal from an anonymous institution like a large bank. A multinational bank would not even notice. Or maybe Marcus can steal from an obscenely wealthy person if that person makes the money illegally. Maybe he can be a modern-day Robin Hood, giving ninety percent of his takings to the needy. He is sure he can pull it off without getting caught. This path, however, is still illegal. Marcus does not want to be a criminal, even with Robin Hood-type excuses.

What about something physical where he can use his powers? Marcus can move furniture, using his T-powers. This job prospect is more fleeting than the illegal options - it sounds like a drag to move furniture day in and day out, in the rain, in the sun, etc. Or, he can be a highly paid magician, not for children but for adults. Marcus recently watched life show of top magicians and found it thrilling. But as a famous magician, he will draw constant attention to himself and might be found out.

Although Marcus continues to explore career options, he does so without much enthusiasm. His eyes go back to the TV screen where late night music videos are playing. He likes the choreography of some of the clips and the body close-ups of others. Lots of shaking, lots of action, excitement, lights,

fast life, fast women, fast women. Marcus wonders what would be the most ethical way to get rich.

He decides to work out a code of Ethics for himself, to ease his conscience. This is the list of rules he ends up with:

Rule 1: I will try to keep my T-powers a secret.

Rule 2: I will use my T-power if I can save the life of a people as long as this does not violate Rule 1.

Rule 3: I cannot save all persons who could be saved through my powers. I can only help selected persons, especially those close to me, where the opportunity offers itself or where it is particularly important.

Rule 4: I must not hurt people, physically or by making them dependent of me through my powers, unless a case according to Rule 2 gives an overriding reason to do so.

Rule 5: I can use my T-powers to protect myself as long as this does not violate Rule 4.

Rule 6: I can financially hurt anonymous institutions, like banks or casinos, as long as this is done because of Rule 1 or Rule 2.

Rule 7: I can use my T-powers to increase my chances in games of luck.

He is not really comfortable with Rule 6. and even Rule 7 makes him uneasy. By increasing his chances he reduces the chances of others.

Marcus gets up from the table and walks to the window. On a whole, the rules are fuzzy but simple. Finally he thinks to himself, 'As long as I don't go overboard, Rule 7 is okay. I have to protect myself, and that includes financial protection. If I work towards Rule 7 I'll harm others as little as possible.'

The rules move into the gray areas of the law. Marcus is aware of this. But the laws are human laws. Is he still human? Marcus furrows his brow at the conceit in his thought - of him being apart from or somehow outside human law. He also knows there is danger in such thoughts. If he loses all vestiges of humbleness he will truly turn into an outsider. As such society will certainly persecute him as he fears!

Maybe it is the wine or perhaps it is the late hour, but Marcus' thoughts are getting into a quagmire. If he only lives his life for the good of others, will he need Rules 6 and 7? But does he want to live a martyred life?

"Definitely not," says Marcus answering his own question. He wants to enjoy life, doing as much good as he can along the way.

"The gambling option is probably a compromise ethically," Marcus thinks through the possibilities. "And I can't think of a better solution. Gambling doesn't harm others... keeps my powers hidden ... and lets me enjoy life. Gambling it is."

With the decision made, Marcus can get down to the brass tactics - how can he win money in casinos in the least morally offensive way?

Although Marcus spends much of the evening weighing "career" options, he is really just rationalizing his decision. He has already bought a roulette game and has started experimenting with it.

Marcus practices making the roulette ball land naturally on red or black, as he chooses before he spins. Although he can push or brake the ball slightly toward the end of the cycle, he cannot make the roulette ball land on a predetermined number. When he tries to do this the ball jerks slightly and noticeably. Alternately, he can choose a few numbers distributed evenly over the roulette wheel and can naturally stop the roulette ball on one of them.

Just to make sure his methods are smooth, Marcus tests them with a time-lapse video. Although he is looking for it, he cannot discern manipulation of the roulette ball. Thus he feels confident he can make huge winnings at roulette, with very limited risk.

Marcus decides he will visit the casino in Vienna three times. On his first visit he will win moderately, beginner's luck. The second visit will be a disaster. Marcus will lose a lot of money. On his third visit, Marcus will make a killing. On each visit he will use the same table on the same day of the week. He hopes to build rapport with the croupiers and supervisors so that by the third visit they will know him and quietly hope that he wins. Marcus decides to call Greta in the morning and ask her to join him for a trip to the casino.

A few days later they walk into the Vienna casino. They look good. Greta wears a red, strapless evening gown with slits along both sides. Marcus and most of the men in the casino enjoy looking at Greta's long legs as she walks or sits. Greta's blond hair looks like the mane of a lion, full, luscious and a bit wild. She accents her red evening gown tastefully with black - high-heeled black pumps, a shiny black handbag with a silver clasp, and a black stone on a long silver chain that emphasizes her plunging neckline. Marcus wears an elegant dinner jacket with small, black-violet trimming. His beautiful silk shirt accents the jacket perfectly. Greta is especially impressed with Marcus' bow tie, which is Marcus' favorite as well. It is ceramic and contains just enough red to accent Greta's dress.

Both Marcus and Greta enter the casino holding their heads high. They feel attractive and Marcus feels lucky. They register at the door, as is the custom in all Austrian casinos, showing their IDs. Marcus takes in the casino as they walk toward the window to purchase chips. He buys fifty chips at twenty Euros each. Then they sit down to enjoy a glass of champagne.

When a head croupier changes and a seat becomes free at a roulette table, Marcus walks over and sits down. Greta stands behind him and lovingly

places her hand on Marcus' shoulder. He smiles as he watches the men around the table. Many of the men's eyes flit toward Greta's neckline when she moves to get a better view. This is a diversion Marcus had not anticipated, but he appreciates it.

Marcus plays his favorite triple-red-black game. He places one chip on black. If black returns, he wins one chip. He then starts this algorithm again. If red returns, he puts three chips on black. If black then comes, he has put in a total of four chips, but now gets six, thus winning two. He starts the same strategy again. If Marcus loses the second time, he places nine chips (for convenience sake he bets a chip that is really worth ten) on black. If the ball stops on black he has put in a total of fourteen chips but gets back twenty, thus giving him a win of six. If by this time red has come up three times in a row, Marcus again triples the amount put on black.

Marcus' approach is not unique. It is known to be a winning roulette strategy - to a point. If there is a long streak of red, the player will likely run out of money. Even if the player has unlimited resources and can last the red throws, a casino usually has a table limit as a safeguard for the casino. This limit is a sum that a player may not exceed when betting. For this reason, on average most players will lose regardless of the strategy used. Of course, Marcus' situation is different. If a run of red is getting too long, he can simply break the streak with his T-powers, making sure that black shows up.

This evening Marcus lets the roulette game mostly take its own course. He intervenes only five times, when he has particularly high bets on black. He has ups and downs throughout the evening but he is steadily, slowly winning. He is also attracting attention. Several players around the table have taken his lead and are following his strategy, losing and winning with him. Marcus switches tactics. He places two hundred Euros on each of six evenly distributed numbers on the roulette wheel.

Greta has grown quiet and fidgety. She looks at the chip piles as Marcus pushes them forward. What is he doing?, thinks Greta. 'He has almost sixteen hundred Euros, and now he's betting all but four hundred!'

Greta leans forward to make a comment but Marcus is focusing intently on the roulette wheel. She thinks better of interrupting him, so she steps back, holds her breath as the roulette wheel spins. As it slows the ball starts to hop through grooves, stopping on one of Marcus' numbers! Greta cannot help herself. She lets out a tiny shriek and hugs Marcus tightly around the neck.

"We're rich." purrs Greta contentedly, in his ear.

The players around the table and the onlookers, who number quite a few by this time, clap. They look at the lucky and happy couple with a mixture of

entertainment and envy. After all Marcus has just won seven thousand Euros and will celebrate in style tonight!

☐ Marcus smiles at Greta, "I better stop. You must be my lucky charm!"

Before he leaves, Marcus wants to make sure that the croupiers remember him next time so he gives them a substantial tip. His generosity impresses Greta, who is ready to celebrate their winnings, which they do long into the night.

☐ Marcus is exhilarated. Pulling the evening off without a hitch was much easier than he anticipated. This nominal win has given him more money than he has ever had.

Like Marcus, Greta is in an exuberant mood. She later invites him to take some "interesting" photos of her. She appreciates his love of photography and thinks a photo shoot may be just the thing to start the next part of the evening. Marcus does not have to be asked twice. He shoots photos until they both collapse on the bed exhausted.

On Marcus and Greta's second visit to the casino, Marcus loses all the money that he converts into chips, despite the fact that he starts with twice the amount that he started with on his first visit.

☐ Marcus takes it easy on this visit, winning a sizeable amount in the middle of the game before losing everything. From the croupiers' body language he has the impression that even they are disappointed with his loss. Marcus enjoys watching the table dynamics, even Greta's desperation. When he leaves the table, he again gives the roulette crew a large tip.

"Don't worry, I'll return and win it all back," Marcus announces as he leaves the table.

☐ The croupiers nod in agreement, as they are trained to do, but Marcus clearly sees that they are not convinced. 'Just another guy who's going to lose everything is what they're saying about me,' thinks Marcus. He smiles, knowing otherwise.

☐ As the third visit approaches, Marcus has a problem he did not expect. Greta does not want to go and tries to persuade Marcus likewise. "You're just going to lose more money," pleads Greta.

She can't understand why Marcus has to tempt luck. He was lucky the first time, isn't that enough? He should stop while he is ahead. They reach a compromise. Marcus promises that he will not go into another Vienna casino for at least six months *after* this visit.

☐ Marcus tries to convince Greta again that she is his good luck charm and that the last bad luck visit was an anomaly. Greta does not buy any of it until they are having dinner at a nice restaurant prior to going. Marcus buys her a large bouquet of red roses. Greta is so touched by Marcus' gesture that she

agrees to accompany him and yes, be his good luck charm. Greta carries the roses into the casino, seeming to blossom herself in the attention.

Marcus is relieved to see that the same team of croupiers are working but at a different roulette table. He changes three thousand Euros into fairly large chips and plays aggressively from the start, using his T-powers. Marcus wins, loses, wins again, loses almost everything, and then soars to over eight thousand Euros.

Greta is caught up in the excitement. Her face is flushed and she is talking to Marcus in a high quick voice. Marcus sees the appreciative glances cast Greta's way by the men around the table. He again feels proud she is with him. Marcus is unaware that the onlookers are also watching him as he plays. They wonder at this young man who plays with such confidence, taking large wins and losses in stride, making only the occasional short quip.

"Marcus, please stop," whispers Greta in his ear as she leans over toward him. Marcus assures her that everything is alright. His response, however, agitates her and she becomes louder and more insistent.

Annoyed with Greta's persistence, Marcus cuts her short. As an observer she should not intervene. Hands off is a basic casino rule. "Greta, you can be asked to leave if you don't back off," says Marcus quietly but firmly. "I'll place only three more bets. It will be okay."

Marcus puts the whole amount on red. Greta gasps. She cannot believe what Marcus is doing.

"Don't complain Greta. Cheer for me!" says Marcus to lighten their dialogue.

Greta crosses her fingers.

Marcus spins. The roulette ball lands on red! Greta shrieks and jumps, and Marcus laughs as he is jostled and hugged by Greta. The croupiers seem to be as happy as Greta and Marcus!

When the croupier begin to push the 16,000 Euros toward Marcus, he says, "No, leave them where they are."

Greta stops laughing. Her arms drop to her sides. The whole table falls silent. Few players bet, but they all stay to watch. The roulette ball seems to echo as it spins and then starts jumping from groove to groove. The usual "No more betting now" is stated solemnly by the croupier. The roulette ball stops on red! Instead of the celebratory whoops of the prior win, this win is met with a consensual gasp. Before anyone's breath can escape, Marcus grins and places the entire 32,000 Euros on black. Greta turns pale. She looks at the floor.

The head croupier intervenes, "Sorry, sir, but the table limit is 20,000 Euros. Should I get the casino manager to see if he will give special permission to increase the limit for you?"

"No, 20,000 Euros is fine. I'll take 12,000 Euros and the rest can go on black," says Marcus with certainty. He turns to Greta, who is still looking at the floor trying to regain her composure.

"Greta, no matter what happens with this spin, we'll have at least 12,000 Euros - not bad!"

Marcus tries to draw Greta into his enthusiasm. Greta raises her head but manages only a weak smile.

The tension around the table is so high that it is making Marcus slightly uncomfortable. All of the players have backed off. They are watching the scene, going from Greta's to Marcus' face, then back to the roulette wheel. The roulette wheel is spun. Marcus intervenes. "Black wins," says the croupier with a smile curving the sides of his mouth. Congratulatory shouts and slaps on the back engulf Marcus. It is clear that Marcus has a number of enthusiastic admirers. He takes the win of 40,000 Euros, leaving 1,000 Euros for the croupier team. He gathers up his evening's takings, 51,000 Euros, to cash them in.

Smiling but silent, Greta follows Marcus. She is obviously happy, but beyond words. Marcus, on the other hand, is chatty. He has never had this much money in his life! And whom has he harmed? The croupiers are happy with a handsome tip. He provided an evening's entertainment to a group of observers. And Casino Austria with annual revenues in the multi-digit billions will not even notice that Marcus Waller was in their casino one lucky evening.

At the cashier there is a surprise waiting for Marcus. The cashier says, "I need your passport, sir."

"I just want to change the chips to cash," explains Marcus. "I've never had to have a passport before."

"I'm sorry if this is an inconvenience sir," apologizes the cashier. "But when a player changes back more than 20,000 Euros, identification is required. You'll receive a receipt. It's really to protect you sir."

"To protect me?" asks Marcus incredulously. "How does it protect me?"

"If you deposit the money into an account and you're audited," explains the cashier, "then you have to prove that you won the money in a casino or in a lottery. If you can't prove it you'll have to pay income tax on it or worse, you may get a hefty penalty."

Once explained Marcus can see logic behind it. But he sees more than benevolence to casino players. Marcus also sees that the casino is helping the Austrian financial officers by preventing money laundering through gambling. The tracking also benefits the casino the most. If Marcus were to win at the casino often he would raise suspicion. They may even ban him from playing there.

All these reasons do not matter tonight, as Marcus wants to celebrate. "Greta, love, I'm almost rich! I can afford to buy a nice new car!" exclaims Marcus.

By this time Greta's zest has returned. She shares Marcus' high spirits. "I could do with money like that," says Greta jokingly.

Marcus can see that Greta comment is more than a passing remark. Her interest in casinos and roulette has been piqued.

'Just give me six days,' smiles Marcus to himself.

Six days later it's her birthday. To Greta's surprise Marcus drives to Baden, a romantic spa-town just south of Vienna. She feels like the nobility of old, who used to escape the busy life of Vienna for a quiet, expensive villa in Baden. Marcus has reserved a suite in the elegant traditional Sauerhof spa-hotel. Greta is in the lap of luxury and enjoys every moment of it, from the elegant suite to the beautiful Roman baths to the early dinner in the hotel's famous restaurant. At dinner Marcus gives Greta a midsize box.

"Before you look in the box, you have to promise me that you'll do everything exactly as written down on the sheet of paper in the box," insists Marcus.

This condition makes Greta curious. She looks at Marcus, who is quite earnest.

"Okay, I agree. I'll stick to whatever rules you've written up," says Greta.

She opens the wrapped box. On top Greta sees a gorgeous and delicate rose made from lead crystal glass.

"Is it?" asks Greta breathless. "It is! It's a Swarovski."

Greta has admired these world-renown glass pieces for years. She even went so far as to research the Western Austrian company, finding out that Swarovski makes not only exquisite lead crystal pieces but also some of the most superb optical instruments, from hunting binoculars to telescopes.

"Thank you so much," says Greta as she leans over to give Marcus a kiss.

"There's more," says Marcus.

Greta looks back in the box and pulls up the wrapping that lines the box. She cannot believe it! She finds 50 casino chips, each worth 20 Euros! Greta is touched by Marcus' generosity, but she is also slightly annoyed.

"You promised that you wouldn't go to the casino for at least six months," scolds Greta playfully. She has been much too spoiled throughout the day to be genuinely angry.

"I promised that I wouldn't go into a Viennese casino for at least six months, and I won't," says Marcus. "That's why we're in Baden! Our agreement does not cover this city!"

Greta cannot help but smile. After all, Marcus' winnings have paid for her birthday surprises!

"The rules - you have to read the rules now and agree that you'll stick to them tonight in the casino," says Marcus looking intently at Greta.

Greta looks at the paper folded carefully. She is not surprised to see that he wants her to follow his triple-red-black strategy until she has either lost everything or won 20,000 Euros. Greta knows this strategy by heart. She has watched Marcus play it, and she has dreamt of it - not pleasant dreams but dreams, that woke her and left her feeling anxious.

"Well?" asks Marcus.

"Yes, yes, of course," responds Greta still flattered at Marcus' generosity.

"Statistically, your chances of winning 20,000 Euros is only one in twenty. *But*," says Marcus lightly, "let's be superstitious. It's your birthday - we're together - and I feel that today could be your lucky day!"

Greta smiles, feeling more confident with Marcus' words.

"Yes, it *is* my birthday," she says. "Why can't *I* be the one in twenty! Someone has to!"

Marcus interrupts her. "Please, promise me you'll stop when you hit 20,000 Euros. It's easy to get caught up in the moment. And promise that you won't go into any casino for six months after tonight. Promise?"

Greta finds it funny that they are now both under the six-months-casino-free condition that she had insisted for Marcus.

"Yes, of course I promise. I'd get out long before 20,000 Euros anyway - I'd be happy with a thousand!" Greta laughs.

"We'll see," responds Marcus as he folds his napkin and places it on the table. "How about we go and find out. Fingers crossed - I think this is your night Greta!"

Greta and Marcus walk hand in hand to the short distance from Sauerhof to the casino. The summer night is pleasant and Greta begins to think about the casino. As quickly as she gets caught up in Marcus' excitement, she feels it fall away. Tension is moving through her body. The first time they went to the casino it was fun - the roses, the attention, Marcus' easy wins. The second and third times, however, were incredibly emotional. Her emotions swelled and dived with each spin of the wheel. It was all too much. Greta's walking pace slows.

"What's wrong Greta?" asks Marcus.

"Maybe I should just keep the presents. I don't need to go to the casino. I'm very happy with what you've given me Marcus," says Greta.

"It will be fun Greta. Even if you lose the chips, it's not a problem. You didn't have them before tonight, so there's no loss. And you've got the lovely Swarovski," says Marcus. "And, just think, you could be driving back to Vienna in a Rolls Royce!"

It takes a couple of glasses of champagne at the casino before Greta starts to loosen up. She looks around the room for a quiet roulette table. Marcus catches her glance and laughs. Quiet tables don't exist. If a table is not fairly crowded it is closed because a real gambling atmosphere needs critical mass. The excitement feeds exponentially in a larger group.

With some trepidation, Greta chooses a table. She draws attention from the men as she passes them. Tonight, however, she is oblivious to the looks. She sits down and flashes a smile at the croupier. She places a chip on black. On the first spin she loses. She then places 3 chips on black and again loses. She places 10 chips on black and loses a third time. She looks at Marcus questioningly.

"You know how to continue," says Marcus and reassuringly rests his hand on her shoulder.

Greta turns back to the table and places 30 chips on black. She is playing automatically now. She knows the strategy and plays it.

Marcus can feel the tension in Greta's shoulders. He decides to use his T-powers on this spin. It may not be necessary, but Greta needs a win to boost her morale, and he does not want to risk another loss. Marcus can't tell whether he needs to intercede with his powers and this realization annoys him. If he practices more, he hopes to gain more sensitivity in this area.

The roulette ball stops on black. Greta gasps and smiles broadly. She wins 60 chips! She looks up at Marcus. He stays for a while, making sure that Greta's wins outnumber her losses.

As she gets caught up in the excitement, her cheeks are flushed and she talks quickly. "Can you believe it? - there must be a couple thousands worth of Euros here! You're right - today's my day!"

Marcus squeezes Greta's shoulder and gives her a quick peck on the cheek before he goes for a walk around the casino. Every now and then he watches Greta and helps her out. Although he is happy to see her so excited and enjoying herself, he is also nervous. Will she stop as promised? 'She *must* stop,' Marcus thinks. 'I have to know that I can trust her word.'

Greta has a stack of 50 chips in front of her, each worth 50 Euros. She is so consumed by the game that she does not notice Marcus watching, standing at her side, walking around the casino.

Marcus whispers in Greta's ear, "You promised to stop at 20,000 Euros. You're above that now. Please stop as you promised."

Greta turns her head toward Marcus but keeps her eyes on the roulette wheel. Briefly she looks up at him, then looks back. "Marcus, can't you see - this is my lucky day! Even you said it! I want to stay, just a little longer."

Greta turns her back fully on Marcus and places her next bet. She uses very large chips.

"Greta, I'll wait at the cashier for exactly five minutes," says Marcus flatly but sternly. "If you're not there, I'll leave you here on your own. You'll have broken your promise."

Greta is annoyed with Marcus and with the guilt lurking somewhere on the outskirts of her thoughts. She promised, true, but she's winning! She wants to stay. Marcus stayed when she wanted him to go. She will stay if she wants to. Greta quips to Marcus that it is impermissible to influence players in a casino, just as he had said to her in his previous gambles.

"I'm not influencing you. We agreed beforehand. You promised," says Marcus and then steps back.

Greta turns quickly to Marcus and rolls her eyes. "Fine, leave," she says curtly.

Marcus walks to the cashier. His chest feels tight and his face warm. After five minutes he walks to the casino exit alone.

At exactly that time, Greta runs to the cashier. She has tears in her eyes. Marcus watches her from the doorway. She changes just a small stack of chips. She then turns toward the door and runs to him sobbing. "I had reached 42,000 and then nothing worked anymore."

"Greta I'm sorry you didn't win more," says Marcus in a voice that stops Greta's tears instantly. Marcus has gone cold. She can hear and see it in him.

"I'm even more sorry that you broke your promise," he continues. "The 20,000 would have been enough. We agreed. You promised. You solemnly promised and then you broke that promise. I can't trust you again." With this final statement Marcus turns and walks out of the casino.

Greta is stunned. Marcus' reaction is harsh, too harsh. Greta protests, "Marcus, stop! Don't take it so seriously. Don't take it personally! I got caught up in it - gambling fever. I'm sorry. Please, stop. Don't be mad."

Marcus stops, turns and looks at Greta. He sees that she is sincere. Her face is stained with tears.

"I'm not mad Greta," says Marcus softly. "I'm just sad."

Greta walks next to Marcus, slipping her arm in his. They walk in silence for a few minutes, then Greta suggests they end the evening on an up note. She suggests a nightclub.

Greta knows she has broken Marcus' trust and she works hard the rest of the evening to make it up to him. She chats and talks fondly of the Swarovski piece he has given her. The both drink too much at the club.

Marcus can see that Greta is really trying to patch things up with him. He also tries to lift his spirits. It is her birthday and he wants her to have a nice one. Inside, however, he is different. He feels lonely and vulnerable. His life has changed since his T-powers. He had hoped he could trust Greta enough to one day tell her about his powers. He had hoped he could tell her

everything. He had hoped he could someday feel something other than isolation. Greta is not the one. She flips out with large sums of money, she breaks promises in the heat of the moment. From that he surmises he cannot trust her with still bigger things.

The swim in the morning, the beautifully set breakfast table, the massages that Marcus has ordered, everything goes as Marcus has planned. He knows that Greta thinks everything is back to normal. However, that cannot be further from the truth. He sees Greta differently. She is still beautiful and charming, but there is now something else inside Marcus. He has lost the trust of someone very important to him. Marcus knows he is an accomplice in what has happened. He had wanted to give Greta the opportunity to forget her current financial problems and that plan backfired.

With each passing minute that hard core inside Marcus grows. He tells himself that it is a reaction it will pass with time. But despite these self assurances, it does not take long before Marcus concludes that the lesson he must draw from this is that he cannot trust anyone.

On a professional note, Marcus decides that European casinos are not suitable for winning large amounts of money. The registration procedures are too restrictive.

Greta too has her own thoughts. Marcus has reacted too harshly. True, she promised to stop at 20,000 Euros, but she got caught up in the moment. She is appalled to think that she broke Marcus' trust in her. His trust was so long in the coming, and to break it over something so silly as a roulette game, well, she is ashamed at how she acted. Marcus seems to have forgiven her and all she can do is move on from here. She promises herself never to break a promise again, especially with Marcus. Although Greta cannot know now, much later she will have an opportunity to prove her trustworthiness to Marcus again.

When they return to Vienna, Marcus turns his attention to casinos. He needs a freer environment than Europe. He needs to make large sums of money to set himself up financially. He pours over books and spends hour after hour on the internet. It quickly becomes clear he must go to the U.S., a place where high rollers can stay anonymous and winnings remain relatively private.

When Marcus tells Greta that he will be traveling to the U.S., she wants to join him. "I won't be a bother and I'll pay for all my own expenses," she says.

In the days before Greta's birthday, Marcus would have enjoyed the thought of Greta traveling with him. He would have enjoyed her company, talking and experiencing new places with her. But that was before. Marcus has become hard and realistic. What he plans to do, he can share with no one.

Greta comes to the airport despite having agreed at their farewell dinner the previous night that she would not. She says almost accusingly, "You don't trust me anymore since the casino affair. Why have you become so hard?"

After a few minutes of silence, Greta continues. "I'll always be there for you if you need help. I'd give up a lot for you. I don't think you realize that."

Marcus listens and watches Greta with a mixture of sadness and disbelief. Has he stepped into the parting scene of a sentimental Hollywood movie? It does not cross his mind that his reaction was very harsh and that he may be overreacting.

The long check-in process gives Marcus and Greta enough time to part on friendly, but strained terms. When Greta receives an anonymous letter a few weeks later containing 20,000 Euros, she knows who sent it. She is very sad. It is a nice gesture from Marcus, to get her out of her current financial bind, but it is also a clear good-bye.

Marcus' emotions toward Greta had prevented him from focusing fully on his upcoming trip to the U.S. As a result he has had little time to read about where he wants to visit and what he wants to do when he arrives. However, by increasing his individual speed by a factor of almost 100 he crams into two days about half a year's worth of preparation. He is able to digest reams of information about the U.S., particularly the South West including Las Vegas, and the lives of the very rich. On the transatlantic leg of his trip he reduces his individual speed slightly to rest after his information cram and minimize his jetlag. Even with his individual time change, it's still a long flight.

Marcus has reserved a luxurious suite, which includes an in-suite whirlpool, in Caesar's Palace. Despite the luxury that awaits him, the suite is inexpensive by European standards. Clearly the lure is the extravagance. The hotel's goal is to subsidize accommodation in hopes that guests will leave money at the casino's gambling tables and slot machines.

Marcus is looking forward to playing the role of a young, rich European single. He will appear to be unconcerned about money. Before leaving Europe he bought everything from name brand clothes and accessories, to a platinum Rolex and leather suitcases. Everything about Marcus shouts money.

Marcus is met at the airport by one of the stretch limousine companies. The car has a built-in bar and entertainment set. When he is alone in the back, he investigates the gadgets with the excitement of a little boy. However, when the door opens at Caesar's Palace he is back to his swinging bachelor role. He generously tips everyone, from the limo driver to the bellboys and other hotel personnel. At check-in, Marcus puts his valuables

and about \$30,000 cash in the hotel safety deposit box - a nest egg, just in case.

Outwardly, Marcus is nonchalant about the suite, while inside he wants to jump into the whirlpool and try out the extra foam option! The suite is much better than the photos he researched at on the internet! The rooms are much more spacious than he imagined and are tastefully decorated with antique furniture. There is a huge bar and an equally large bed, which Marcus wants to plop himself on after the long flight!

There are also other gadgets that he cannot wait to play with, like a large-screen projection system instead of a TV, and a bathtub with five gilded taps - for cold water, hot water, cold or hot seawater (brought over 700 miles from the Pacific by tanker trucks!) and ice water. Marcus laughs when he sees the ice water option, thinking about a story he read on the internet, in which the man used just such a tap to mix whiskey with water while he was in the tub with his two girlfriends.

Marcus looks at the whirlpool more closely. He asks John the Bellman, who has shown him this room, why the whirlpool does not have the ice water option. John apologizes, saying that management is aware of the oversight and has already placed orders for new whirlpools with the ice water option. Marcus turns away, smiling to himself. What a place!

John receives a \$50 tip from Marcus. The tip impresses John, who asks if Marcus would like something else. He looks like he needs a lift after his long flight - maybe a bit of caviar with the usual trimmings: toast, chopped egg white and sour cream? A bottle of champagne? Perhaps a massage to relax?

Marcus interrupts John. "Yes, I'd like a good massage. Do you have anyone who gives a good massage and is young and attractive?" Marcus is on a roll, so he continues. "I'd like some company for dinner tonight too, to settle in. But first I'd like to rest a bit."

John does not have to be asked twice. As he walks toward Marcus he takes out a small booklet and hands it to Marcus. Marcus takes the booklet and flips through the pages. There are photos of girls of all ages and nationalities, each showing an ample amount of skin. Each photo is accompanied with an explanation of the girl's expertise. Marcus is tired and does not want to flip through the book. He also finds the book - the thought of cataloging women - distasteful.

"Come on, I haven't come here to study a book of women," says Marcus annoyed. "I want a good massage, and if I take the woman as an escort this evening I'd prefer that she is good looking and interesting. If I have to give preferences, I'd prefer a Caucasian woman, slim but toned, brown hair, intelligent, and she has to know Vegas inside and out. She should be about our age. How's that?"

"Yes, good," responds John quickly. "Monica fits that description, but her price."

Marcus cuts John off, pushing another \$50 tip into his hand. "Just send the right girl. If I like her, you'll get another good tip."

John is uncertain - what price range?

"Look, price doesn't matter. She has to be good at what she does and well worth the money. That's all," finishes Marcus. "I know you'll find the right one John."

John leaves, very impressed with the new guest.

The champagne and caviar arrive quickly, while Marcus fills the big bathtub. The tub fills within minutes to just the right temperature. The gas water heater he has in Vienna would have needed five hours to fill this tub, and in the time it takes to fill, the water would already be cooling off!

Marcus gets into the bathtub. He waves his hand over the thick rich foam. He has placed his champagne and caviar beside him. 'Life doesn't get much better than this. I could get used to it,' he thinks.

While he eats and relaxes, Marcus lets his mind drift. He looks more closely at the foam. Why did it spread evenly instead of billow up under the water taps? As Marcus investigates he notices that there are small nozzles higher up in the bathtub that help create a coating of evenly distributed foam. The ingenuity of the hidden nozzles impresses Marcus. He loves taking baths. He looks at the name of the manufacturer, Koehler. 'Koehler. I wonder if they're Austrian?' Marcus asks himself distractedly.

Although he will not find out for awhile, Marcus' guess about the origins of the Koehler name is correct. The Koehler family came to the U.S. from Western Austria about three generations ago. The company headquarters are located north of Milwaukee, where Koehler is a well-known name. The Koehlers started out in farming, as many immigrants in Wisconsin did, but they turned to business, building an empire on bathroom fixtures. The town with the business took the same name, Koehler. Some say the family owns the town, including the sheriff and mayor! Marcus commits the name to memory so he can buy a bathtub. He cannot know that the name will come up again in dramatic circumstances in the near future!

Marcus' mind continues to roam about, turning from foam to the temperature of the water. He feels snuggled in a warm, soft blanket. The well-tempered water reminds him of the well-tempered piano by J.S. Bach. Marcus enjoyed Bach's fugues at an excellent concert he heard in Vienna shortly before he left for America. He remembers sitting next to Greta and holding hands, all pre-casino days. It seems foggy and distant now, like another world, a dream world. Marianne, Greta, Vienna - they all seem far away. 'My life has sped away,' Marcus thinks.

Marcus' mind shifts to Andrea, of whom he has lost track and Maria, the young woman he met at Lake Leopoldstein. He misses both. Although he does not know Maria, he knows there is something different about her. Marcus smiles when he thinks of her. She and Andrea seem to be there, in the back of his thoughts, all the time. They never seem far away. Marcus quietly teases himself. 'I don't even know Maria, why am I thinking about her?'

Marcus nods off just when there is a knock at the door. He is jolted back to the hotel room. "Yes? Come in," he shouts.

An tanned young woman with brown hair walks in. She is attractive in a sporty way, wearing short cutoff jeans, a white blouse and sandals. She carries a small leather tote bag and gives Marcus a big smile. Without asking, she puts the "Do not disturb" sign on the outside of the door. She closes and locks it, then goes to the phone and dials a number, "No phone calls to suite 303 until 6:00 tonight please. Thanks."

The woman turns to Marcus. "Hi, I'm Monica. Can I call you Marcus?" asks Monica in perfect German.

Marcus nods. Monica walks toward Marcus and sits on the edge of the bathtub. "Sorry, we have a rule, business first."

Marcus points to a bundle of hundred dollar bills. "Take twenty. I'm sure we won't squabble over money."

Monica is a top-priced escort. Had Marcus read John's booklet, he would have seen that for \$2000 Monica is available for 24 hours as a masseuse and escort, and possibly more...

"Marcus, for that amount you can have almost anything you want from me for 24 hours. Some things, however, only if I feel like it."

Marcus shrugs. "I want you as a companion and masseuse. I don't want you as a slave, okay?"

Monica is not sure what Marcus means by this, but she nods. There is something about Marcus that Monica noticed immediately. Something about him makes her want to believe him. She has seen many men pass through Caesar's Palace, but Marcus seems different. She is impressed he does not need to explore what her boundaries are, as most men do. But, it is also more than that.

Marcus, likewise, is surprised by Monica. Why does she leave the money on the table rather than put it away? Instead, she asks him what he wants.

"Can you please put on some music for us - piano if you don't mind. I would like that," says Marcus. "I was just dozing off. And then, please join me in the bathtub."

Monica reaches down to feel the temperature of the bathtub. "It's well tempered," she comments.

Marcus is startled by Monica's strange choice of words. The words make sense in German, but sound awkward in English. However, when she chooses a record with Bach fugues from the "well-tempered piano", Marcus is no longer surprised, but surprisingly pleased.

Monica undresses tastefully, without unnecessary gyrations or movements. She simply undresses. First she takes off her shorts. Her small, almost transparent under garment shows that she is shaved a bit, but not completely. Then she takes off her blouse and lays it neatly on top of her shorts. When she tries to open her bra, she pretends to need Marcus' assistance. She uses the closeness of their faces for a short, but full-mouthed kiss. Marcus likes the feel of Monica's kiss. Monica playfully pouts disappointment that Marcus will not help her take off the rest of her under garments. But he enjoys watching.

Marcus looks with admiration and desire upon Monica's body. She has full, but not large, breasts, and her body is nicely toned. The most intimate parts of her body are white. There is a triangle of white except for a nicely groomed bunch of hair lower. And Monica's breasts are snow white.

She's been watching Marcus closely and smiles. "Marcus, this is a prude country in many ways. With a few exceptions, you can't tan nude at a beach. I haven't had a chance this year to visit the places where I can. Do you like my tan lines?"

Marcus laughs as Monica twirls for him so he can see her tan lines.

"Some of the laws here are crazy," Monica says as she finishes folding her clothes. "Killing someone is not only unlawful but just plain awful. *But*, murder shows are popular and are shown all the time on TV. Sex, on the other hand, is pleasant and legal - well mostly legal! *But*, it's off limits for most TV stations."

Marcus nods agreement. He has often had the same thoughts. As Marcus watches Monica, he has an interesting thought - well, interesting to Marcus as a physicist. How is this gorgeous, but naked, woman going to get into the bathtub? She can enter facing him or with her back facing him, just between his legs.

Marcus catches a brief view of Monica's back as she undresses. Her back is toned and unblemished. Is she naturally beautiful and flawless? Has she had cosmetic removal of birthmarks? Marcus chides himself for thinking too much. How can he be thinking of surgery and birthmarks when a beautiful woman is joining him in a whirlpool.

Monica surprises him by simply getting into the bathtub next to him, without a fuss. She puts an arm around Marcus and a leg over his. They talk a lot about nothing. Monica cups her hands and pours water over his shoulders, massaging him gently. As her hand moves down towards his legs

and groin, she watches him carefully. She is interested in his reaction. Her hand continues down his leg toward his knee.

Marcus enjoys Monica's touch and attentiveness, but he is far too tired for sex. She notices this and touches his eyebrow and says, "You're tired. Come on. Why don't you sleep for a couple of hours. I'll gently massage you until you fall asleep. What do you want to do afterwards? Would you like to go to a casino and out to dinner?"

Marcus nods.

"Do you like lobster and fresh seafood?"

"Yes!"

"OK, I'll make a reservation at the best seafood restaurant in Vegas. It's a joke really," laughs Monica. "Here we are in the middle of the desert. But the restaurant we'll go to tonight is one of the top three seafood restaurants in the U.S."

Marcus finds this fact impressive. "How's that possible?"

"The restaurant has its own plane, which brings fresh fish daily from either Los Angeles or New Orleans."

"Why their own plane?" asks Marcus. "Why not use a commercial flight?"

Monica looks at him surprised. "For the quality, of course! The chef himself has to select the best fish - the quality depends on his selection."

When Marcus gets out of the bathtub Monica insists on drying him. He is very tired but relaxed. He savors how gently Monica dries him off and leads him to bed. She tells him to lie down on his stomach, then she starts rubbing him slowly with massage oil. Marcus makes a few contented noises to show he relishes the attention, which makes her smile.

"Shhh. I know this is nice. Just relax. Just let yourself go, without distraction. Sleep a bit. I need you awake afterwards," Monica laughs softly and teasingly.

Marcus is aware of little that is going on around him. His is blissfully drifting off to sleep. He feels Monica's expert touch here and there, and her fleeting kisses and small bites. She turns him over onto his back and spoils him by gently kissing his face. He feels her mouth wander to more intimate regions of his body.

Marcus drifts off into a blissful dream state, somewhere between waking and sleeping. When he awakes, he cannot tell what Monica has and has not done. Was he dreaming? He asks Monica. He is embarrassed that he cannot remember and she laughs mischievously and refuses to tell him.

Marcus smells strong coffee brewing. Monica is sitting at the table, already dressed in her evening gown. She looks radiant. The table is set with coffee and a colorful array of fresh fruit.

Monica smiles broadly at Marcus. "Get up sleepyhead! Join me!"

Marcus' suitcases have disappeared. Monica answers his questioning look by pointing to the closet. He puts on his white bathrobe, then embraces and kisses her. Monica answers without shame.

As they sip their coffee and try the fruits, Monica and Marcus pick up the light chatter they started hours ago in the bathtub. He is intrigued by many of the fruits, some of which he only knows from photos in books. Monica notices his interest in the fruits and explains the preparation tricks that bring out the best tastes, fragrances and textures of the fruits. The taste of papaya, for example, is enhanced with lime juice. Passion fruits are best eaten spooned out of the fruit shell. Feijodas are cut in half like a kiwi but are much less acidic. The trick with mangoes is all in the cut - properly filleted will save time flossing later! There is one fruit that Marcus has never seen before, not even in books. "What is that pear-shaped yellow fruit?" asks Marcus. "I've never seen it before."

"I'm not surprised. It's only appeared recently here in Vegas - it's grown in Hawaii. It's called egg fruit. You cut it oblong, then you spoon it out. The meat of the fruit has the texture of a cooked egg yolk, thus the name. It's sweet and has a light, fruity taste, but it's not very juicy. It tastes like something made with too much flour."

Marcus spoons out a mouthful. He likes to try new foods. Monica's description is very accurate, except she forgot to mention that the fruit has two longish black stones embedded in the flesh. Marcus decides he will not ask for it a second time!

"Well, if you still want to lose your money today, we should think about going soon," says Monica.

Marcus laughs. "I'm feeling lucky Monica. I'm going to win here in Vegas. Just look at you. I'm already lucky! You look beautiful!"

If Monica had a hundred dollars for each time she heard these words and seen this enthusiasm, she could retire. Well, she could take a nice vacation anyway. It is her job to support such hopes and to keep a client's enthusiasm high even if things do not work out exactly as they plan. But she does not want to pretend with Marcus.

Despite her better judgement, Monica says rather seriously, "There have been men before you Marcus, who have hit Vegas just like you - with me on one arm and a lot of money in their pocket. They felt lucky and rich for two reasons: they had money and they had me. I'm told I'm a nice showpiece."

Monica pauses, then continues. "Marcus, don't fool yourself. We'll have a nice evening. You want to show me off. Believe me when I say I've never said this to anyone before, but I also find you attractive and interesting. Don't gamble if you can't afford to lose. Don't gamble if you'll regret it."

Marcus is surprised at Monica's words. He knows that Monica's job is to keep clients happy and spending. She is not supposed to say such things.

"Monica, I know you won't believe me, but I'm going to win tonight. I feel it. I know it. Actually, I'm so sure of it I'll make you a deal. I won't pay you anything, but you can get 2% of all I win tonight," says Marcus.

Monica is saddened by Marcus' reply. She responds, "No deal. This city lives off people like you, not the other way around. You're a sweet guy. How about I treat you in the restaurant we've booked after you lose everything."

"Okay," replies Marcus, "but only if I lose. Everything else is on me."

Monica suppresses a sigh. She looks at Marcus. He is young but evidently quite successful. He seems reasonable. Why is he insisting on losing money in Vegas?

"One last question," says Monica. "How much of what you own are you risking tonight gambling?"

"A good percentage," laughs Marcus cheerfully and embraces Monica. He is touched that she wants to protect him.

"Marcus you're crazy!"

"Monica, don't worry about me. I'll be Okay either way. Let's just enjoy ourselves!"

Marcus is in high spirits. By contrast, she is subdued. She has to accompany another man on another casino spree, a date that hardly ever ends well. His questions, "Which casino do you suggest? Where do you think I'd have the best chances?" indicate to Monica that Marcus is a gambling novice.

"I think we should go to the Pyramid. They're fairly new so they're usually more generous than the others."

Monica is lying. All casinos in the south of Las Vegas belong to one big syndicate and follow the same rules. However, at the Pyramid Monica gets one tenth of a percent of the losses of whomever she accompanies. She has long since rationalized taking clients to the Pyramid. Her clients lose money gambling anyway, why not earn a little extra in the process?

At the Pyramid, Monica makes sure the pretty hostesses look after Marcus well, giving him lots of free drinks. This is the least she can do. Marcus goes to a roulette table that has \$100 minimum and \$5000 maximum bet on individual numbers.

Monica watches Marcus. She thinks he likes the thrill of big money. Only when the roulette ball is rolling, at the very last moment, does he bet on three or four seemingly random numbers. After just three spins he has lost \$1000.

Despite his loss, Marcus appears completely at ease. He keeps playing his strategy. Suddenly one of his numbers hits, and he wins \$3600! Marcus goes through a series of ups and downs, but keeps winning slowly. When he has a

pile of chips in front of him, he starts gambling at the maximum, the \$5000 bets. Marcus tops out at a win of \$180,000!

"Enough for now," laughs Marcus. "Let's get some dinner. My treat!"

Monica has never personally seen a winning streak before. She has heard of them and knows they exist, but this is her first. And she has rarely seen anyone who has kept his composure as Marcus has done throughout the evening, whether winning or losing. Marcus also did not seem to notice the inviting glances of the casino girls, those women who capitalize on the good fortune of big winners.

Monica corrects her assessment of Marcus. He is naïve, but he is not a novice. She is determined to hold her ground for the evening. The casino girls will not take him over. They do, after all, make themselves up to be sexy and flashy, a front that doesn't hide their lack of any money or class. They hone in on the gamblers high on winning and "fall in love" with them. They get wined and dined and more. Monica decides to stay close to Marcus' side, if only to protect him!

The dinner is memorable. They both order lobster, although Marcus toys with the idea of trying the well-known Alaskan king crab legs. They order a light Italian white wine and talk nonstop, finding many common interests.

Marcus is surprised at the breadth of Monica's reading. Authors like Thomas Wolfe and epic novels like *Of Web and Rock* mean something to her. She finds David Lodge's *Changing Places* as funny as he does and tells him that if he liked *Changing Places*, he must definitely read Lodge's latest book, *Thinks*. Monica even knows about recent German writers and Austrian poets. She grew up in the U.S. but her parents emigrated from Germany.

After dinner Marcus announces that he will continue gambling, since he is on a roll. Monica is horrified. He has already had more luck than anyone she knows, and now he is going to ruin it all.

Marcus calms her down. "Look, here is \$100,000. Put it in your purse for me until we're back at the hotel. I'll only bet with the rest of the money, so whatever happens I'll have done well."

Monica is still not happy. She is consoled by the \$100,000 - at least he will not lose everything. But \$100,000 - she catches herself. 'He has just given me \$100,000! If I don't show up at his hotel room later and if I swear I never received the money, what could he do?' she thinks to herself. 'It would be my word against his.' Certainly her bosses would support her if she gave them a 50% cut!

Monica cannot know that Marcus fully understands the risk he is taking in giving her the money. He wants to test her. He also knows that it would be easy to get the money back - if worse comes to worst - with his T-powers.

This time they go directly back to Caesar's Palace, where Marcus is staying. By the time Marcus finishes gambling he has won \$500,000. He takes the check without much visible emotion. Monica is working hard to restrain herself. She is sitting in the head office of the casino drinking champagne at the casino's expense. She feels as if she has entered an entirely new world.

The happy couple continue their celebration by visiting a few bars. In the early hours of the morning, they head back to the hotel, where Marcus deposits the check in the hotel safe before going upstairs.

Marcus admits that he is really tired. The long flight and the nine-hours' time difference has hit him.

"The evening was exciting and fun, largely because you shared it with me Monica," says Marcus. "But before we go to bed, here's the \$12,000 - the 2% of my winnings - that we agreed today you'd get rather than your usual honorarium."

Monica stares at the money that Marcus has placed on the end table. She looks away as her eyes well up in tears. No one has shown her such honesty and trust. She has seen scenes like this in the movies, but that was Hollywood, not life. Surely he must remember that she did not accept the deal.

Monica slowly picks up the money. This money will make her almost completely independent of her current bosses, whom she does not like.

In bed, Monica moves close to Marcus. He has his back toward her, so she drapes an arm lightly over him. She can feel his warm skin pressed against her. She caresses him lightly until his breathing slows and he has fallen asleep.

Monica is sleepy but cannot fall asleep. She is amazed at Marcus' generosity. She lies quietly next to him. She is not in love. She will not fall in love. And she knows that Marcus will not fall in love with her. Of that she is sure. They will spend a day or two together in a non-committal way. They will enjoy each other's company. What intrigues her most, however, is Marcus' naiveté. Right now there is over \$100,000 in the room. What if she just got up and sneaked out of the room with the money? She'll ask Marcus about this tomorrow.

Very cautiously so as not to wake Marcus, Monica gets up and goes into an adjacent room of the suite. She calls a friend who is a detective and asks him to find out everything he can about a Marcus Waller from Vienna, Austria. The response is the usual, "Sure. Will do. I'll leave the information at the agreed number. But there's one condition, you have to promise to keep one evening free next week for dinner with me!"

Monica smiles, "Deal."

Next Monica places a small digital video camera in the bedroom and focuses it on the big bed in preparation for the morning's events. With a smile she arranges a few other things, then turns on the TV quietly and gets into the whirlpool. When she finally feels relaxed and tired, she crawls into bed next to Marcus. 'He smells nice,' she thinks.

Monica wakes up while it is still dark. She waits patiently until Marcus' breathing pattern changes and he begins to wake up. Monica gets up quietly and turns on the video camera then gets back into bed. She starts to wake up Marcus.

The blankets are soon on the floor. The nude bodies are touching and exploring each other, kissing each other. Monica does not hold back, but she also watches Marcus to find out what excites him and what does not. She notices that Marcus is trying to do the same, but is less polished than Monica. Monica fleetingly thinks about how beautiful their sex could be if they could know without speaking - telepathically - what the other wanted both physically and emotionally. Their embraces, kisses and movements are becoming quicker and more certain.

Suddenly Monica says, "Yesterday, I was a bad girl. I didn't agree to your deal, but I accepted your money. I think you have to punish me severely so I won't do it again."

Monica is lying on her stomach. She raises her behind in the air so that it is exposed. Marcus scans the bed and its vicinity. He sees his belt on the bedside table and smiles. He had not put it there last night. Monica has planned this scenario.

"Yes, you were a bad girl," laughs Marcus, picking up the belt. He hits Monica a few times so hard that he does not know at the end whether her squeals are part of the game - painful, orgasmic or both!

Monica promises that she'll never ignore Marcus' proposals again. Marcus finishes with three more strokes on Monica's now-red behind. Then he falls onto her passionately. Monica squeals and laughs at the same time. They toss and turn, laughing and biting each other playfully. Finally, coupled tightly in passion, their wildness is expended. Both collapse panting.

A few minutes later they look at each other and say in unison, "Good morning!" Both laugh and roll apart onto their backs.

Monica asks, "American breakfast?"

"I guess so," responds Marcus. "Together with lobster and king crab legs - American breakfast must be the delicacies of U.S. cuisine!"

"Would you rather have king crab legs?"

"Could we get them at this time of the day?" asks Marcus astonished.

"In this suite, you can get anything you want 24 hours a day," answers Monica with conviction. "How much did you pay for the room?"

"I haven't asked."

Marcus and Monica end up having the American breakfast, accompanied by a bottle of champagne on the house. "That reminds me," says Monica. "I have a present for you too."

She walks to the video camera and takes out the tape. She hands it to Marcus.

"Just in case you enjoyed this morning and might like to see it again. It's all there on the tape."

Marcus is obviously surprised. "I know some men who are voyeurs and have taped their sex - usually unbeknownst to the partner. But you've taped us, and you're handing it over to me? I'd have thought it'd be good for extortion - a few extra dollars. You're... amazing."

Marcus pauses, then continues. "I'll look at it ... and enjoy it. Thanks!"

They look at each other for awhile until Monica says haltingly, "We are not lovers, and we won't be in the future. We'll spend some time together now, but we'll probably never meet again in the future. However, this doesn't mean that I won't remember you. I will. You're a good man, and a good lover. I taped us to make sure you have a little something to remember us by."

There is an awkwardness and a silence now between them. Marcus changes the topic. Monica continues to look at Marcus, but does not hear what he is saying. She is disappointed. She knows that what she said is true, but she wanted to hear him say that he will stay with her. She wants it to end differently this time. But she knows it will not. And she is glad that he does not lie to her just to be kind. She wants the truth, no matter how harsh. She admires his straightforwardness.

The radio breaks their resumed silence. The temperature is going to hit 95 degrees today. Marcus asks Monica how she can stand such temperatures!

"Well, we have the three S's, the three G's and the three L's," smiles Monica.

"The what?!"

"We have the three S's - Sex, Sleeping and Shopping; the three G's - Gambling, Getting drunk and Going out; and the three L's - Laughing, Loving and Lake Mead," laughs Monica.

"You really go to Lake Mead?" asks Marcus suddenly alert.

"If I get bored, I do," replies Monica.

He found Lake Mead boring when he was there a few years ago, on an extended trip to Western Canada and the U.S. with his parents. "We voted Lake Mead as 'horrible.'" admits Marcus, "but how about Lake Powell?"

Monica shakes her head, "Probably just another big lake in the middle of the desert."

Marcus frowns and looks at his watch, "No, not quite."

He continues, having made a decision. "How about joining me on an excursion to Lake Powell? You'll need to pack a few things - something warm for tonight and good walking shoes. We'll be sleeping in the wilderness, so prepare for a no facilities adventure. We'll return tomorrow. I'll get everything organized, but we'll have to leave by 11:00 sharp - that's only 90 minutes from now. What do you think?"

Marcus' excitement and determination are obvious. Monica smiles. She wants to join him, but ... "Marcus, it takes a good three hours to drive to Lake Powell from here. I've got to be available by phone by 4:00pm tomorrow. When you called you said that you only wanted me for one day. I want to go, but there isn't enough time."

"I promise I'll have you back by 4:00 tomorrow. It doesn't give us much time, and it's a shame you have to be back, but we can do it."

Marcus pauses, then continues teasingly, "Now, don't say no to my proposal, or I'll have to punish you again."

Monica gasps as if she is frightened then laughs. "That's a terrible threat! Hmmm, maybe I'll have to turn you down!"

A few minutes later Monica calls a taxi and leaves to pack a few things for Lake Powell.

Marcus begins a mini-marathon of phone calls. Much of the Lake Powell trip planning, however, he leaves to the hotel. They consider Marcus a valuable customer and seem only too happy to assist him with his spur-of-the-moment plans. After all, Marcus *does* have \$500,000 in their safe! Marcus knows that the hotel management has contacts and some of his requests have been extraordinary, such as his request for a helicopter to be waiting on the roof of the hotel at exactly 11:00 to take them to Glen Canyon Dam at the southern end of Lake Powell.

Marcus would like to see the dam as well. He has read that the dam, which is more than 600 feet high, has created a reservoir with a shore length of over 2000 miles. It has flooded the valley of the Colorado and San Juan Rivers and many smaller ones in between. Former mountain peaks are now islands in the lake. The whole lake is surrounded by Indian reserve. There are only a few isolated access points.

Through hotel management, Marcus rents a powerful special-purpose motorboat, which will be waiting for him at the Lake's marina. He also orders food and drinks for two days, various equipment for going ashore and camping overnight, and other essentials. He requests current maps and detailed information on Lake Powell to be delivered to his room as soon as possible. He knows that the water level of Lake Powell can vary so significantly that it will impact what he plans to do.

By the time Marcus has showered, dressed and packed, a stack of information has been delivered to his room. The time is 10:50. He has exactly 10 minutes to study the information and meet Monica downstairs. He uses his T-power to increase his individual time so he can learn in 8 minutes what would normally require a couple of days.

Eight minutes later Marcus walks downstairs with a small suitcase. He is now a Lake Powell specialist and is ready for his tour.

Marcus arrives in the hotel lobby at exactly 11:00, just as Monica is walking in the door. She is wearing baggy, T-shirt and an extravagant straw hat with matching bag. She looks stunning.

As she embraces Marcus, cameras flash. 'Hotel management have obviously not ignored the large sums of money that I've won and am spending,' thinks Marcus, both amused and annoyed. It does not even cross his mind that the photos could be for another purpose.

Monica nonchalantly climbs into the helicopter as if she takes helicopter trips daily. In reality, it is her first helicopter ride, and she is excited. Thirty minutes later they land at the marina, located at the lower end of Lake Powell. The two men waiting at the marina walk them to their boat, explaining certain features while they are en route. Marcus listens closely as they explain how to lower the boat's special guard. When they reach the boat they show Marcus where the equipment is stored that he has ordered. Finally the men ask where they are going, just in case they run into any problems.

"We're going into the Navaho Canyon," says Marcus.

"Do you know what you're in for?" asks one of the men surprised. It turns out that this man is a local Ranger and knows the dangers of the canyon first hand.

"Yes," responds Marcus. "That's why I requested the special guards for the propeller, the extra water, the camping stove, and the spare gas. Thanks again for putting the spare gas onboard. I know it's not usual practice to carry it on the boat. I also asked for spare bolts. Are they here somewhere?"

They have forgotten the spare bolts. Marcus insists they supply them along with a few tools he thinks he might need.

The Ranger looks at Marcus with surprise when Marcus requests that a search be started for them if they do not return by 4:00 the next afternoon.

"We're going to the canyon," he explains. "I want to try to reach the holy waterfall."

The Ranger warns Marcus. "You seem to know a lot about the canyon and you're well prepared, so I won't give you my usual talk. I'll give you a shortened version. I need to warn you that the situation in the canyon is bad, especially where you're talking about going. I think you should reconsider your trip."

☞ Marcus assures the Ranger that he is prepared and will not venture past where he is comfortable. He signs the necessary waivers, then they leave the marina to speed upward, away from the dam. Monica had listened closely to Marcus' discussions with the Ranger, but admits that she has not understood everything.

☞ Soon after they leave the marina, Marcus begins telling Monica about Lake Powell. Like Lake Mead, Lake Powell is a gigantic artificial lake created by damming the Colorado River. However, since it is in much more mountainous terrain, it is considerably more interesting than Lake Mead, which has mostly gentle desert shores.

☞ "A vacation on Lake Powell in a houseboat would be a great experience," comments Marcus. "There are only four places where there's access to the Lake, and with over 2000 miles of shore to choose from, it would be a peaceful experience."

Then he laughs. "We won't be able to get that houseboat experience in just over 24 hours on a speed boat, but I wanted you to have a taste of Lake Powell. I thought you might enjoy the beauty of this big body of water. It's nostalgic for me."

"Tell me about the Navaho Canyon. What's so special about it? And why do we need the guard?" asks Monica.

"The Navaho Canyon is the third largest tributary canyon of this lake. It's about 20 miles long and it's very narrow. The water hardly moves in it for most of the year. For that reason, when the snow melts, there's a lot of dead wood carried into the canyon and it gets stuck there. There's nothing to flush it through. If the canyon were shallow, it would eventually turn into land. But the canyon is deep, so there's a layer of driftwood that gathers in sections. You'll see it get thicker the deeper we go into the canyon."

☞ Marcus pauses to point out swallows darting playfully through the air.

"The clumps of driftwood are like floating islands. They start to grow moss... grass... bushes... even animals use it as their habitat. It's similar to the Sargasso Sea. I'm fascinated with this for a few reasons. First, nobody predicted that type of phenomenon when they built the dam. It shows - again - that if we manipulate nature on a large scale, we get completely unexpected outcomes. Second, it's now impossible to reach the back end of the canyon by boat. Since there are vertical cliffs on both sides of the canyon, it's impossible to get there, otherwise. As a result, the old Indian ruins are now more or less inaccessible. However, there's a spot just before the end that's not easy to reach, but still possible - and that's where I want to go. I consider it one of the biggest marvels in the country.

☞ Marcus pauses thoughtfully, then continues. "You also asked about the guard. Because the driftwood can be very solid in places, boats usually can't

go in very far. The guard on this boat can be lowered to protect the propeller from hitting the logs. We'll need it to reach the spot I want to show you."

Monica listens with interest while enjoying the passing scenery. She is also concerned. She knows little about boats other than loving their speed but can be of little help to Marcus if something should happen to go wrong.

Monica looks at Marcus, steering confidently. He is obviously enjoying himself - the speed, the wind and the lake.

"You surprise me," says Monica. "You dare to go where few people do. You're only twenty-two years old.... You're a physics student in Vienna, but you've got the knowledge of an experienced wilderness scout! You use money as if you're a millionaire, but from what I can tell you only hit it big last night."

Marcus looks at Monica. He is disgusted that she seems to know much more about him than he has told her. He speeds up his individual time to give himself a chance to compose a solid, believable answer.

"Your detectives don't know of all of my activities... or motives," says Marcus evenly. "One thing they missed is why I'm here. I want to open new accounts in America. And as far as Lake Powell goes, I've been here before. I have an ongoing interest in and appreciation for the Navaho Indians - thus my knowledge about the Navaho Canyon. I've read a lot about the canyon. I was planning on going here myself after finishing my business, but after meeting you I changed my plans. I thought it'd be more fun going here with you than going here alone."

It's Monica's turn to be caught off guard. "I'm sorry Marcus. I was very rude." She continues, "Yes, I do have a friend who is a detective and I asked him to check you out. All of yesterday evening was like a dream for me. I felt like I had walked onto the set of a Hollywood movie!"

Marcus shrugs his shoulders. "I like you more than I should and I trust you more than our time together warrants. I think you feel the same. I just had to be sure."

Monica can see that Marcus is confused, so she explains. "Yesterday you gave me a large sum of money to put in my purse. The whole night that money was in the room with us. I could have left with the money while you were sleeping. Why weren't you worried? There are many women in Vegas who would have grabbed the chance. They would have taken the money and run. I'm not sure that I wasn't stupid not to take it and run."

Marcus is quiet for several minutes. He does not look at Monica, but instead looks straight ahead. Monica is kicking herself for being so honest and open with him.

When Marcus finally talks, his voice is quiet but firm. He tells Monica that he likes her and that he wanted to trust her. But, in all honesty and

without hurting her feelings, his own feelings toward her would *not* have been enough for him to keep large sums of money in the room with them. He kept it in the room because he would have been able to get the money back from her had she stolen it from him.

Monica is shocked, "How?"

"My secret," says Marcus. "Just trust me on this one. Just know that I'm very, very happy that you didn't try to betray me. I won't forget your honesty."

Marcus' voice is breaking, so he looks away from Monica. Although he is looking at the passing scenery, he momentarily sees nothing. Marcus had securely fastened the door bolt with his T-powers so that Monica could not easily leave the room. The noise would have woken him up.

The momentary tension has been replaced by a temporary, emotional silence. Monica moves closer to Marcus, who puts his arm around her. Monica responds by snuggling in. The boat steers erratically for a moment as they kiss deeply.

The wind of the speeding boat and the occasional spray keep Marcus and Monica cool. And, they are in danger of getting severe sunburn!

Since they are on the main part of Lake Powell, there is a fair amount of traffic - houseboats, ski boats, water skiers and speed boats. Marcus is pleased to see that theirs is the only of its type. The boats and brightly colored passengers contrast sharply with the mostly barren and uncultivated mountain desert landscape. The setting seems almost surreal - the open desert sky and the towering cliffs - the red rocks jutting up out of the water at 90 or near-90 degree angles. Tufts of sun-bleached vegetation grow stubbornly here and there in the rock crevices.

Monica has taken off her blouse and shorts and is enjoying the wind wildly blowing her hair. She seems to be at home on the boat. - Her yellow bikini shows off nicely her deeply tanned body. Marcus, although not quite as bronzed as Monica, still looks healthily tanned and fit in his fire red swimming suit. Steering the superboat Marcus also looks like he is having fun. Together, they look like contented lovers. They leave a trail of envious glances as they overtake boats on their way to the canyon. Marcus casts a glance to the back of the boat. The canvas of the sunroof shelters their provisions from the direct sun, which is beating relentlessly.

Monica sees Marcus' glance at the supplies. She says, "Judging from what you've taken, you're kidnapping me for weeks!"

Marcus smiles as she says, "Hey, do you think I could try the water skis?"

"Sure," replies Marcus. "Let's do it now while we're in the main canyon. It's only about 10 miles from the marina at Glen Canyon Dam to where we

veer off for Navaho Canyon. And that canyon is too narrow to water ski. We've got twenty minutes tops in this part of the lake - want to go now?"

It's quickly obvious to Marcus that Monica must be close to being a professional water skier. She easily gets up on the first try, crosses their wake, then does a few artistic feats that impress Marcus (and others!). Marcus laughs and applauds, and as he slows down Monica lets go of the rope and sinks into the water. He smoothly swings the boat around to pick her up. Monica climbs aboard elegantly, glowing from her performance.

As wet as she is, Monica embraces Marcus, "You know, we're starting to be a good team. Your turn now. Do you want to try - or go swimming? The water is beautiful!"

"Soon. I'd like to get away from the crowd first," responds Marcus mischievously.

Before long, Marcus turns right to enter the Navaho Canyon. The waterway narrows significantly on both sides. The cliffs are high and vertical, casting them into shadow even though the sun is at its highest point. Boat traffic falls off dramatically.

Monica watches the much-changed scenery. The cliffs now overhang the river. The colors capture Monica's imagination - creamy colored sandy bays and rich green plants set against bright red rock and a deep blue sky. Monica is momentarily silenced by the beauty.

Marcus has slowed down and is concentrating on the water ahead.

"What are you looking for Marcus?"

"We're going to run into driftwood soon. That's why we're not meeting that many boats. I expect that soon we won't meet any boats. But we will meet more and more driftwood. This is where we have to be careful. If a piece of driftwood hits the propeller, it could break it, regardless of our speed," says Marcus.

Noticing Monica's expression, Marcus continues, "Don't worry, there's usually a warning - they call it a predetermined breaking point - a bolt snapping off, like the bolt connecting two of the parts that drive the propeller. The boat also has a special guard, like a cage, that we can lower around the propeller to keep the driftwood away from it. This helps keep the propeller safe, but it slows the boat and increases our gas consumption. We'll use it only as a last resort. If we use it too early, we won't have enough gas."

"Even with the extra gas that's onboard?" asks Monica.

"Unfortunately, yes. When the cage is down we'll go through a lot of gas. Even though we have two spare cans with us, if we lowered it now, we'd quickly go through that before we reached our destination - 'de papa gaetae,' the holy falls."

"You talked about this place with the Ranger. What is it?" asks Monica.

"I'd tell you, but I want to surprise you."

Monica smiles and decides to savor the anticipation. She cannot believe that it would be any more beautiful than the scenery passing the boat right now. She feels as if she is viewing a series of postcards, set upright one right next to the other.

They are now traveling fairly slowly around corner after corner. They begin to pass floating pieces of driftwood. Marcus carefully avoids most of them. However, occasionally over the next half hour there are a few bangs as the propeller hits a piece of wood. Suddenly, after a loud BANG, the motor revs up.

"We've lost a bolt," yells Marcus. "I have to replace it. Want to join me in the water?"

Marcus stops the motor. The boat drifts gently not far from a sandy bay. A few strokes of the paddle and the boat is in shallow water.

Marcus picks up a bolt and a pair of pliers. He then puts on a diving mask to see clearly while working under water. Replacing the bolt is easy with the right tools. Marcus is glad that he insisted on spare bolts and a variety of tools before they left the marina. Without a bolt, the motor is useless. The only option left is paddling!

Monica takes close notes. She watches as Marcus anchors the boat in calm water to make the changing of the bolt easier. Trying to replace the bolt when the boat is among rocks or drifting in strong current would be much more difficult. The situation here is ideal.

Marcus takes a few deep breaths. He makes sure there is no driftwood nearby to hurt him when he dives in or comes back up. He then dives into the water and swims under the boat. He removes the remainder of the broken bolt and replaces it with a new one, bending it with the pliers so can't slip out. Marcus is unaware that Monica has put on a diving mask and has followed him into the water. She observes him at a distance. However, she runs out of air before Marcus does and has to surface before he finishes. When Marcus surfaces, she congratulates him on his quickness and precise movements. They throw their diving masks and tools into the boat and swim to the sandy shore.

At a spot where the water is about three feet deep, Marcus stops. He takes Monica into his arms and kisses her, swaying her gently in the water. He slides his hand inside her bikini. They enjoy the sun, the water, the scenery and being together. Although it is already past noon, Marcus does not want to stop for lunch until they are more remote, where they are certain to be undisturbed by other boaters. Monica smiles as she guesses his motives.

They continue at a slow speed. When the bolt breaks again, Monica says that she will replace it, since she watched Marcus replace the last one.

Monica is surprised that it is not as easy as she thought. She keeps running out of air and having to resurface. On one of her trips up for more air, Marcus explains how he uses the hyperventilation technique to remain under water longer. He breathes deeply and quickly to enrich his blood with oxygen. When he starts to feel dizzy, he takes a last breath. With that last breath he can stay under water much longer than had he just taken a single deep breath.

Before Monica tries this, Marcus warns her of a potential danger. With this technique carbon dioxide can build up in the body without any warning signs. Too much build up can and has killed people. For this reason, Marcus makes Monica promise not to use the technique alone. It should only be used with someone who is aware of what they're doing and the dangers inherent in it.

Monica agrees. She follows Marcus' lead, as he does the technique with her.

When they get back into the boat, he decides to lower the guard cage around the propeller. They only have two spare bolts left. They cannot risk breaking another on the way in. With the cage lowered, the boat moves significantly slower. Marcus finds that the boat is also more difficult to maneuver.

Around the next corner they both are speechless at what they see. There is not only thick driftwood but also a solid cover of wood. The little island looks like a mini ecosystem with grass, small bushes and nesting birds. Without the guard, they would have to turn back at this point. Even with the guard, they seem to be barely moving.

To get through this island-like obstacle requires close teamwork. From the front of the boat Marcus searches for the best route through the moving islands. He pushes wood aside with a paddle as best he can. Monica has assumed control over the rudder. Slowly they inch forward until they reach a long stretch of open water. They look over their shoulders at each other and smile.

With the first obstacle behind them, they look for someplace to stop for lunch. They find a spot that reminds Monica of a painting - a sandy, deserted beach separated nicely with sunny and shady sections. Not far offshore there is a sandbar that forms a mini island in the lake. The rugged cliffs of the canyon form a dramatic backdrop.

"Hey, you're unloading half the boat!" teases Monica as Marcus carries his second cooler from the boat. Monica is helping Marcus and gives him a nudge as she passes him with the last load from the boat. Marcus has formed a small mountain of items from the boat - blankets, cushions, coolers, a large bag of food and a few small bags of "surprises."

Marcus laughs, "Okay, you're right! Let's get rid of a few things."

Before Monica can react, he has untied and pulled off her bikini top. "I'm getting rid of unnecessary things!" shouts Marcus while grabbing hold of Monica's bikini bottoms and tugging downward. Instead of fighting, Monica reciprocates by pulling down Marcus' swimming suit. Before Marcus can throw off his swimming suit, Monica has dashed into the water and taunts Marcus, daring him to catch her.

Marcus dives into the water to catch Monica, who is trying, but not very hard, to get away. Marcus soon catches Monica and they jump and splash like kids. Marcus thinks, 'If you've never splashed nude with a beautiful woman, you've not lived!'

Their frolicking changes pace. They play less like kids and more like adults. Monica wraps her legs around Marcus' waist, supporting herself in the water. She feels the sun beat down on her eyelids as she hugs him tightly. Slowly they untwine and paddle toward shore, famished.

After they reached shore, Marcus spreads out the beach blanket and gets out the suntan lotion. They massage each other with lotion to avoid sunburns, paying particular attention to un-tanned areas. Monica poses for a few photos after Marcus promises he will not show them to anyone.

Life is good. The water has cooled them off, and they are sitting on the blanket, eating delicacies that Marcus has packed. Monica is impressed with his creativity. He has remembered everything, even the small touches - a small vase and a rose for instance.

Marcus packed one of his favorite wines, Austrian Morillon, a delicious light wine that is difficult to buy in the U.S. Its refreshing taste suits the inspiring surroundings perfectly - pristine and untouched - such a contrast to the flashing neon of Vegas. That they are sitting there - a modern day Adam and Eve - gives Marcus thoughts that probably doesn't classify as pure and pristine.

Marcus sprays the edges of the blanket against sand flies and other insects. They then settle in, sleeping side by side for almost an hour. Their late night and early morning has caught up with them. After Monica prepares coffee to help them "wake up" she wonders why they are not sharing this Eden-like spot with others.

"We're pretty inaccessible to all but the determined!" Marcus laughs. "If you're looking from above, we're almost completely hidden by the cliff overhangs. To get here via the canyon you need a boat with a guard, like ours, and there aren't many of those here. The only other way in that I'm aware of is using a New Zealand-built jet boat. The Ranger has one of those, but because of forestry laws, he's only supposed to use it in emergencies.

That type of boat does a lot of damage to the floating islands that we've been maneuvering around."

"What's a jet boat?" asks Monica.

Marcus obviously relishes Monica's questions about machines and mechanics. She notices how animated he becomes with his responses. Marcus explains that some ingenious Kiwis (New Zealanders) invented a boat whose bottom has a large but solid sieve through which water is quickly pumped. The water is ejected through a jet at the rear of the boat with high speed. The jet can turn more than 180 degrees, making the boat responsive as well as fast, reaching speeds up to about 40 miles per hour. By sheer inertia the boat is capable of traversing sandbars without being damaged. It is also versatile, able to operate in water that is less than one inch deep.

"We've lost two bolts already, and we still have to traverse a few more floating islands. If we're lucky, we'll make it out with the spares we have left. If we're unlucky, we won't make it out despite all the equipment we have. That's why I asked the Ranger to come out for us if we're not back by 4:00 tomorrow," says Marcus.

He adds quickly, "Don't worry. If I weren't 99% sure we'd be able to do it, I wouldn't have tried it." Marcus has left out one key point that gives him 99% of his confidence - his T-powers. If necessary, he can pave a channel through the floating debris for their boat.

After several trips to reload the boat, Marcus and Monica resume their slow trip through paradise. The increasingly large patches of solid driftwood keep Marcus and Monica on their toes. They continue working as a team and are enjoying their sense of accomplishment and team work. As they pass by one of the floating islands, Monica quietly but excitedly points out a large deer-like animal grazing peacefully.

"Wapiti" says Marcus. "That's strange. There aren't wapitis for hundreds of miles in any direction. But look at it, it's doing well."

The wapiti has raised its head and is looking straight at them, watching curiously with its large doe-like eyes. There is plenty of water and fresh grass and foliage on the islands. The wapitis would be safe from predators, such as cougars, who tend to shy away from these floating islands. As they pass, Marcus wonders how it got there.

Their trip up the canyon is very slow. The water is mostly in shadows and the sun's rays are slowly creeping toward the upper rim of the canyon walls. After a sharp turn off the canyon, they enter a narrow passageway. Marcus can hear it. He sees a crack in the cliff on the right hand side. There it is - the waterfall! Finally!

The waterfall plunges about 300 feet, causing a cool mist to billow into the air. Broad leaves of plants hang heavy with water that slowly beads and

drip off. In dramatic contrast to what they have seen for the past few hours, here is knee-high grass, there are also tall trees and large bushes growing up the side of the cliff. The falling water has created a deep clear pool, sheltered by a sandbar that largely separates the pool from the canyon water. Quite a bit of driftwood, fairly dry, has been pushed up onto the shore.

Monica looks from the waterfall to Marcus' face. She can see that although Marcus has read about what he would find, he could not have imagined such a spot. He looks as impressed as she is.

"This is where we're staying overnight," says Marcus quietly. He looks overhead, then continues, "Since we're not likely to get rain tonight, let's sleep in our sleeping bags in the grass. There's enough dry wood for a campfire later. And the waterfall can be our shower. Sound good?"

"Sounds five-star to me!" says Monica, "Race you to the waterfall!"

Marcus quickly anchors the boat, then jumps into the water. Monica has a head start, but Marcus quickly catches up. They swim directly to the waterfall, where the water hits the pool.

Monica looks at Marcus with surprise. "It's warm! Much warmer than the lake." Marcus beams. "You didn't expect me to offer you a cold shower, did you?"

Monica wants to know why the water is warm. Marcus challenges her to find out herself. She will need to investigate where the water comes from.

Although the climb up the cliff face looks tricky, Marcus reassures Monica, telling her stories about his treks back in Austria on Hochtorn Mountain. His stories and confidence calm her.

"I don't know this place other than reading about it, but we can do it," says Marcus. "Let's put some shoes and socks on - shoes for the climb and socks for rattlesnakes."

The two slowly make their way up near the waterfall, pushing back plants and bushes as they go. They only have to climb about 300 feet and there are a few good footholds, but it is fairly steep. Moss covers many of the rocks, and the waterfall's mist makes the rocks slippery.

Before long they reach the top of the holy fall as Marcus calls it. This is what Marcus has come for – this holy place, the *de papa gaetae*. Monica can see why it is special. There is a small pool carved into what looks like a large, smooth rock bowl. That pool extends into a cave then flows over the edge of the cliff face, plunging into the water below. The upper pool is fed by a number of thin veins of water, some of which trickle down the face of the cliff in their own mini waterfalls. Little rainbows form in the mist billowing from the waterfall.

After surveying the area for a few minutes, Monica observes that there is more water going down the waterfall than is coming from *de papa gaetae*.

"Absolutely right," says Marcus. "What's happening? I can't tell you - you have to find out for yourself; otherwise it'll bring us bad luck - or so the legend goes."

Monica takes off her shoes and clothes and walks toward the veins of water. Marcus follows at a short distance behind. As she approaches the first water vein, she notices the water getting considerably warmer. When she puts her hand in, she jumps back quickly and looks at her hand. Has she burnt it? Monica looks at Marcus confused, but then remembers reading once about shallow pans of water lying on top of the canyon. She wonders if this heated water is coming from there. Marcus agrees, saying that the water gets near scalding.

As Monica continues her investigation, she discovers that the water coming out of the cave is not just cool, but cold. This must be subterranean water coming through the cave from mountains upstream. Add the two together - the heated top water and the chilled cave water and voila! Warm spa water!

Marcus tells Monica that the pool was considered a holy place by the Navaho Indians centuries ago. It looks as if it hasn't been visited by the Navaho or by anyone for many years.

They enjoy exploring the different water temperatures of the pool. They also find it exciting - and a bit scary - to venture into the darkness of the cave. They stay in the water so long that their fingers begin to look like raisins. They grudgingly climb out of the water and get dressed to make a cautious descent.

When they get to the camping spot, Marcus starts a big fire. Monica finds that roughing it is different than she envisaged. It is not very rough at all. She loves watching the dancing shadows cast onto the cliff face by the campfire. Although the fire's ambience is romantic, it was not Marcus' initial motive. On their return trip Marcus will explain to Monica the real reason for the fire - to keep mountain lions, or pumas, at bay, especially when they smell cooked food. Of course Marcus could kill a puma just as he killed the dog in Vienna, but that assumes he would see the animal in time to act.

"Madam, do you prefer meat or fresh lake fish this evening?" asks Marcus in his best waiter voice. He has just finished wrapping potatoes in aluminum foil and has placed them on the fire.

"Fish, thanks," responds Monica.

"Trout or carp?" Monica thinks Marcus is joking so she answers lightheartedly, "If possible, a bit of both, please."

"You don't make life easy for me, do you?" laughs Marcus. "As you wish. I think I can promise you the carp, and I probably have a fair chance at getting the trout, too."

Monica watches Marcus as he takes a long fishing line and ties a hook to it. She strains to see what he puts on the end of the hook.

"Before you ask, I'll tell you," says Marcus, heading off Monica's questions. "I'm using a 15 pound line and a hook size of 6. You might not want to know, but I'm using maggots as bait. Trout like maggots.

As Marcus rises, he continues, "For trout, I need to go out deep - 150 feet ideally - they like cold water. There should be plenty of oxygen in the water too - another thing trout like - because of the falls and the water feeding into the lake. I've done some research, and in the almost 20 miles of Navaho Canyon, there's really only one suitable spot to fish trout and that's here!"

Marcus swims to the boat, anchors it in what looks like much deeper water, then drops the line from a fishing rod into the lake. He swims back to shore and uses a stick to push a potato out of the fire. It is clearly overcooked. Marcus removes the burnt skin until he has a handful of well-cooked potato. "Unlike the trout, the carp-like fish here love cooked potato! That's harder to keep on the hook though. I'll have to use a treble hook, like this one, and throw the line out very gently."

Marcus ties the hook onto what looks like much thicker line and wades a few feet into the water. He carefully throws the hook about 15 feet in front of him. It seems only minutes have passed before he wades back ashore, pulling behind him a carp that easily weighs six pounds!

Marcus' father taught him how to scale and clean the carp - his mother's cooking preference for this type of fish. Now, however, Marcus uses his axe to simply cut the fish into two big fillets. He cleans the fillets and throws the remains into a bush as far from their site as he can. He knows that a desert fox, a puma, or another animal will be grateful for the dinner, but he does not want any animal showing up at their site to show that appreciation.

Marcus swims back out toward the boat. Monica continues to watch his every move with a combination of amusement and amazement. She thinks that he's swimming very cautiously and wonders why. Marcus has seen the rod bend slightly a few times. A fish is nibbling at the bait, but has not yet taken it. Then, suddenly, the fish bites and Marcus yanks, setting the hook in the fish's mouth. Marcus proudly pulls out a sizeable lake trout.

Back at the campfire Monica watches chef Marcus prepare their dinner. She sits on the ground with her knees pulled up to her chest and her head resting on her knees. She cannot remember the last time she has been so relaxed and contented. Marcus flashes Monica a smile as he adds butter and a few herbs to the fish. He prepares the potatoes by cutting off the burnt parts. The appetizer and dessert are still coming. They are surprises hidden away in the coolers. Marcus pours them each a glass of wine from the bottle they started at lunchtime. It will go nicely with fresh fish.

Marcus enjoys Monica's gaze. He feels like Crocodile Dundee - he loved that movie - now there is a guy who really knows how to handle the wilderness. Independent. Self-sufficient. Marcus likes to think of himself as self-sufficient. Take his fishing for example. He was self-sufficient - well, *almost* self-sufficient. Before he cast the line in to catch trout he used his T-powers to check whether there were trout in the area. However, the rest - the fishing - was genuine.

Marcus and Monica will never forget this night together in the Navaho Canyon - the wild and idyllic setting, the remoteness and stillness, the millions of stars overhead, and the flickering of the fire on the rocks and in the mirrored image in the lake. Marcus outdoes himself with his romantic dinner for two. The food is exquisite. They finish the evening with a refreshing skinny dip after dinner. After their swim, they sit propped against each other, watching the night sky, pointing out falling stars.

Maybe it is all in their heads, but both Monica and Marcus feel something very special about this place, the holy waterfall and the *de papa gaetae* just above them. They continue to sip their wine and enjoy the feeling of togetherness, of something akin to love. Neither wants to express their thoughts. They do not want to blemish their feeling with words, especially such a word as "love," which seems to be inextricably tied to commitment. Marcus has heard that many Americans have developed a phobia around commitment. He has had the same knee-jerk reactions to these words as well, but that seems distant now.

The night is gentle and dry. The sleeping bags lying on the grass feel as soft as beds in a 5 star hotel. The crackle of the fire and the roaring of the waterfall provide a soothing background as they lie in each other's arms talking about everything and nothing, until they finally fall asleep.

In the morning, neither wants to leave their spot. Marcus remarks that he will be in Vegas a few more days - they have time to do other fun things together - makes Monica uncomfortable and sad. These words are what she has longed to hear him say. Now that he is speaking them, she knows she cannot let them mean anything to her. She is afraid that her bosses will already have committed her to a new "assignment."

On the way back to the marina, they are again a well-oiled team. Monica is curious why Marcus scans the canyon walls as if he is looking for something.

"The rocky walls have a tendency to break off without warning. There aren't signs saying 'Beware of Falling Rock.' I'm just trying to be careful," says Marcus. Yesterday, Monica didn't recall Marcus being so vigilant about the canyon walls as they motored into the canyon.

"I probably should have been more careful," admits Marcus. "Later in the day it's not as dangerous. In the mornings the rock expands from the cool night, so there's more chance of rock falling now than in the afternoon."

Marcus is only telling Monica half the truth. The full truth is that Marcus wants to impress her. He plans to use his T-power to plunge a rock dramatically into the lake. He can do this with a substantial piece of rock only if it is already loosened. After awhile, Marcus finds what he is looking for, a large, loose boulder hanging onto the cliff face.

Suddenly Marcus steers the boat to the right side of the canyon and speeds up. Monica looks bewildered. She follows Marcus' gaze to see a huge chunk of rock thundering down the cliff face just behind them and to the left. It hits the water with such a splash that they barely escape the huge waves created.

Monica looks at Marcus with a light frown. "You seem to have a seventh sense."

"No, I've got at least nine," he laughs. He scolds himself for using his T-powers unnecessarily. He's got to be more selective!

Before they reach the last floating island they jump in the water for a final skinny dip. When they finish swimming, they sit on the shore and enjoy the warmth of the sun and the refreshing breeze on their bodies. Marcus is surprised at how quickly time seems to pass when they are together.

When they are back on the boat, Marcus decides to raise the guard. They have passed the last of the driftwood so it should be clear from here on. Both Monica and Marcus are surprised, however, when the bolt snaps again. Monica enthusiastically volunteers to fix it, showing off her new breathing technique and newly learnt bolt prowess.

Everything fixed, they speed back towards the marina. As they disembark, they look at each other and say "Thanks, it was great". They hug and Marcus gives Monica a quick peck on the cheek, laughing that they both chose the same words.

While Marcus pays the rest of the bill, Monica telephones her boss. She hangs up and turns to Marcus. Her enthusiasm has visibly drained from her face. "I'm not free past 6:00 tonight." Marcus winces. "For how long?"

"I don't know."

The glass of wine they drink as they wait for the helicopter has little taste. "Monica, if you ever need help, you know how to find me in the Vienna phone book, or your detectives can help you," mumbles Marcus. "I guess to ask you for a business card or address is pointless, isn't it?"

Monica smiles and gives him her card. "You're right. Nothing is correct, not the address or the phone number." She hesitates then says, "If you use this phone number in Los Angeles instead of Las Vegas, you'll get my

mother. If you phone her, she'll say she doesn't know me, etc. But if you say your name is Marcus, I'll let her know that she can give you my contact details."

Monica looks up into Marcus' face. "Please don't misuse the information or give it to anyone. The time with you was beautiful, but we both know that our lives are too different to make more of it. We're not in the movies, although sometimes I feel like I am. We're in life. There are things that you're not telling me, some kind of hidden agenda that I can't figure out, and that's okay. You don't have to tell me and I don't have to understand. So let's leave it as it is. We're good friends. Maybe if one of us is in dire straits or if life takes a different turn, we can contact each other."

Marcus cannot know how desperately Monica pins her hopes on the last statement - if only life could take a different turn.

"Let's make a deal. If I'm free for a day this week and you're still at Caesar's Palace, I'll contact you. Will you survive our separation?" jokes Monica trying to lift her and Marcus' spirits. "I'll survive... just barely," Marcus teases back. "We're both sad, but what you say is true. I'll be in Vegas for awhile longer, gambling. I have to win more. If you're not around, I guess some of the casino girls will look after me."

Monica is thinking. So he *did* notice the casino girls. He is going to continue to gamble. And he is sure that his winning streak will hold. She cannot believe it. She would not have guessed his astute observation of the girls. Nor can she fully grasp his duality - his youth and naiveté versus his cocky belief in his gambling abilities. Is there something she should have observed but missed?

The helicopter ride back to Las Vegas is short and quiet. Their conversation is restricted to small talk and even that seems stilted. A car is waiting for Monica. They embrace, they wave as Monica gets into the car. Once the car door shuts, she does not look back.

Marcus decides to go to the roulette tables to further secure his financial future. He has dinner at Caesar's then goes into the MGM Hotel and Casino. With 5,500 rooms, the hotel must be the largest hotel in the world. It even has its own amusement park. The laughter and delightful screams of children adds to the lively bustle of the hotel. Marcus makes his way to the casino. After just two hours, he has won \$230,000 - not bad for a day's work.

At breakfast the next morning Marcus decides his strategy. He must open a bank account. He also needs a new name and address in Vegas if he wants to stay anonymous. Marcus catches a taxi cab to a real estate agency where he finds what he is looking for, an apartment in a big complex where all meter readings can be done without going into the apartment. The door has a slit in it for mail, and he guesses that even if he sticks a "No junk mail" sign

on his door, he will still receive it. He would have to receive piles of junk mail, however, to fill up the space behind the door and cause suspicion!

Marcus takes the apartment. He wants to avoid risk so he gets the lock changed and leaves one key with a lawyer with whom he has negotiated a simple deal: Someone will go into the apartment monthly to check things, water a few cacti, and leave the impression that the place is sometimes used. The lawyer will check the mail and only keep those pieces addressed directly to Andy Milthof, his first new identity. If something arrives, which *is* directly addressed, the lawyer has instructions to put an ad in the upcoming issues of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, the largest newspaper in Southern Germany. The text of the ad will read:

German Shepherd named Andy is missing. Any information to help find him will be well rewarded. Phone (089) 3478956.

The phone number is an invalid number in Munich. The ad must run for six weeks or until someone calls up who says he is Andy Milthof, in which case the lawyer must follow the directions exactly as specified by the caller.

The deal, which Marcus negotiates for three years, is not cheap. He pays the full amount, including the full apartment rental account in advance. The lawyer is pleased with the deal and does not ask any unnecessary questions.

Marcus buys a few pairs of pants and casual dress shirts, into which he has stitched the letters AM. He buys other items, such as a variety of books. In many of the books, Marcus writes "Andy Milthof" in a script unlike his own in the inside covers. He does a few other things, such as leaving magazines around (which the lawyer will replace monthly) to leave the impression that Andy uses the apartment once in awhile.

Marcus sometimes chides himself. He wonders whether he has seen too many spy movies. Perhaps he is becoming paranoid but can't help to think that his T-powers might be important - possibly even threatening - enough to others that one day all these precautions will pay off. He cannot logically explain, but feels his life may get complicated at some point in the not-too-distant future. If this nagging fear becomes reality, a new identity and a hiding place will come in handy.

The next steps are opening a bank account and getting a credit card in the name of Andy Milthof. Marcus sees these two steps as being critical in establishing Andy as a real person. Andy will also need a passport and a driver's license. Marcus wonders how many extra identities he will need. Will one be enough? How can he pull this off? And what if he is caught?

7 Money and Problems

First half of August 2003

Marcus next visits the Nevada State Bank. Posing as Andy Milthof, he wants to open a no-interest checking account. The transaction is going smoothly until he wants to deposit \$500,000.

Against his protests, Marcus is assigned a personal financial advisor. This advisor urges him to deposit the money into a different type of account. This is a substantial chunk of money - why not accrue interest! Marcus tries to shortcut the conversation. He already knows that if he does anything more than simply deposit the money he will have to declare the interest as revenue for his U.S. tax return - something he wants to avoid at all costs. So, he explains that he does not want to release his Social Security Number. That is why he is putting his money into an ordinary, no-interest bearing account.

Marcus is surprised with the advisor's response. Even if Marcus does *not* accrue interest on an account, the most he can deposit is \$50,000 if he is unwilling to use proper identification to set up the account. Even that deposit of \$50,000 is technically illegal. The advisor will let him set up the account, but *really* he is supposed to have Marcus' Social Security Number. Without this information, the bank will post to Marcus letter after letter requesting these details. The advisor tells Marcus confidentially that if he ignores the letters long enough, the bank will eventually stop sending them.

Marcus gives up. Instead of opening one account, he opens five accounts at five different banks. He deposits \$50,000 into each of the accounts. Visiting the banks, listening to the advice and setting up the accounts takes Marcus the best part of the day. He now has five different credit cards and checkbooks. It becomes clear by the end of the day that this approach will never work with the millions of dollars that he wants to stockpile to alleviate all money concerns for the rest of his life.

Marcus decides to deposit most of his money offshore - maybe Nassau or the Bahamas, or perhaps in Swiss accounts. Marcus is happy that the Swiss have not made any moves to join the EU anytime soon. But even going offshore will be tricky. It is illegal to take more than \$50,000 cash outside of the U.S. without declaring it. Marcus will need help with this one.

While he considers his options, Marcus puts cash into a safety deposit box in one of the banks. He thinks it odd that while he cannot deposit large amounts into an account without garnering attention, he can place much larger sums into a deposit box without violating any laws.

Marcus decides to visit a friend in Chicago who operates a large export / import business. Marcus is certain that he will know how to transfer money anonymously outside the U.S.

But before Marcus leaves for Chicago, he decides to take another trip or two to a casino to top off his funds. To avoid suspicion he visits casinos in other cities. His first stop is Reno, where he wins a large sum of money in a single day. His goal throughout these casino sprints is to keep as low a profile as possible. To that end he hires Wendy, an attractive woman from a local escort service, to act as his girlfriend. With Wendy on his arm he is able to avoid the propositions of the casino girls. The sum he pays to the escort service for Wendy is hefty, but it certainly pays off. He keeps the casino girls at bay, although he still receives plenty of their looks on the sly.

Marcus carefully spreads his work over a large area and multiple casinos. The boom of casinos that grew out of the 1990's has come in handy. He is sure he's covered his trail by traveling from city to city. Only 10 days later Marcus has accumulated an enormous sum of money.

Even though he has not been in Vegas during his gambling spree, Marcus has kept the suite at Caesar's Palace. He will also keep it during his trip to Chicago because he wants to return here before leaving the U.S.

Feeling better about his financial future, Marcus boards a plane to Chicago to visit his friend, Peter Cobb. On the way, he thinks about the ways Peter's and his lives have crisscrossed over the years.

At their first meeting, Marcus probably saved Peter's life. It was dusk on a beautiful fall day. While hiking down the Eisenerzer Reichenstein in Austria, Peter had slipped and broken his leg. By the time Marcus found him he was in severe pain and already cold from the approaching night air. It was too late in the day for an alpine helicopter to rescue him. Marcus wrapped Peter in a bivouac bag, left him a thermos with hot, sweet tea and some emergency food. Then he ran down as fast as he could to the Praebichl hut for help. Marcus managed to bring help to get Peter down the mountain, saving him from severe frostbite, or worse.

Through this rescue Peter and Marcus became good friends. The more they talked and e-mailed, the more common interests they found they had.

On another meeting Marcus helped Peter a second time. Peter had his car stolen in Bratislava. Being Viennese, Marcus had heard stories about such crimes going on in Slovakia. With a little research and several phone calls, Marcus was able to get Peter's car back - although it was newly painted. Marcus laughs to himself when he remembers the look on Peter's face when he saw his "new" car - definitely not a color that he or Peter would have chosen.

Another time they went on a ski trip together to the Alberta mountains in Canada. Marcus and Peter were determined to make it to the peak of the mountain. Throughout the day, the weather became more and more threatening. However, neither wanted to be the one to suggest turning back.

At one point they caught each other's eye. Neither said anything. They both snapped on their ski boots and took off down the mountain, abandoning their goal. They made the right decision. Although they did not escape the fury of the blizzard that descended on them, they were far enough down the mountain to reach a hut for protection. Neither of them talked about the 'what ifs' of that day. But they both knew that if they had continued, most likely they would not have survived. It was after this trip that Marcus felt sure of Peter. Between them was a solid trust that Marcus knew he could rely on. No matter what.

In Chicago Marcus stays at the Blackstone Hotel. His room is big with a great view of Lake Michigan. He meets Peter in the restaurant at the top of the Hancock building, and they race through their conversations, trying to catch up. Marcus mentions that he has made "lots" of money in the U.S. semi-legally, but he does not know how to get it out of the country without paying taxes. Marcus does not mention that he also believes - perhaps even more importantly - that his anonymity is critical because of potentially dangerous enemies.

Peter is impressed with the sums that Marcus mentions, sums in the nine digits range, but he is also skeptical.

"You need more than anonymous accounts in the Bahamas or numbered Swiss accounts," says Peter. "You need new identities. Sums of money like that are bound to create powerful enemies. You have to be able to disappear quickly if necessary." "I'm sure you're right," Marcus responds, somewhat reassured that Peter brought up the topic of enemies. Marcus often wonders if he is paranoid when he thinks about this. "But how do I do it?"

Peter is quiet for a few moments as they order another round of drinks, enjoying the lights on the lake. Then he says, "Let me take care of this for you. It will cost you a good deal, but with the amounts you're talking, the cost isn't that much in the bigger scheme of things."

"I have to be able to reach you by mobile day or night. I'll prepare documents and transfer the money for you. I think you should have at least three distinct identities. Because of your accent, your country of birth has to remain Austria. But in one case you'll be an American citizen with a Social Security Number. That identity will be an employee of my company in Chicago, living here as well. First thing tomorrow you'll need to find an apartment. I'll put you on my payroll, but you'll never see a cent. That will be my tax deduction, and that's how I'll make some money on this. I'll take care of your U.S. tax forms, but you can't work at another job in the U.S."

"Second, I guess you should have a European identity. I'll have to check out which country is most favorable. Then you can fly to the Bahamas and Switzerland to open accounts there. I'll transfer money as you tell me." Peter

pauses, sipping his drink, then continues. "Make sure you have three versions of passport photos. And make sure they look different enough - you know, full beard in one, glasses in another, long hair in another - that type of thing."

Peter Cobb does not disappoint Marcus. The next day Marcus takes three sets of passport photos. Peter tells Marcus to take them to a small shop on Fifth Avenue near Lakeshore Drive. The photos of him are very different. In one version he has a distorted nose and ears that look like small wings. The second set of photos have similarly odd, but distinguishing peculiarities. Only one set of photos looks similar to the real Marcus. He has done well.

Peter is impressed and amused by Marcus' photos. Real versatility! He just doesn't know that Marcus' ingenuity is due to his T-powers.

Only a few hours later Marcus has three new identities. He is the U.S. citizen Frank Mohler, the Austrian Gustav Hufnagl and the New Zealander Marcus Simmer. In Vegas, he's still Andy Milthof.

Marcus carefully memorizes names and details. He cannot make a mistake with the different identities. He also cannot be found with different passports on his person at the same time. Finally, he must remember the physical peculiarities of each identity. For example, the American has the bent nose and the New Zealander is the one that looks the most like Marcus.

With his new Frank Mohler identity, Marcus rents an apartment in Chicago. He then opens his bank accounts, flying to Nassau and Switzerland as New Zealander Marcus Simmer. The flights do not bother Marcus, who now enjoys first or business class window seats. He asks not to be disturbed en route, during which he reduces his individual time by a factor of 20. With this time manipulation, the 10-hour flight to Europe passes like 30 minutes, just enough time to rest and plan ahead.

Peter Cobb has no trouble transferring the money from Chicago to the accounts that Marcus has opened. When Marcus returns to Chicago, they meet again, this time at a local blues bar. As they clink their glasses and drink to success, Peter says, "If you ever need my service again, no problem. Next time, however, I'll keep 2% commission for me - Okay?"

Marcus readily agrees. "I'm actually happier with that arrangement. I can use your talents and connections without feeling like a beggar! I'm sure I'll need you a few more times at least. Are you okay if we talk over the phone rather than dealing in person?—as long as we use our old ways of identifying each other?"

"Sure, no problem," agrees Peter. He remembers the passwords they used when his car temporarily disappeared in Slovakia. Marcus now feels as if he has accomplished everything that he intended in the States,. He has a few things to pick up from the hotel in Vegas, and there is the outside chance of having a romantic interlude with Monica before leaving.

He has also not visited a single casino in North Vegas, so Marcus decides to return and earn a little pocket money before leaving the U.S. He will then fly to Auckland to test his new New Zealand passport and to prepare an apartment and account just in case. When he thinks through his plans he feels paranoid. Is he being wasteful about setting up all of these hiding places? He can easily afford it, so he consoles himself in that even if he does not have to flee to them, they are good vacation spots.

More than once Marcus dreams that he is a fugitive hunted worldwide. When he awakes sweating from these dreams, he calms himself by thinking of his hiding spots. Marcus plans to stay in Auckland only briefly, to get things sorted. He will then return to Austria to visit family, who remind him on each phone call that it is high time for a visit.

Caesar's Palace in Vegas, where Marcus has kept his suite, welcomes Marcus with much fanfare. They have waiting for him a huge basket of fruits, wines and champagnes. John, the employee who selected Monica for Marcus, is also at the hotel. Marcus gives him another hefty tip and asks him to see if Monica is available. Everything is going fine. A day or two and Marcus will be off to New Zealand their home.

Just as John leaves, Marcus receives a phone call. A muffled voice says quickly, "Mr. Waller, you're in danger. Leave Vegas secretly and as fast as possible. Don't go into any casinos for a few months." Marcus does not recognize the voice, but something tells him that it could be Monica. Was she talking through a towel? Before Marcus can say anything, the caller hangs up. Marcus shakes his head. 'It can't be Monica,' he thinks. 'I only asked John to call her a few minutes ago. She can't know I'm in town yet.'

Marcus takes the warning only semi-seriously. He calls the airline to change his flight. He will leave early the next day. After he finishes these arrangements, he still has the best part of the day. He does not feel like sitting beside the hotel pool, so he decides to go to North Vegas to try out a small casino. He plans to win only a moderate amount. Marcus takes a limousine from the front of the hotel. He asks the driver to go north on the strip for awhile. He will tell him when to stop.

However, the decision about where to stop is no longer Marcus' decision. At a red light the driver turns around to face Marcus, who is looking out the window. Before Marcus realizes what is happening, a tiny arrow fired from an air pistol hits his neck. Marcus tries to win time by increasing his subjective speed, but the poison works too quickly. The inside of the limousine starts spinning and Marcus blacks out before he can open the car door.

When Marcus wakes he is sitting in a chair. His hands and feet are tightly bound. Opposite him are a few empty chairs. There is a window through

which Marcus can see a road and a mid-sized hotel. Next to him in another chair, also tied up, is Monica!

"Monica, what's happening!" Marcus mumbles still groggy from the injection. Marcus sees black circles under her eyes. Her arms and face are bruised. She is obviously very scared.

"Marcus you got too greedy. Clearly you must have a trick to make money playing roulette. Because you won such large amounts they noticed you. They're going to force you to tell them how you do it. I'm here because they think I know the trick. We were only together for two days, but they think I know something. Maybe they're just going to torture me to show you what they'll do to you if you don't cooperate." Monica is speaking quickly but her voice sounds tired and tight.

"I think they'll try to kill me whether I cooperate or not." Monica replies with frustration and resignation. "They're not going to *try* to kill you. They *will* kill you. And they're also going to kill me because they think I know too much. It's just a matter of whether they kill us quickly or slowly and painfully. Please, just tell them straight out what your trick is and let's get it over with."

Monica looks at Marcus, then looks toward the window. "As much as I don't want to die, it's not your fault. It's my own fault. I should have told my bosses about you after our first evening together. I'd be safe right now."

Marcus increases his individual speed to have time without worrying Monica with his silence. He is tied up simply, with ropes. He looks around the room and sees many objects he can use as projectiles or weapons. He can easily free himself and Monica and if he wants, he can reach outside the window, pick up a few small stones with one pseudo-hand then throw the stones like bullets from a pistol if he needs to. It is clear that whoever captured him does not know about his T-powers. They probably drugged him rather than physically overwhelmed him because it was the easier option. Being drugged again is the only thing that Marcus will have to watch out for.

In a small way Marcus is looking forward to using his formidable powers in this situation. There are surprises in store for the gangsters who think they have Marcus in custody! He is sure there are cameras and microphones capturing the interaction between Monica and him, so he can only tell Monica things that everyone can hear.

"Monica I don't blame you for being scared. Anyone would be scared in this situation. But I promise you - and you must believe me - that you will not be hurt any more. We will both leave this place as we are now. I'm not alone. I'm prepared for this. You'll be free soon and I'll make sure that you can start a new life, in a different city."

Monica wrinkles her brow and looks at Marcus as if he were crazy. He laughs quietly, "I know what I'm saying must sound strange to you - given the circumstances, but please believe me. We're in no danger whatsoever. There may be a few bumps along the way, but don't be afraid of your safety. Just watch like you're in a movie theatre."

Marcus notices with his pseudo-hands that a group of people are approaching. To be on the safe side, he covers himself and Monica with invisible yet steel-hard hands so that if someone were to try to shoot at them, it would not matter. Marcus is more worried about needles laced with drugs than he is about bullets....

Three heavily armed bodyguards enter the room first. They are followed by two elegantly dressed men, the shorter apparently the boss. The last person to walk into the room is a petite girl acting as a waitress. She is carrying a tray with drinks. The whole scene reminds Marcus of a cheap action movie. Monica catches her breath, obviously frightened despite everything that Marcus has said to her. Marcus turns to Monica, who looks at Marcus from the corner of her eye. He nods slowly and tries to calm her. The two men sit down, light cigars, and sip from two of the drinks. They are clearly enjoying the scene. The shorter one starts to speak.

"We've been listening to your conversation with Monica, so let me come right to the point. You have found a way of winning at roulette. You've hurt our group to the tune of \$140 million in less than two weeks. We observed you carefully during your last winning streaks but haven't figured out how you do it. I'm sure you understand that we want the money back and we want to know your tricks."

He pauses, inhaling slowly from the cigar, then says, "Monica won't live. We don't think she knows the trick, but we're not sure. But worse, she stupidly tried to warn you with a phone call to your room about an hour ago. We don't tolerate persons who aren't totally loyal to us. Sorry Monica. You, Marcus, might live if you cooperate fully and help us drive competing casinos into bankruptcy. Now, to bring your nonsense about protecting Monica and yourself to an end, we'll give you a small taste of our work."

The man turns to one of the bodyguards and says calmly, "Josi, cut off one of Monica's ears." Monica sits perfectly still, staring out of the window. Josi approaches her with a large serrated knife. Monica refuses to look at Josi as he approaches, and she refuses to plead for leniency when she knows her pleas and screams will not help her. Josi is about three feet from Monica, holding the knife up in front of her face. Suddenly a part of the window shatters and a bullet hits Josi's upper hand. He screams in pain and drops the knife. Almost simultaneously another bullet hits the arm of the boss who looks down at his arm stunned. Blood seeps through the sleeve of his jacket.

Marcus says loudly and clearly, "Anyone who makes a move now will be killed immediately. I've been easy on you so far." Everyone freezes. The bodyguard next to the door, however, thinks he is safe from the shots, which appear to be coming through the window. He takes a step toward the door. As he does so, a couple of bullets come out of the wall opposite him. One smashes his left leg, making him fall to the floor in pain.

Marcus says quietly, "I could have killed you. This is the last time I'm going to warn you. This building is under my control. My team has placed cameras, guns and bombs in dozens of places. How many of them I use will depend on you."

"And you," says Marcus looking directly at the man who has done the talking, "got hurt because you gave the order to maim Monica and because you called me by my first name without permission. You will address me as "Sir" from now on. What's your name?"

"Marc Shank." "Okay, Mr. Shank. Take off your jacket - carefully - and roll up your shirtsleeve so the skin where the bullet hit you is exposed. Don't try any nonsense with the pistol in your jacket or the small one that you have in your armpit. And you," continues Marcus as he looks at the girl, "open the first aid box in the corner of the room. You will first dress Mr. Shank's arm, then Josi's hand, and finally the leg of the bodyguard on the floor."

After the girl finishes these dressings he tells her to cut the strings tying up Monica and himself. He frisks the bodyguards for weapons and then tells a surprised Josi, "You and your friend with the grazed leg will go to the emergency unit of the nearest hospital. You both need professional treatment. You're not allowed to tell anyone what happened here. If you're asked, you'll say - and remember this for the future - that everything was under control when you left this room. If you ever say anything different you'll be eliminated. This is an order to my team who will remain in Las Vegas. As proof that they can hear me, I want one more shot to come through the window without hurting anyone."

There is the sound of a shot. Several pieces of glass shatter onto the floor as a bullet comes through the window.

Marcus makes the third bodyguard, Henry, sit in the chair he had been in himself. He ties him up tightly. Then he sends the girl out of the room with the same warning that he gave to the two bodyguards who have since left.

"Good, now there's five of us," states Marcus, indicating the boss, his colleague, Henry, Monica and himself. "We can have an undisturbed discussion." Marcus moves a little table between them. He and Monica sit on one side of the table and the boss and his sidekick on the other. Marcus pours a gin and tonic for himself and Monica. He then serves a drink to the two

men, asking the boss to put his hidden weapons on the floor. Marcus raises his glass and makes a toast "To cooperation."

Marcus speaks slowly between sips, as if he were sitting at a picnic rather than the headquarters of a casino Mafia gang, bent on killing him. "I'm a physicist. Yes, I have discovered a winning technique. I target certain types of roulette tables and can win systematically. You've had the bad luck of buying your tables from a company unaware of the fault in their tables. My method doesn't work in European casinos," Marcus lies, "since they purchase all their tables from a top Austrian manufacturer. I'm the only one who knows this trick."

It is Marcus' time to enjoy his drink and his position of power. He continues, slowly, "I have left a complete description of my method - sealed - with a notary public who has instructions to open it on January 10, unless I contact him otherwise before that date. In that sense killing me would not have helped you much. You would have been forced to close the casinos at the end of the year. Now at least you know that if you change your tables you'll be safe. I expect that you wouldn't want to be slow about making the change. The Austrian manufacturers will be overrun with orders beginning late 2003 and for quite a few years from then."

"I'm a reasonable man," says Marcus, enjoying his part. "I'll not risk playing in the U.S. for the next year or so, beyond what we might agree. Regardless, I was prepared to be found out. I'm the type of man who prepares for eventualities. And I prepared for just such a scenario as today."

Marcus swirls the drink in his glass, letting his words hang in the air. "From my point of view," says Marcus, "we now have two problems - a small one and a big one. The small one is that Monica wants to leave your employment. I believe it's customary that if a customer wants, he can buy out one of your girls? Is that right? What's the going rate?"

"50,000."

"OK Mr. Shank, give me an account number and I'll deposit that sum to buy out Monica. We understand each other when I say that Monica is then free to do whatever she wants. Your group will not harass her in any way. Is that correct?"

Both men nod. "Then we come to the big problem. You two and Henry." The men turn white.

"No, don't misunderstand me," clarifies Marcus. "I'm not a killer. I'm not the danger. The danger comes from your bosses. They won't want to hear that you let me escape with all the money - you haven't found out my trick - and all of this after you supposedly had us where you wanted us. I'm sure that you've contacted your bosses and assured them that they'll get everything they wanted - probably right before you came into the room."

The men quickly glance at each other. This guy is right. Big mistakes are not accepted graciously in their circles. They both look at Marcus silently.

Marcus explains how he thinks he can save their lives. They will pretend that they forced Marcus, under much duress, to comply with their plan. Their plan is for Marcus accompanied by Monica to go into a competing casino in Central City. Marcus will play and win until he has busted the bank of the casino. Both Marcus and Monica will be disguised so that later they cannot be identified. Marcus will deposit a large amount from the winnings into Shank's bank account, which proves that he is cooperating with their plan.

In the plan, Marcus will play aggressively until the casino forbids him to play further. At this point Shank's men, disguised as casino police, will escort Marcus and Monica out of the casino. Marcus will struggle and try to break free. There will be a dramatic shootout and explosion in which Marcus and Monica appear to die. In reality, they will not die. They will go undercover and resume their lives in another part of the world with their real identities. In the end, Shank and his colleagues will get off the hook from their bosses. Marcus will no longer be in danger, and Marcus and Monica will not be hunted by the casino Mafia.

Marcus concedes that there are many nuances to the plan that need ironing out, but he is sure that Shank's gang can see to the details. The finished plan must be waiting for them in the casino hotel in Central City where they are going to gamble and stay. Shank and the others are quiet. They are flabbergasted by the elaborate plan, and although they are trying to poke holes in it, they find it almost workable! But more so, they cannot believe that someone they intended to kill just moments earlier seems willing to help them.

However, Marcus motives are not entirely gratuitous. He does not want to kill his opponents, even if they are criminals. But if they stay alive and are turned over to the police, Monica and he will be hunted by the casino Mafia now and in the future. The only way to avoid this revenge is to leave the appearance of having died.

Marcus has three conditions he puts to Shank and his colleague, to ensure that they play along and do not try to kill him. "I'm sure you understand that straying from the plan won't be good for your life expectancy. There's my team in Vegas that will hunt you down. Second, there's the details on my casino trick that will stay under wraps with the notary public until I give the word. And lastly, there's one more detail."

Marcus places two capsules on the table. Marcus continues, "Here are two capsules that contain a rare poison which takes effect after two weeks of being in your body. I'll send the antidote to Shank's address after Monica and I disappear. If something happens to Monica or me during the plan, you don't

get the antidote. With no antidote, you will die. Henry will escort us to Central City to make things look genuine. But you, Mr. Shank and your colleague better not leave Vegas for 10 days no matter what. If you do, I just might forget to send the antidote."

Mr. Shank and his colleague do not want to swallow the capsules. But Marcus' command to his invisible troops to kill them after he and Monica have left the building does the job: they finally swallow them. In reality, the capsules are harmless antibiotic pills from the first aid kit just used before.

Before Marcus and Monica leave, Marcus sets the scene. It must all look authentic. With the butt of a rifle he breaks open a hole at the point where the bullets came out of the wall and hit the leg of the bodyguard. Marcus pulls a pistol out of this hole and pockets it. He is, of course, working as a magician. There was never a pistol in the wall. He used his speed acceleration to put one of the guard's pistols into the hole, then he takes it out leisurely and *appears* to pocket it. However, so no one will notice it missing later, Marcus does not keep it. Instead he drops it unnoticed onto the pile of weapons taken from the bodyguards.

Of course, throughout the "shootout" in the building, not a single gunshot was ever fired. Marcus threw small stones, accelerating them faster than the speed of sound, thus creating the typical noise of a gunshot. The fact that the bullets were actually stones helps the two injured bodyguards when they go to the hospital. At the hospital they recount their unlikely story - an accident they had when trying to fix a concrete rod in the ground. The physician suspects bullet wounds and plans to call the police after he finishes treating them. However, during treatment the doctor finds pieces of stones in the wounds, which seem to substantiate their highly unlikely story. No criminal investigation is started.

After making sure the room is set, they are ready to begin the real charade. Monica and Marcus are brought in handcuffs into a dark limousine. Marcus' things are checked out of Caesar's Palace by "friends" and a suite in Harvey's Wagon Wheel Casino, Central City, is booked for Marcus and Monica. They will play the role of an elderly couple. Henry is booked in an adjacent room. In the chartered plane which takes them from Vegas to Central City, Colorado, both Monica and Marcus are "made over" by professional makeup artists. When the artists finish, they hardly recognize each other.

From the airport in Denver they take another limousine. This time Henry plays the role of a butler for the rich elderly couple. They drive west out of Denver, through the beautiful winding canyon roads near Golden, past the big casinos of Black Hawk to the gold mining town of Central City, a tourist mecca.

The area brings back good memories to Marcus of his earlier U.S. trip. He clearly remembers this Gilpin County. Golden was the hometown of Bill Cody, also known as Buffalo Bill. Marcus loved listening to stories about Buffalo Bill and went more than once to see his grave, which is high above the town. He and his parents also visited the Coors brewery, one of the largest breweries in the world. But what Marcus finds most interesting is the area's connection with the heydays of the gold rush - the name Golden itself speaks volumes. It was on May 6, 1859, when gold was first found in the river. It was not the first time gold was found in Colorado but it was the largest find to date. Marcus easily imagined the excitement, the gold fever that must have gripped those first prospectors.

Marcus is aware that there was more to those days than the excitement of gold. It was the Wild West, and with that era came all the dangers of the frontier as well. There were problems when the miners changed from panning in the rivers to mining hard rocks. This shift came in 1868 when the emphasis moved from the riverbeds to the surrounding hills and mountains. Far worse than the logistical problems was the tension in the area. In 1888, for example, there was a sizeable attack by Ute Indians under Colorow. These American Indians came all the way from Utah to lead a massacre.

Despite the hardships, the population kept growing. Gold was found in large quantities. In 1900, for example, a single gold mining camp, Cripple Creek, housed over 500,000 people, about the same number of registered Colorado citizens at that time! It was in 1900 that gold hit its stride in the area. Afterwards, gold finds fell off. People moved on. Today the hills and mountains are still pocked with holes leading into a network of tunnels. And today as then, hills destabilized from tunneling can suddenly and unexpectedly collapse!

By 1975 Central City was almost a ghost town. Only a few buildings were still being used. Theatre and jazz performances in wonderful settings, such as in a mosaic-floored restaurant, brought in only a meager trickle of tourists. It looked like Central City would fold. Then came the wave of casinos. Gambling, earlier limited to Nevada, was suddenly allowed in others States in the U.S. On this casino wave Central City again turned into a city where people would come to, hopeful on making a fast buck. With the new laws came new buildings and eager tourists. The area took on a dual personality - Western Town and gambling. Day trippers from Denver rediscovered Central City as did tourists from around the country and the world.

Marcus, Monica and Henry form quite a trio and they cause a stir in the Wagon Wheel Casino where Marcus starts a winning streak not long after starting to gamble. They take a break from gambling to have a nice dinner,

which is less intimate than anticipated, considering Henry's company and the attention they created in the casino. Their costumes also do not make it easy.

Marcus returns to gambling after their meal. Before long he has finished his day's work and he has won \$2 million. He and Monica leave the roulette table tired but exhilarated. The applause of their fans follows them out of the casino, and they walk toward the adjoining hotel. In their suite they find detailed instructions for the next morning. The real show is about to begin. Their staged deaths and the circumstances around it sound plausible. Shank and his gang have done their homework.

Monica is playing along, but one question keeps nagging her. "Marcus, why are you doing this for me?"

"You mean why am I buying you off?," he asks. "Well, I probably wouldn't have to do it now, because tomorrow we're going to die. But, I'm going to do it anyway. You risked your life when you tried to warn me. And there's no way you could know that I was prepared to get us out of any jam we might get into. But, let's not talk about that now - let's talk about that tomorrow, when we're done with the charades."

While Marcus works in Central City as an elderly gambler, Shank is having trouble getting to sleep in Las Vegas. What if those damned capsules work faster than the two weeks? What if they are working right now to poison him in his sleep? What if Waller does not send the antidote? Why did Waller have those tablets on him anyway? Suddenly Shank is wide awake. Shank's bodyguard had searched Waller very carefully. How could he have overlooked the capsules?

Shank jumps out of bed and calls Josi. Josi is groggy, having been awoken from a deep sleep. Shank wants reassurance, and Josi gives it to him. Josi is 100 percent certain that he would have found anything as large as capsules when he frisked Marcus while Marcus was unconscious.

Shank hangs up the phone. He dresses quickly and drives back to the office building and the room in which Marcus' 'interview' took place. He heads straight for the first aid kit. He thrusts it open and rummages through it. Two antibiotic capsules are missing from the package! He runs out to his car, heart racing. On the way back into Vegas he calls his doctor's after-hours number and insists on seeing him. His doctor verifies what he suspects. He has not eaten deadly drugs. Rather, his stomach contains traces of a harmless antibiotic - the same antibiotic contained in the capsules that he took from the first aid kit for comparison. Marcus was bluffing. Might he also be lying about the notary public?

Shank decides that one good joke deserves another. Monica and Marcus will die tomorrow as scripted. But they will not die just for the public facade.

They will die for real. He will then try to find the notary public. If worse comes to worst he will just replace the roulette tables at the end of the year.

While Monica and Marcus are sleeping restfully, Shank is scheming. He contacts his men to give explicit directions on the change of plans. He prepares - despite the promises he has given Marcus - to lead the operation in Central City himself.

First thing the next morning, Marcus deposits a percentage of his winnings into Shank's account. Marcus has kept his side of the bargain. Then Marcus returns to the casino to continue gambling, as per the plan. Marcus has become a legend overnight. Many non-players are watching him as he plays. He sporadically loses but his gains are steadily climbing.

Several times Marcus changes a large number of high-value chips into cash, announcing innocently to onlookers, "In case my winning streak ends, I want to take a little home."

Unfortunately, others playing also want to take money home. They begin following Marcus' lead, betting as he bets. This lemming behavior annoys Marcus as much as it bothers the casino director. The roulette table begins losing large sums of money to gamblers. The director of the casino intervenes, requesting politely but firmly that Marcus leave the casino.

This is Marcus' cue for the next part of the plan. There are some exchanges between the director and Marcus, but only a few. The other players do most of Marcus' talking for him. They do not want him to go, because they are winning large sums of money hanging on the shirrtails of Marcus' winning streak. When the exchanges become loud, the casino police intervene. The director looks at the police, obviously surprised that he does not recognize them as his casino men, but he says nothing. He is just relieved that Marcus and his wife are being escorted out of his gambling casino.

Two of the officers direct Marcus and Monica politely but firmly to the backseat of a car, just as outlined in the master plan that Marcus and Monica studied the night before. One of them gets in the driver's seat and Henry sits next to him. The other officer runs to a car parked further back.

As soon as they sit in the car Monica whispers, "Shank is in the car behind us! I'm sure I saw him. He's not supposed to be here. The capsules—yesterday—were they really poison?"

"No, of course not," Marcus admits. "It was just a trick." "Well, I think he's figured it out - and I'm sure he doesn't find it funny."

"This doesn't look good," agrees Marcus. "There are two scenarios. He's trying to recapture me to extort my gambling "trick," or more likely, he plans to kill us - for real, not just for the public. To be on the safe side, we're going

to leave the car before we get to the destination. You're going to have to trust me again Monica. And do exactly as I say."

Monica looks out the window as they pass the small museum of mining and the large parking lot. She is trying to be brave, but she is scared. She steels herself to follow Marcus' every word - although deep inside she feels that this must certainly be her last trip. The road is leading up and away from Central City, approaching a large fuel depot. Marcus sees a series of 5,000 gallon fuel containers. While they are driving, he uses his T-powers to pull the pistol from Henry's holster and put it on the floor in the back of the car, just out of Monica's line of sight. Henry looks out of the window, noticing nothing.

Marcus whispers to Monica, "Get ready. We're getting out soon. Brace yourself." Unexpectedly and to the surprise of the driver the car brakes sharply. The driver and Henry are thrown forward in their seats. Luckily they had seatbelts on. Marcus and Monica jump out of the car. "If you want to survive, drive away as fast as you can," Marcus yells back at them.

Marcus and Monica scramble quickly uphill, away from the road, toward the first gasoline depot. In the car, Henry has recovered from his shock and is groping frantically for his pistol. Where is it? The driver has also regained his senses and is speeding uphill along the side of the fuel depot as fast as he can, trying to get alongside Marcus and Monica.

The men in Shank's car behind them are shooting at Marcus and Monica with their semi-automatic rifles. To their surprise they continually miss their targets, thanks to Marcus' T-powers. He is using his hands to shield them. As they spray the air with shots, some of those shots hit the barrels of gasoline. A small rivulet of gas is making its way downhill towards the road. The first car misses the gas, but the second car drives right into it. A spark ignites the gas. All hell is about to break loose.

Marcus increases his individual speed 300 fold. He hits Monica's temple with his fist. She collapses into his arms with a surprised look on her face. He carries her and runs as fast as he can. 'I must be going at least 120 miles an hour!' He bolts through the gasoline, which is now flowing like a small river down the road, then runs behind the fuel depot.

Then he begins to panic. 'I can't do this fast enough carrying Monica. There's got to be another way.' He quickly scans his and options and decides to try something new. He uses his T-powers to lift Monica up and propel her through the air. He puts her down behind a big boulder up ahead. Now, without her weight, he can run much faster.

As Marcus runs toward the boulder that shelters her, the fire races up the hill toward the fuel depot. The ground shakes as a large explosion

reverberates through the air. The car carrying Shank and the others explodes as well.

Marcus dives behind the boulder and rolls on top of Monica. Thousands of gallons of gasoline contained in the first storage tank shoot skyward in a large ball of flame. Small explosions that sound like fireworks follow in rapid succession. Black clouds of smoke billow outward in all directions. The boulder is not providing enough shelter. Marcus feels the scorching heat.

They cannot stay here. He knows that other explosions will follow. He pushes his T-powers further. Again he flies Monica through the air while he runs as fast as he can. He needs to put as much distance between him and the fuel depot as quickly as possible. His goal is to reach the town's water reservoir, which is uphill from where they are.

Three more blinding explosions follow. Debris is thrown hundreds of feet from the depot. Marcus quickly extends his pseudo-hands to protect Monica and himself against the flying shards of metal. He is amazed at the distance the metal fragments from the depot are hitting his pseudo-hands.

Finally, they reach the earth wall holding Central City's water supply. Marcus catches his breath as waves of intense gasoline smell are carried on hot gusts of wind. He hears smaller explosions for a while. When it quiets down, he takes two pseudo-hands and cups them into a bowl shape, then fills them with water from the pool. He gently splashes some on Monica's face. Her eyes open slowly and she looks around confused. "Everything is fine," says Marcus as he gathers Monica up in his arms and hugs her. He apologizes for hitting her but explains that he had to do it. It is too much to talk about right now, but he is sure that she can read all about it in tomorrow's newspapers.

They suddenly laugh as they realize they can only hug from a distance. The thick, fake rolls of stomach they have taken on as part of their elderly couple look are getting in the way. They also look ridiculous with their smudged makeup and wigs. At least the stomach rolls contain a change of clothes, which they quickly get into. Within minutes they look like a young couple again, bearing no resemblance to the older couple who won it big in Central City before dying in the flames of the depot fire.

Marcus and Monica walk briskly down the hill to Central City. They risk hiring a taxicab for the long ride to Denver. It is an unusual request as the distance is considerable, but they cover themselves well. Marcus explains they are journalists vacationing in the area, and they just witnessed several huge explosions at the fuel depot. They must get back quickly to report. It sounds credible. In Denver, they get out at the Denver Post building and rush toward it, waving off the driver and their change.

After a cup of coffee they take another taxi to the Marriott Hotel near the airport. They book a room for one night and complain about the airline losing their luggage. The boutique in the hotel is good, but expensive. They hire a car in case they need to get out of Denver quickly.

After weighing the risks, they decide it's safe to take a swim in the hotel pool. They also enjoy a good meal then finally relax and tire to their gigantic bed, embracing each other as they did two weeks ago. "Two weeks ago?" thinks Marcus. "It feels like months have passed!"

"What's happens next?" asks Monica in a slow, drowsy voice.

"I think we deserve a break away. Tomorrow we'll buy some hiking equipment, then we'll drive to Netherlands - not Holland - just outside the Indian Peak Wilderness area near here. There's some rustic accommodations there that I think you'll like. Then we'll drive to Brainerd Lake and hike up to the tip of a glacier. Then you'll have a test - whether you're brave enough to swim in the ice-fed water of a small lake."

Monica smiles as she responds. "Don't you ever stop thinking? You've got it all figured out, haven't you?" Marcus is unsure of how to read Monica's comment. Is she complimenting or complaining? He will have to wait until tomorrow to find out. Monica has fallen asleep.

The next morning it's Monica's turn to surprise Marcus. She offers him an unusual proposition. "You guys often have wild fantasies about what you'd like to do with a woman. Most of you never dare to live them, let alone acknowledge them. As you know already, I'm a bad girl, and I require disciplining once in awhile."

Monica is closely watching Marcus' reaction. She continues, "We're going to play a game. Here are three pieces of paper. On each of them write a wild sexual fantasy that you've had. I'll select one and we'll do anything you've written down. I'll be your slave."

The look on Marcus' face - his wide eyes and intent stare - shows he's stunned by Monica's offer. The more he looks at this beautiful woman, who has already put on a submissive pose, the more excited he gets.

"Anything? You mean you'll do anything I write on one of these pieces of paper, no matter how *dirty* my idea might be?"

"Yes. Oh, and one more point. You have to do what you have written down conscience free. In other words, you can't feel guilty or dirty about it afterwards. You have to do whatever it is you've written down or you're a coward."

Marcus takes the three pieces of paper, hotel stationery letterhead. With red ears he writes down a list of S&M scenes that he has thought about but never imagined he would ever act out. As Marcus focuses intently on the paper, Monica enjoys her cup of morning tea, observing Marcus with

anticipation. When Marcus gives her the three sheets, she doesn't read them all. Instead, she picks up one.

Marcus walks over to behind where Monica is sitting so he can read over her shoulder. The suspense of which scene she has picked is too much for him. He can feel his heart throbbing and the heat of anticipation moving through his body.

"I knew you'd have a good imagination," comments Monica. "I happen to have a couple of the things that we'll need with me. No..." she cuts off Marcus' question. "No, I won't tell you how I got these or where I had them. You have your secrets and I have mine. Now let's get started."

Monica opens a zipped compartment in her small purse. She pulls out a number of things - pieces of thin rope, a chain with two clips, an open mouth ring, a candle and other items that Marcus does not recognize. Monica looks at Marcus expectantly.

Marcus takes the cue. In a hoarse voice he says, "Undress first. I'll then arrange your hands and feet so I can tie you up."

Marcus slowly and carefully ties Monica's hands and feet, leaving her rather exposed.

"I know I've been a bad girl again," says Monica, playing her part. "I know you've got to punish me."

Marcus feels like he is in a dream. More than once he has had this sensation with Monica. He is doing things to her that he never thought he would do outside his fantasies. A few times Monica lets out a small scream, but she always says, "Yes, I know I deserve it."

When Marcus becomes too timid to continue, which happens a couple of times, Monica makes up a story for which she has to be punished. Marcus slips back into his role and continues. Finally, Marcus is exhausted. He has experienced feelings of ecstasy unknown to him before.

Marcus unties Monica and tells her, "And now you'll be loved as you've never been loved before."

Monica looks at Marcus with surprise. "You've got reserves?"

Marcus does not answer. Instead he blindfolds her once more and uses his ten pseudo-hands to drive her from one orgasm to the next. When Monica finally begs Marcus to "Please stop!" Marcus takes off her blindfold and calmly says, "Good morning" as if nothing unusual has happened.

It is Monica's turn to stare in disbelief at Marcus. Monica will never forget Marcus nor will she forget the time they shared and this morning's experience. She looks at him again wondering how he could have touched her as he did - it seemed physically impossible!

Of course she is partly correct. Not only has Marcus had sex unlike never before, so too has Monica never experienced physical sensations like this.

The morning is full of surprises. Marcus shows Monica the *Denver Post's* piece on the "incident" in Central City. The news story is so garbled - trying to make sense of what happened - that they laugh. Two things, however, are stated as certain: the driver and passengers in the second car - 2 or 3 people - and the 2 people who tried to run from the depot on foot are "clearly dead." There is a fuzzy photo showing Marcus standing in an inferno of flames holding the limp body of Monica. The caption reads:

Heroically he tries to carry away his wife, but the gasoline storage tank right behind them (shown with arrow) explodes just seconds after this picture was taken, leaving no possibility of escape.

"How did you manage to get us out of there?" asks Monica quietly, not really expecting Marcus to answer her.

Marcus hesitates, then says, "First, I wasn't standing in the fire. I was standing behind it. You can't tell that from the photo. And second, I used a trick that I don't want to give away, the same way I don't want to tell anyone about my roulette trick."

Marcus veers the conversation away from Monica's questions. He insists that what is important is that they are officially dead as far as the casino Mafia is concerned. "I think I asked you this when we were in the car, but I can't remember. Are you going to send the antidote to Shank's man?" asks Monica.

"I can't, I'm dead. But, yes, you did ask about it in the car, and as you know he doesn't need an antidote. It was just an antibiotic pill. Serves him right to worry about it for a few days," replies Marcus.

Monica hasn't seen the part of Colorado that Marcus wants to show her. As they shop for hiking equipment, Marcus raves about the spot. He describes it as beautiful and fairly remote - but not yet overrun by tourists like Estes Park further north. The next few days pass quickly. Monica enjoys the mountains and the hiking much more than expected. She was nervous when Marcus mentioned rustic accommodation. Once and only once had she ever stayed in rustic accommodations and to her, that meant old drafty buildings with lots of bugs and spiders. Not exactly her idea of a vacation spot. Unlike that rustic spot, that Marcus is speaking of, Netherlands is simple with a few excellent restaurants run by top chefs who have left the rat race of the city. The accommodation is charmingly rustic, but comfortable and clean.

Monica once again impresses Marcus. Not only does she willingly go on extended hikes, she also is daring. She actually takes a dip in the glacier lake that Marcus mentioned to her earlier. But she does place one condition on the glacier swim—that she gets a body-to-body warm-up afterwards. Marcus agrees.

The water is so cold that Marcus can hear Monica gasping for breath. She does a quick dog paddle in a small circle then gets out. As he watches Monica emerge from the icy water, he gets excited watching her--her grace, stature and flawless body. She rushes toward him and he feels her hardened nipples pressed tightly against him. Marcus forgets where he is - forgets that they are exposed at the water's edge - as they warm each other up.

While they are enjoying each other Marcus happens to look up where he notices two hikers, who appear to be watching them from a ledge. They can see Marcus looking toward them, so the couple wave. Marcus and Monica interpret the wave to mean 'Sorry, continue, we didn't mean to disturb you.' Marcus looks at Monica and smiles, saying, "Maybe not all Americans are as puritanical as Europeans think they are." They both laugh, taking the couple's advice.

The time they spend in the Netherlands refreshes them both. But as they drive to the airport their conversation lessens. Reality has caught up with them. They have discussed it before and know they must part. But as that time approaches, it is still very difficult for them. Marcus bought Monica a ticket to Los Angeles so she can visit her parents. He gives it to her when they reach the airport along with another envelope. He asks her to read the second letter in the plane's restroom after takeoff.

At the airport Marcus and Monica embrace for a long time. They both think the same thing. Should they try to stay together for a longer period of time? Monica wants to believe that with Marcus life could be different, but she cannot help remembering her past. On the rare occasion she has tried to have a relationship with a client, it has failed. Likewise, Marcus wants to believe that Monica could be someone he could talk to about his T-powers. However, he knows that he's kidding himself. He does not trust her to that extent. That is why he felt he had to knock her out when they were at the fuel depot. He could not live a normal life with her and with his T-powers.

As soon as the Fasten Seatbelts sign is turned off, Monica gets out of her seat and goes to the toilet, carrying with her Marcus' unopened letter. In the letter Marcus asks Monica to first visit her parents and to spend time with them. He then asks her to start a new and different life with the \$500,000 that he has included with the letter. Marcus has also written other personal, romantic things, asking her to keep these between themselves. Monica returns to her seat with eyes swollen from crying. She immediately sits, puts on her sunglasses and rests her head against the headrest.

Marcus is not ready to leave America just yet. He wants to investigate a phenomenon he discovered by chance. In a souvenir shop in Central City he saw a vial with small gold nuggets in it. When he touched the gold with his

pseudo-hands he felt a sensation run through his body. His reaction makes him think that he might be able to tell if he is touching gold even if he cannot see it.

Marcus parks the car about three miles before Black Hawk. He walks down to the creek, letting his pseudo-hands rummage around in the gravel of the riverbed. Suddenly he touches an object that gives him that "gold nugget feeling." He tries to pull the object out, but cannot, and he knows why. He cannot pull objects through certain substances. He discovered this in his early experiments with his pseudo-hands. What he touches now appears to be covered by a layer of gravel. Marcus gets another pseudo-hand into a scoop shape to remove some of the gravel covering the gold. He pulls out a finger-sized gold nugget!

This discovery is opening new career options for Marcus. Maybe he can retire from casino gambling and start searching for gold?

Marcus decides to grab lunch in Black Hawk at a local diner. He enjoys his burger with the works, but sorely misses a good cup of coffee. What he has found while in America is that coffee is often too weak. Instead of drinking a single cup, he has to drink several. Marcus craves a good, strong coffee, like the ones he gets from the café across from his apartment in Vienna. Now *that* is a good solid cup of coffee. He had strong coffee in America once, but that coffee tasted like the beans were over roasted, almost burnt. He cannot believe the success of the coffee shop chain that was selling this burnt tasting coffee. He has read that the chain's flavored coffees are sweeping the country. How can Americans drink this stuff?

Marcus' fixation on coffee is momentary. As he's staring into his coffee cup, what he is really concentrating on is gold. After his fourth cup of coffee he decides. He will try his luck for a few days with the gold. He needs a few tools to dig out the gold, which will likely be buried under rocks or boulders.

Marcus heads off to the museum in Central City. From everything he reads he decides to try "panning" at Cripple Creek. There will also be fewer tourists there.

On the first day he heads out with a backpack containing six one-liter jars. He hopes to fill the jars by the end of the day. He also carries a shovel and a pick. Marcus walks slowly upstream, starting at a point where the banks slope fairly steeply. He lets his pseudo-hands roam a few inches below the bottom of the water out toward the middle of the creek. He is amazed when he feels nuggets almost every few feet, the largest of which is the size of a hazelnut. He can easily lift out most of these with his T-power because they are covered with just a thin layer of gravel.

Marcus is amazed! Why is there so much gold here? This is a spot where intensive gold mining took place. How could they have overlooked so much?

As Marcus' hands move out from the middle toward the sides of the creek and along the banks, they find nothing. Marcus quickly realizes the reason. The depth of the stream prohibits anyone from mining in the middle, and the steep slopes prevent the use of dredging machinery.

Marcus makes a mental note - the best places to find gold are the deep flowing parts of creeks or rivers. Within an hour Marcus fills the first jar. He can already see he is going to have a problem. Gold weighs 19.3 grams per cubic centimeter. That means that a cube of gold that is 4 inches by 4 inches weighs about 45 pounds! And that means that this jar weighs over 25 pounds - and the jar is not even packed solid! Marcus quickly calculates that he will be able to carry at most 3 jars.

Out of curiosity Marcus pushes his hands deeper into the ground. He quickly finds a nugget the size of an apple. This time, however, Marcus has to dig hard to retrieve it. This nugget weighs at least 10 pounds by itself!

He's convinced that he can mine as much gold as he wants. He can do initial explorations to find out where the gold is, then he can stake a claim on that land. Once located, he can hire someone for excavation. Marcus feels good about his new profession. He has stumbled onto an entirely legal way to make unlimited amounts of money using his T-powers. He does not need money for the time being, but should he in the future, he no longer has to cheat casinos to get it!

This experiment has re-ignited Marcus' curiosity about his T-powers. Can he locate other substances? Or even better, can he find gold in abandoned mines if the gold is buried in rock beneath the earth's surface? Since Marcus is right here in gold country, he would be crazy not to explore these gold options further.

Marcus remembers an abandoned mine along the gravel road that leads from Central City to Interstate Highway 70 - just a few miles before the highway. There is a place where the road makes a sharp, downhill turn to the left. If he recalls correctly, the entrance to the mine is hidden to the right of the bend. It is probably difficult to get into the mine. Most of the mines in the area have vertical shaft entrances, which are difficult to climb down because they have been unused for decades. At least the mine will be abandoned so he can experiment with his T-powers at will.

Marcus goes back into Central City to buy more equipment: a large flashlight, helmet, leather gloves, rope, bottled water, energy bars and extra batteries, just to be on the safe side.

Locating the entrance of the mine is harder than he anticipates. It is more overgrown than when he visited with his parents. Still, it looks like people have recently used the entrance of the mine. Traces of activity in the dry soil and broken branches could have come from animals but Marcus also sees a

piece of torn white cloth stained with what looks like blood. A closer look reveals that Marcus is correct. It's blood.'

On heightened alert, Marcus increases his individual speed 50 fold. He climbs down the vertical shaft. The rusted clamps along the wall still look secure, so he uses them like a ladder. His new leather gloves and solidly soled shoes come in handy. When he reaches the bottom of the shaft, he pauses. A number of horizontal tunnels lead out from this central entrance area.

Going into one of the tunnels are shoe tracks that look recent. Marcus is now wary. He dims his light as much as possible while still being able to navigate the dark passageway. Before he proceeds, he tries to calm himself. Like himself, others may be investigating the old workings. Although he tries, he cannot convince himself the tracks are previous mine enthusiasts. He finds it very unsettling to think that people were here only a short time before him.

As he is wrestling with his fears, Marcus almost forgets to scan within the rock walls for veins of hidden gold. Suddenly he freezes. About 20 feet into the rock he feels a solid vein of gold stretching for at least several feet. The early miners were so close. This find convinces him beyond doubt. He can be the best gold hunter in the world.

Marcus has discovered what he came here for. There is no reason for him to search any further, yet he cannot leave. The tracks of others have made him not only nervous but also curious. He continues down the tunnel for quite a while. He keeps his light dim just in case. When he hears voices, he thinks about turning back. Marcus turns off his light and relies on his pseudo-hands to guide him. He notices light coming from a narrow side tunnel. Carefully, he walks until he can see down into a chamber. Two men are sitting and a third, younger man, apparently exhausted if not unconscious, is tied up not far from them.

Eavesdropping, Marcus pieces together the scene before him. Three men have kidnapped the young man and are holding him for ransom. They don't say where the third man is now, but they and the prisoner have been in the mine for 10 days. They have still not received the money and in their anger have decided to stop feeding their prisoner.

Marcus hesitates briefly, just enough to plan his strategy. He accelerates his individual speed until his movements are a blur. He runs down the steps, takes the weapons from the kidnappers and ties their hands and feet. To the kidnappers, it all lasts less than a second. At his increased time factor of 300 Marcus actually had a leisurely 4 minutes for his surprise attack.

Having tightly bound the kidnappers, he reduces his individual speed to a factor of two. Nobody should know about his T-powers - neither the young

prisoner who is coming around nor the kidnappers. It will be enough for the kidnappers that for the rest of their lives they will not understand what happened to them. Had they fallen asleep? Were they stunned in some way? Just a few minutes ago they were talking about getting out of this dank, dark shaft and leaving the guy here, and now they're hog tied, waiting for police custody!

With the kidnappers safely in hand, Marcus turns his attention to the young man. Marcus gives him water, but only allows him small swallows. He also gives him an energy bar, which is mostly dextrose. He cuts the ropes that have cut into his skin and gently massages his stiff arms and legs. As sure as Marcus is acting in front of the young man, he is conscious that there is a third kidnapper, who could appear at any time. He will, after all, see Marcus' car near the entrance and will surely be armed like the others.

Marcus checks the ropes and gags of the kidnappers one last time. He then puts the kidnappers' weapons into his backpack and smashes their flashlights and lanterns. Tied, gagged and in complete darkness, the kidnappers will not be going anywhere until the police arrives.

Marcus and the young man one slowly climb the stairs out of the side tunnel, Marcus supporting the man to speed their exit. He is not afraid of the third kidnapper and can easily take him using his T-powers. However, he cannot recklessly use those powers because the young man - Helmut Koehler as Marcus now knows, is with him. Helmut is the complicating factor. No one, not even the exhausted Helmut, must know about his parabilities.

Marcus guides Helmut through the tunnels until they reach the bottom of the vertical shaft. Helmut is still shaky and too weak to climb the steep shaft out of the mine. Marcus gives instructions, "here, I'm going to tie this rope under your shoulders. I'm going to climb up and when I'm out I'll tug on the rope. When you feel the tug, start to climb and I'll help you by pulling on the rope. Be careful on the climb because you're still very weak. Here, put on my gloves and my helmet. You need them more than I do. For the time being, just sit down and wait until you feel me tug on the rope."

Helmut nods but Marcus isn't sure he has understood. He's close to collapsing. Marcus climbs as fast as possible. As he reaches the top of the mineshaft he sees the third kidnapper checking out his car. The kidnapper must have just arrived. He is surveying the car and the area, readying two pistols.

Since Helmut is still at the bottom of the shaft Marcus revs up his individual time and acts lightening fast. He snaps off a large branch just above the kidnapper, which hits the kidnapper and brings him to his knees. While he is looking at the tree and rubbing his shoulder, Marcus jumps on him. He takes the kidnapper's weapons and ties him up. He wrestles him into

the back seat of the kidnapper's car, ties him up, and takes the car keys and wallet to give to the police.

Marcus quickly goes back to the entrance of the mine at the bottom where Helmut is slumped, waiting for Marcus to signal him. Marcus tugs on the rope and calls down. It is time for him to try to climb up the stairs of the shaft. Helmut is so weak that he can barely stand alone, so Marcus gently uses his T-powers to support him, hoping that Helmut will not notice. When Helmut emerges from the shaft he is blinded by the bright sunshine. Marcus quickly gives him his sunglasses. Marcus sits Helmut down again and gives him water and bits of energy bar.

Marcus checks once more on the third kidnapper, making sure he can't escape. He also makes sure he will not die from asphyxiation. He's in the car and the sun is strong. Until this point Marcus hasn't gagged the kidnapper, but decides to change his mind and gag him. He then writes largely on a piece of paper and places it underneath the driver side windshield wiper:

ATTENTION: The time is 2:00pm on August 12. The man in this car is a DANGEROUS CRIMINAL. The police will be here soon to take care of him. Do NOT help him in any way. He's not injured and doesn't need drink or food. Stay away!

Helmut is slowly regaining his energy. He is relieved and somewhat emotional in sharp contrast to resigning himself to certain death. "How can I ever repay you?" he asks Marcus.

"Don't worry about it," jokes Marcus. "I'm a Boy Scout so I have to do something good everyday. This was my good deed for the day." Marcus continues, "Your surname sounds familiar. Are you from *the* Koehler family near Milwaukee?"

Helmut smiles. "I guess so. The current director of Koehler is my father."

As Marcus and Helmut are leaving the mine, Marcus asks Helmut to phone his father. When the secretary hears the familiar voice of the kidnapped son, she immediately puts him through to his father. "Dad?" says Helmut softly but excitedly. "Yeah, I'm shaky but I'm okay. I was rescued by a guy from Austria. I'm still not sure how he found me. We're in his car heading toward Denver. We're going to call the police to tell them where to find the kidnappers. Marcus somehow got their guns from them and tied them up. What? Sure, just a minute."

Helmut hands the phone to Marcus. "Hello" is all that Marcus can say. His greeting is answered by a barrage of thanks and emotions from Mr. Koehler.

Marcus says, "No, no need to thank me. I just happened to see your son and it wasn't hard to free him because I surprised the kidnappers. Anyway, where's the best place to take Helmut?"

"Can you take him directly to the Koehler district office in Denver?" asks Helmut's father. "I'll alert them that you're coming, and I'll join you there shortly. I'm in Albuquerque right now, so it won't take me long to get to Denver. Is there anything that my staff can do for you when you arrive?"

"It'd be a good idea to have a doctor for Helmut. He seems to be okay but a checkup would be good. He was in low light and confined for 10 days, and he hasn't had much to eat or drink for the last 2 days."

Marcus looks at Helmut and continues, "And a bed - a nice bed for Helmut to catch up on some sleep. As for me, I do have a request. Please don't tell anyone about me - not my name or that I'm Austrian. I'd prefer to stay anonymous."

To Marcus' surprise, Mr. Koehler chuckles strangely at this. "Yes, I can understand," he replies. Marcus is baffled by Mr. Koehler's reaction but just shrugs it off.

Marcus asks Helmut to call the police to report where to find his kidnappers. Rather than having a lengthy discussion, Marcus asks Helmut to keep the call short. The Koehler family will handle the details in person.

When Marcus drops Helmut at the Koehler office in Denver he wants to leave immediately. But everyone insists that he stay. Despite his best judgement, he briefly stays. He's apprehensive about talking to the police and definitely does not want to have his photo taken. If his photo hits the media, the casino Mafia in Vegas will realize he's alive. And this is the last thing that Marcus wants.

After a brief hesitation, Marcus puts the address of a Denver hotel into an envelope and gives it to the office manager, asking "Can you please give this to Mr. Koehler when he arrives? He can contact me there if he wants to. But please make sure you don't give this to anyone else. And please don't tell anyone about me. Just say that Helmut came to Denver by taxi and forget the rest."

The office manager is surprised with Marcus' actions. But he has been requested by Mr. Koehler himself to do whatever Marcus requests. He simply nods agreement.

Marcus does not have a chance to say good-bye to Helmut. He tries but after Helmut's medical checkup and a light soup, he has fallen asleep. Marcus leaves not a minute too soon. As he approaches the corner he sees two police cars driving into the Koehler building parking lot.

Marcus checks into the nondescript hotel near the airport, whose address he has left for Helmut's father. Not even 15 minutes pass before Mr. Koehler shows up at Marcus' hotel. He is so profusely thankful that Marcus feels embarrassed. Mr. Koehler does not stay long. As he leaves he gives Marcus a leather attaché case. "What's this?" asks Marcus surprised.

"The two million dollars that you've made."

"What?"

Mr. Koehler is as stunned as Marcus. "You mean you didn't know about the reward for the return of my son? Two million dollars. No questions asked.... If you didn't know about the reward, why do you want to remain anonymous?" Marcus now understands why Mr. Koehler chuckled earlier on the telephone. "I'm just a tourist, but I've got a reason I'd like to stay in the background. It has nothing to do with money."

Mr. Koehler looks at Marcus for a moment then says, "Well, it's yours. And we'll honor your anonymity, although it will make the prosecution of the three criminals much harder."

Marcus is thoughtful. Finally, he says, "The police don't know about me, do they? I'm sure that Helmut called them from the car. It'd be best if you concoct a story about Helmut freeing himself. The three kidnapers will tell such garbled stories that nobody will believe them anyway. Please tell Helmut that to protect me I want him to say that he freed himself. When we meet some other time I'll tell you both why I'm so insistent on this." "Oh, and one more thing," continues Marcus. "I don't need the two million dollars. But there is another way that you could help me."

At the end of the conversation, Marcus is officially employed as an Austrian representative of Koehler. His annual salary is \$150,000, roughly the interest that can be made on \$2,000,000. This position helps Marcus who needs income. Without income the Austrian tax office will become suspicious as he will be spending money without any known source of income.

Mr. Koehler and Marcus say good-bye after Mr. Koehler makes sure that Marcus knows that he is always welcome to come to the Koehler family home. Mr. Koehler also insists that Marcus give him a call if ever he needs help. He does not know Marcus but he knows that something serious is going on with him. Marcus is touched by Mr. Koehler's sincerity and generosity. He wonders if his insistence on anonymity is overkill, but Mr. Koehler goes along with it. Like Marcus, he wonders if Marcus has seen too many movies or if his precautions are warranted.

Many years later, when he desperately needs help, Marcus will wonder at his foresight in arranging for his aliases and for having people who are indebted to him.

Marcus has a long car trip ahead of him. He's carrying over 300 pounds of gold in the trunk and is taking it to his friend Peter Cobb in Chicago. There is no way that he can fly to Chicago with that amount of the gold, given airport security. So, he is driving, which gives him plenty of time to think. He is sure that Peter can convert the gold into cash.

Foremost in Marcus' mind is not the Vegas casinos or the shoot out at the fuel depot. Rather he is thinking about how he saved Helmut. Finally, he is happy that he was able to use his T-powers to a positive end. He smiles.

Peter Cobb is surprised to see Marcus again so soon. But the real shock comes when he sees 300 pounds of gold nuggets in the back of Marcus' car.

After he regains his composure, Peter speaks, "Sure, I can turn this into cash and deposit it into your account, minus the 2% as we agreed. But two things first—if you continue like this, I'll be able to close my import-export business and live off the 2% commission from you. Second, you've, shall I say, have diversified. Marcus, stay out of trouble, okay?"

After Marcus' trip to Chicago, he wants to return to Austria. However, before his return, he must finish his plans. He goes to New Zealand to try his fake passport - Marcus Simmer. He is nervous, but immigration accepts his passport without question.

Marcus has read a lot about New Zealand - about its Milford Track and its natural beauty. His first impression of New Zealand, particularly Auckland, is positive. He likes the bustle of Queen Street, the harbor and the university, of which he has heard many impressive things. The professors at the university are doing interesting research. And the university is only a stone's throw from the center of the city. He also enjoys the park next to the university and wanders around the university grounds.

The first day Marcus opens an account at the ASB Bank on the corner of Queen and Wellesly Streets. He also buys a nice apartment in Ponsonby, one of Auckland's districts. The real estate agent who sold Marcus his apartment is impressed with his decisiveness (and his thick wallet)! He calls Marcus the next day to tell him he has an unusually nice piece of property on Great Barrier Island, a little developed island off Auckland. The tract of land includes a stretch of beach with sandy coves, rocky outcroppings, two waterfalls, and stands of Kauri and Pohutukawa, trees native to New Zealand. The property is at \$110,000 for about 2,000 acres.

The realtor's description of the property raises Marcus' curiosity. He flies in a small plane with the agent to the island. Someone picks them up in a jeep and drives them to the property. Marcus doesn't have much time to look around, but the place intrigues him. Now that he has money, he sometimes wonders if he is losing a sense of the value of it. Is he buying these places because he can or because he needs secret places in the world?

Again, without hesitation, Marcus buys the Great Barrier Island property. The fact there is little infrastructure does not put him off. There are no paved roads, electricity, phone networks or regular flights to the mainland. And to top it off, the island has more rain than Auckland, and Auckland has more than enough! Despite these things Marcus follows his compulsion to buy.

By buying the two properties so quickly, Marcus has gained a reputation in Auckland. He is well regarded for his decisiveness and is known to have the financial resources to back his decisions.

The flight to Vienna is a relaxing trip. Marcus reduces his subjective time to about $1/20$, making the 25-hour trip feels like 1 hour. He arrives in Vienna alert and well rested much to the surprise of the flight crew.

8 Maria

Second half of August 2003

As Marcus takes a taxicab from the Vienna airport to his apartment in Koelnerhofgasse it suddenly hits him. Although he has been around many people the last two months, he is still alone. Peter is a friend that he can trust but he is in Chicago. Marcus has no true companion, and no true girlfriend - here or abroad.

There is Greta and Andrea, but they are friends, not lovers or girlfriends any longer. And there is Maria in Graz, but she is an unknown. He is arriving back from his trip to America, and there is no one waiting for his return.

Well, there are two people waiting for him, his parents. He phones them as soon as he returns and tells them about his trip to America. His parents are delighted that he is now a permanent employee - the Austrian representative - of Koehler. They have heard of this company because of the Koehler family's link to Austria.

His parents ask him many questions about his new job, including how much he earns. When he tells them the sum, they are very impressed. He can hear pride in his father's voice. This makes Marcus want to continue. "And I'll have a company car," says Marcus. "Just in time, my old car is reaching the end of its life. Do you want to have it as a backup to Dad's car Mom?"

This company car line also enables Marcus to buy a new car without fielding a lot of questions from his father.

Greta is happy to hear from Marcus, but prefers to meet him for an afternoon coffee rather than a dinner date. Marcus knows what that means. Greta looks great, suntanned, self-confident and tastefully dressed. Marcus tells her that she looks fantastic and Greta appreciates his compliments. They tell each other what they have been up to the last few weeks. Marcus heavily screens his recount, but raves about Las Vegas, Lake Powell and the mountains west of Denver. He mostly ignores Greta's 'Certainly you weren't alone all that time' comments or answers with "Not always."

She tells Marcus about her new job. She also tells him that she was sad and a little angry when Marcus left for the States without her. But, everything has worked out well for her. She has gotten to know a European Union (EU) officer who has just established his office in Vienna. She tells Marcus how she has shown him the highlights of Vienna, often taking him to some of the same places that they used to frequent together. She talks fondly of her new lover and about their holiday on the Greek Island of Rhodes. It was like a dream for Greta to sail there. She speaks in great detail about their day trips and their activities, sometimes including more detail than Marcus cares to hear.

If she is trying to make him jealous and interested, she almost succeeds. Her manner is flirtatious and her low cut, tightly fitting top shows off her evidently completely tanned breasts. She also obviously enjoys leaning forward and squeezing Marcus' arm to emphasize things she says.

Marcus cannot help but compare Greta with Monica. Greta is a city girl who is very interested in bars, dancing and partying. Outside of concerts, she is not interested in science, literature, art or outdoor adventures. When it comes down to it, her world is at odds from his. Monica's world is equally different from Marcus', but in other ways. He wonders whether the chameleon Monica and he would not blend better than he and Greta. But, Greta's world no longer includes him anyway.

Marcus patiently listens to Greta as she raves about her new friend. He congratulates her for finding someone who loves her and vice versa. She is surprised when he suggests that they meet for dinner sometime. This suggestion and other things during their conversation makes Greta think Marcus has changed during his trip to America. She knows that there is a lot that he is not telling her and these omissions have probably caused the biggest changes. She is at the same time happy for him and saddened for herself. This post-America Marcus seems less childish and more mature. She would have liked to have gotten to know the new Marcus better. She shakes herself out of her thoughts. She has a new lover who adores her. And she is happy that Marcus seems willing to be her friend rather than a jealous ex-boyfriend. She will leave it at that.

Greta has always had a good idea of the emotions being felt by the people she meets. This trait is how Klaus Baumgartner noticed her. One evening when they had attended the same concert, Klaus noticed the weak aura of an emotiopath. Since this observation, they had become close friends and lovers.

Marcus is determined to at least finish his Bachelor of Science degree in physics. So he decides to return to the university in the fall of 2003. There, he passes two exams in short succession without any problems. By increasing his subjective time he is able to work through a number of books in just two days. Learning is as easy or as difficult as it was before, it just appears easier because of his ability to manipulate his subjective time.

Since Marcus can get what he needs from books, he attends very few lectures. His absence from lectures unknowingly frustrates Klaus Baumgartner. Klaus attends all major classes in physics, as planned, in hopes of locating the person with the telekinetic powers.

Overall Klaus is dissatisfied with his progress in Vienna. It becomes quickly apparent that people with parabilities are very rare. Greta is the only person whom he has found thus far and her parability as emotiopath is very

weak. Her parability is useful in helping her get along with people, and they make her a good companion and lover, but she is of no value to the PPU. Because she is of no use to the PPU, he does not mention the organization to her.

Nevertheless, Greta is the only positive experience that Klaus has had since coming to Vienna. He enjoys being with her, and he finds that he is falling more in love with her. He'll never forget the holiday in Greece. The guilt he feels toward his wife in Brussels is lessened by some juicy bits of gossip he hears about her from his colleagues.

Greta has not mentioned Marcus at all to Klaus. If she had or spoke of any of the strange circumstances surrounding how they met, Klaus would know immediately that Marcus is his man.

Marcus keeps postponing his phone call to Maria in Graz and to Andrea in Innsbruck. He wants to catch up with them, but just can't seem to bring himself around to it. Finally, Andrea phones him to tell him that she will be coming to Vienna for a week. Would he be available to meet up once during her trip? He responds enthusiastically that he would be very happy to meet up with her. And he is happy that she enjoyed the two postcards he sent her from America.

"I don't want to talk you into anything Andrea," says Marcus. "But I do have a spare bedroom in my apartment, including a spare bathroom. You're more than welcome to stay here if you want to. No strings attached." Andrea hesitates, then he hears her shout away from the phone, "Tony, Marcus says that I can stay with him in Vienna. He has a spare bedroom and bathroom. Is that okay with you?"

Evidently Tony agrees, because Andrea thanks Marcus for his offer and says that she will take him up on it. She makes it very clear to Marcus that she is now living with Tony does not want any "secrets."

From the first moment that Andrea gets off the train, she and Marcus get along. Neither brings up the incident on Hochtorn mountain.

Both go to work during the day. Marcus is mostly involved with his studies and Andrea is collaborating with a colleague from medical school on some research. As for the rest of the day, they spend most of that with each other. Even preparing breakfast together is fun.

After work they roam through Vienna. Marcus enjoys showing Andrea his city and they often stay out until quite late. Andrea is a willing participant in all of the nonsense that Marcus proposes. One time after watching the fancy clock in Hohen Markt, whose figurines emerge every hour to act out a story, she loses a bet with Marcus. Marcus claims to be able to hit the pendulum of the clock with a small stone. Of course, he does. Andrea does not know that Marcus is cheating by using his T-powers. The ping of the

stone is so loud that a number of people who live around the square open their windows to see what is going on. Why did the clock make such a loud, odd sound in the middle of the night?

The local newspaper reports the next day, "Famous clock strikes miraculously at 1:34 am. Experts are baffled."

The report boosts Klaus Baumgartner's morale. The telekinetic he is looking for is obviously still in Vienna, and he is still making himself known. Klaus spends the next several evenings posted near the clock, hoping that the telekinetic will return. Although the clock is only a few hundred yards from where Marcus lives, Klaus' luck still has not changed. He does not see Marcus. On the evenings that Klaus waits - rather impatiently - Andrea and Marcus are enjoying the Vienna nightlife. On one evening they go to a musical. Andrea agrees with Marcus that Vienna really is on par with London regarding musicals! Another night they take in a movie. One day the fall weather is so glorious that Marcus convinces Andrea to take the day off. He takes her to the Danube Island and they rent bicycles. They go as far south as they can, deep into the nude zone. When Marcus jumps into the water with nothing on, Andrea has little choice but to do the same.

"Marcus, you are as much a voyeur and rascal as ever!" laughs Andrea. Although she is with Tony, she likes Marcus appreciative glances. "Come on, don't look like that," teases Andrea. "I've put on a little weight since I saw you last."

Marcus smiles and replies, "I'm not looking at you because you've put on weight. I don't think you have. I'm looking at you because you are just plain beautiful."

The days pass quickly and pleasantly. They both feel close to each other. They are not physically intimate, except a touching of hands here and there. Andrea even adds three days to her stay. Marcus wonders whether he should ask her to stay longer. Maybe they can have more than a friendship.

Two days before Andrea is planning on leaving, Marcus makes a dinner reservation in the King of Hungary restaurant, a very nice, typically Viennese restaurant. This is where he will ask how strongly she feels about Tony, and whether she would consider staying here with him. Did she not say herself that she was having much more fun here in Vienna than she does in Innsbruck? Was she comparing the cities or the men?

Marcus wants the evening to go perfectly. He wants them to enjoy the food and each other's company, but he also wants to have a serious talk with her. Andrea is looking forward to the evening. Like Marcus, she has something serious - life changing - that she wants to talk with him about.

From the very start, the evening has a pleasant, romantic feel. It is more than chance that brings their hands together often as they laugh and talk over appetizers. Finally, Marcus has worked up his courage.

"Andrea, I like you very much, probably more than I should. We've always been good friends and mountaineering comrades. I know you have Tony but would you consider staying longer with me in Vienna? Before you answer, I have to make a confession. And I have to ask you not to tell anyone."

Marcus is going to tell Andrea about his T-powers. He has never told anyone about these and he is very nervous. He knows, however, that this may impact Andrea's decision, and he has to be honest with her if they want to take a shot at being together.

Andrea thinks that Marcus wants to tell her of his many recent relationships. She knows of Marianne and she has heard of Greta. A friend of hers also saw Marcus with a beautiful woman in Las Vegas. As much as she likes him, from what she knows (or has heard secondhand) of his private life, she has him classed as a womanizer and a voyeur. She also has the impression that he is more interested in sex with frequently changing partners than she cares for. This impression leads her to believe that her close call with the boulder when on Hochtor was an opportunity that Marcus seized to have sex with her.

Convinced that Marcus is about to confess his recent "loves," she decides to cut him off, her hurt feelings apparent in her vehemence. "You don't have to answer to me for anything, so save your breath. I don't want to hear your confessions."

Andrea stops a moment, then continues in a softer voice. "Please, let's just stay friends, but before you continue, I want to tell you that I'm three months pregnant, and I'm going to marry Tony."

Marcus feels he's been hit by lightning. He wonders what Andrea means when she says that he is not answerable to her. Why is she talking to him with such a tone? They got along so well for the past ten days, what's happened?

Andrea feels desperate. She hears herself speaking harshly but cannot control herself. She likes Marcus very much and can easily imagine herself living with him if only he could promise to stay with her and not change partners so often. She also wants to tell Marcus something important, but now she cannot. After her sharp words, how can she tell him how she feels about him? How can she tell him that Tony is a nice guy but there is something missing with him? She does not feel the fire and emotion with Tony that she feels with Marcus.

And Tony - how can she let Tony down? When she told him that she was pregnant, he was jubilant and immediately asked her to marry him. In contrast, Marcus' life has been one of travel and women, not one woman, but many. How can she explain her situation about her pregnancy? She thinks desperately, 'Marcus, please don't skirt the issues like a cat sniffing at milk that's too hot. Tell me that you love me and want to marry me, even if I am pregnant. And then I can tell you something that you don't even suspect.'

A loud series of coughs at another table interrupts everything. Something large is stuck in the guest's throat. The man's friends have jumped up and are slapping him on the back. But the man is still choking. Marcus can hear a waiter on the phone shouting the address of the restaurant to an ambulance driver, but the ambulance will be too late. The man's face has already changed from red to a deep purplish blue.

Marcus concentrates his T-powers on the person who is about to suffocate. With his pseudo-hands he enters the upper part of the windpipe and finds a piece of bone. The windpipe has gotten very narrow and virtually no air is passing through it. Slapping his back will not help at all. The bone is wedged too tightly. Marcus stretches the windpipe with one pseudo-hand, making the man to wheeze horribly. With another pseudo-hand he takes hold of the bone and propels it out through the man's mouth.

Breathing heavily the man leans back in his chair. He is rapidly recovering, and the restaurant is beginning to return to normal. As Marcus turns back toward the table, the man's color is returning to his face. He hears the man apologize to his friends, the waiters and the other customers.

Andrea notices that Marcus is detached when he turns back around to face her table. She misinterprets his silence as disinterest in their own conversation, so she looks down at her plate. She is determined to finish eating her dinner without crying.

Marcus is unaware of the emotional roller coaster Andrea is on. He is caught up in thinking he just saved a man's life because he happened to be sitting at a nearby table. This makes him feel good. It is quickly obvious, however, that the ambience that filled the start of the evening is gone. They both pick a bit at their dinners and they soon leave.

Andrea decides to leave a day earlier. Marcus drives her to the train station. Their parting is subdued, but emotional. Marcus cannot understand why Andrea seems sad. She has everything she wants - she said as much at dinner. Andrea is touched by Marcus' concerned looks. Either he is an excellent actor or he really is confused about her behavior. Should she get off of the train and fall into his arms? She just wants to tell him the truth. Although she can picture herself living in Vienna, she can't get herself to get off disembark from the train. And Marcus does not want to interfere, though

all he wants to do is take Andrea by the hand. Neither acts. The decision is made for them.

Although the incident in the restaurant shows Marcus once again how much his T-powers can help people, his enthusiasm for everyday life dwindles. He wonders if he is wasting time by studying physics, but he does not know what else to do. He thinks of Andrea often, but as a friend rather than a potential lover or partner.

Once again Marcus feels alone. This time, however, the loneliness he feels is so heavy it's almost tangible. He wonders whether he should use his T-powers again to speed up the process of getting close to someone.

Marcus decides he needs a change in his life. He will go on an expensive trip. After all, why should he live like an ordinary student when he is really a millionaire? Although this seems to be the easy answer, it is not the real one. Marcus knows that expensive trips, cars and women will make him feel good, but only temporarily. Maybe that is all that he will experience in life,

Before he takes his trip, Marcus decides to call Maria from Graz as promised. She seems genuinely happy to hear from him. They decide on dinner at the Rauchhof near Stainz, a beautiful country inn not far from Graz. On the day of their date, he washes his new car and drives to Maria's parent's house to pick her up.

Maria introduces Marcus to her parents. "This is the guy I told you about who impressed our whole group in Eisenerz by his talents in throwing stones. Almost good enough for a cabaret performance," she jokes. "He's taking me out for a romantic dinner to seduce me. But he doesn't realize that I won't be seduced unless he's got a nice new BMW and I have my own apartment."

The parents try, but cannot suppress their smiles. Marcus joins them in laughing at Maria's forthrightness. Her father is a lawyer and her mother works in a pharmacy. As they chat they both claim to have nothing to do with their daughter's humor gene!

Marcus was about to say something, then stops. "Go on," prods Maria looking at Marcus.

"I'm sorry," Marcus apologizes. "But a very inappropriate joke entered my head when your mother said she worked in a nearby pharmacy. I just happened to buy some things for my car's first aid kit on the way over here."

"Please, tell the joke," insists Maria's mother. "We like a good joke!"

Marcus is very embarrassed and feels himself blushing. Maria's father comes to Marcus' rescue. "I'm sure Marcus was thinking that it would have been embarrassing if you had served him in the pharmacy and instead of buying a first aid kit he had purchased a pack of condoms. I'm sure that's the joke Marcus was thinking of. Am I right?"

Marcus' blush says it all. Minutes later it is Maria's turn to blush. Marcus opens for Maria the passenger door of a new BMW.

"You have a new car?" stammers Maria.

"Yes, so I can seduce young beautiful women more easily," quips Marcus. Maria looks at Marcus and they both laugh. He thinks about how pretty she is. She is not wearing much makeup, but she looks radiant. She is wearing a light sleeveless sweater which shows off her smooth neckline, jeans and simple, but elegant shoes. She has laid her jacket on her knees in case it gets cooler later on. Her hair falls naturally in waves to just above her shoulders. Her eyes are warm and deep, and she has used just a touch of makeup to highlight them. Marcus finds himself looking at her a bit too long. He awkwardly apologizes as he turns to start the car.

It is a mild fall evening. The sun is still up, but just barely. The sky is beginning to turn deep orange and red. The mountains to the west of Graz are now dark silhouettes against the blazing sky colors. The trip to Stainz, southwest of Graz, is short, and the mood in the car is friendly, familiar and relaxing. They drive past a field where the pumpkins have already been harvested. Empty pumpkin shells are scattered about the field. The seeds have been trucked off to the mills to produce Styrian pumpkin oil. Maria mentions that although it is unusual, she has come to enjoy the taste of Styrian pumpkin oil. She has also heard that the oil has a number of properties attributed to it. Marcus is not aware of the properties but before Maria can list them, they come to another field. In this field someone is burning potato plants. The strong smell hits them as they pass; a rabbit is nibbling on the edges of a corn field.

"I was afraid that you were not going to call," says Maria. "I had no idea that you spent a few weeks in the States. You'll have to tell me about what you did there. I've only been to the U.S. once and we stayed on the East coast, in the Maine and Boston areas. When we were there they were having a beautiful fall. The colors of the trees were amazing. I guess it would have been the same for you."

"Colorado was beautiful but it was too early for the fall colors. But I've heard that Maine can be beautiful in fall," says Marcus. "And you'll have to tell me about how you spent your summer."

Maria tells Marcus about a number of mountain hikes she did in the Enns Valley. As she talks, Marcus visualizes each trek. He grew up in that area and knows every place she mentions. Her favorite hut is the Hess hut because it can be accessed from various starting points and once there, there is a selection of hikes to choose from. She talks about the various Hess hut hikes, such as the track that goes up the impressive Hochtör mountain, and the

somewhat easier Planspitze hike. There is another easy hike to the mountains in the east, but she cannot remember the name.

"You mean the Hochzinoedl?" asks Marcus. "Yes! That's it. You know the area?"

Marcus laughs. "I'm from Eisenerz. The mountains that you're talking about are mountains that I've grown up with and have hiked in them often. But please, continue. I like listening about where you've been and your descriptions of the treks."

As their conversation continues, Maria tells Marcus she has started studying psychology at the University of Vienna. She will focus on cognitive phenomena. "And," she hesitates, "I'm going to look into topics that you might consider crazy, like parapsychology."

Marcus hears University of Vienna and parapsychology, both things that interest him. "You mean you're going to look into phenomena like hypnosis, divining rods and such?" asks Marcus.

Maria smiles. "Well, partially. I'm interested in investigating whether there's any scientific evidence for phenomena like telepathy, teleportation, telekinesis and so on. None of those things have been proven scientifically, so you'd think they don't exist. But I'm looking at it from a different angle. Suppose you had some such gift. I think you'd have to hide it or else the world would persecute you for being different. So, do such gifts *not* exist because they are physically impossible or because they are kept under wraps? And if the latter is true, then they *might* exist."

"Suppose, for example, that you could read another person's thoughts," continues Maria. "That would mean you're good in telepathy. Do you think that other persons would accept you and be comfortable around you if you could read their minds? This may well be the reason that such talents exist, or did exist, but why we haven't heard anything about them. Maybe some *were* found out and were either revered as gods or burnt on the stake as witches."

Marcus is flabbergasted. Why is Maria interested in such things? He is quiet now as he takes a romantic shortcut to the inn where they are having dinner. The narrow road is lined with chestnut trees. Between the trees they can see rolling vineyards. They soon reach the inn and are greeted by the friendly manager whom Marcus has met a few times before. He has reserved a nice table for them in the open. "Don't worry," says the manager. "If you get too cool, just come inside. I've also reserved a space there for you, and I've lit the fireplace, just in case."

"We'd like to take a stroll through the gardens and meadows before we have dinner," says Marcus. "Is that okay?" "Sure, by all means."

While they're walking, they pass the inn's tennis courts and watch as two people are playing. They agree, half in fun and half in earnest, to have a game in the future. After crossing a little bridge Marcus shows Maria the pond. Trout are bred in the stream that feeds the pond. Marcus thinks how nice it would be to take a swim right now.

They then walk past the vegetable fields which supplies the restaurant with fresh vegetables. The freshness of the food is one of the biggest attractions of the restaurant. Along with the homegrown vegetables and the fresh fish, the restaurant also has its own small animal farm.

Marcus and Maria now walk between the fields and a dense row of bushes. The sky is getting dark. Suddenly Maria pulls Marcus through some bushes. "Shhh, there are deer grazing on the other side!" Indeed, behind the thicket of bushes are about a dozen deer grazing peacefully in an opening. Marcus is surprised that Maria can see them. He looks at Maria, who half smiles at him. Marcus remembers that smile. It was the same smile that she gave him when they were at Lake Leopoldstein and he skipped the stone across the lake. Marcus feels a strange sensation. Without noticing he takes Maria's hand, saying, "You have very unusual eyes."

"Maybe we both have something rather unusual," replies Maria calmly.

Their hands remain together for a long time as they continue walking. Only when they get back to the inn do they realize how intertwined their fingers have become. Marcus breaks a moment of awkward silence by pointing out to Maria the house opposite the inn. "This is where Reinhard P. Gruber lives, probably the best known living writer of Styria. Do you know him?"

"I've read a few of his books, like *Hoedlmoser* and *Once to the USA and back*. But I've only seen him in person once at the opening of a big fair." Maria laughs and continues. "He gave a speech that consisted of buzz-words only. The speech was okay locally, but as a whole it didn't make any sense. It was just a parody of opening speeches. I think only half the people listening actually got the point."

For dinner, they select the delicate chicken liver in pearl-onion sauce, which is a house specialty. As they talk, one topic leads to another. They talk about their families. Maria mentions her grandmother whom she loves dearly. She has severe diabetes but is in good spirits nevertheless. They talk about life and death and whether foresight would be good. Would it be good to know at what age you will die so that you can live life more fully and consciously? They talk about courage and whether courage can be practiced. And they talk about the many books that they have read.

They are both astonished to find that by the end of their main courses they have only covered a few topics. They have so much more to discuss. As they

order dessert, Marcus cannot hold back. He tells Maria that he lied when they were at the lake and they first met. He is unattached.

"If you're asking about me," Maria says amused, "I don't have a boyfriend right now either. I think I like you, and I hope you forgot your threat at the lake." Marcus looks lost.

"When we first met at the lake, you said that we'd meet for dinner once."

Their mood is becoming more intimate. The coolness of the evening forces them to move closer to each other, and Marcus puts his arm around Maria's shoulder. Maria smiles. "I've promised some friends that I'd meet them at the M1 bar in the city," says Maria when she looks at her watch. "It's getting late, particularly since I have to get up early tomorrow. Want to join me?"

Marcus agrees, reluctantly. He would much rather spend time with Maria alone.

In Graz's M1 bar, groups of young people are milling around talking, laughing and dancing. The music is so loud that it makes talking difficult. Maria introduces Marcus to her friend Veronica, who says with a wink, "My friends call me Vera. Please call me Vera."

To Marcus' dismay Maria seems to be monopolized by her friends. She stays a brief while and then rather abruptly prepares to leave. Before she leaves, however, she takes Marcus' hands in her own and looks into his eyes, "Marcus, I *really* enjoyed myself this evening. Thanks for everything. I hope we can see each other again soon."

After giving him a kiss on the cheek, Maria continues, "Sorry, I have to leave so soon. Why don't you stay awhile with Vera, but watch out for her! This is my evening, not hers!" Marcus laughs, "I'm sorry that you have to leave already too. But if Vera doesn't mind, I'll stay a little while longer. And don't worry. If anyone were to seduce me tonight it could only be you."

Vera overhears this comment and smiles. She is spicy, sexy and popular. She also knows the Graz nightlife, and before the night is over has introduced Marcus to numerous people and secret bars. Vera is not shy. She slips her arm through Marcus' and touches him with intimacy and familiarity. As they leave the last of the bars, she invites him to her apartment for a nightcap.

Marcus does not want to join her. He finds it inappropriate that he has a final drink with Vera rather than Maria. But, Vera insists. As soon as Vera shuts the door to her apartment, she makes it clear to Marcus that she is interested in more than just a drink. Marcus is very aware of Vera's physical beauty. She is slim and has nice curves. And she dresses to flaunt it. She also has a gregarious and infectious smile.

Marcus admits he is very tempted. He has had too much to drink and Vera has been priming him for just this moment. He remembers when they were in the Tequila Bar earlier. Vera not only licked lemon juice and salt from his hand but also took his finger deep in her mouth and sucked it. And then there is Marcus' sex life since he has returned from the U.S., or more to the point, his lack of sex life. He could easily kiss her and let her spaghetti stringed dress slip from her shoulders.

But, this is Maria's evening. Maria even said so herself before she left M1. He has thought of her often throughout the evening, wishing she could have joined them. Marcus is very attracted to her, but his feelings go much deeper than just a physical attraction. 'Don't be silly,' he thinks to himself. 'Love. It can't be love, you haven't known her for more than a few hours!' Although he mocks himself, he still cannot help feeling very emotional about Maria.

Marcus looks at Vera. If he wants fast sex, there will be other opportunities. Tonight he wants to think about Maria. Of course, Maria probably would never find out, but how could he feel comfortable with her if he did anything with Vera? It is important to build on the trust that Maria has placed in him, not destroy it. Marcus decides to leave. As Marcus tries to take his leave graciously, he comes across like a physics teacher talking to a student. "Vera, you're beautiful, attractive and sexy. I'm sure I'm not telling you anything new, or anything that hasn't been said to you dozens of times before. So, there's no need for me to tell you just how attractive you are. Anyone who spends the night with you can count himself lucky. I'm flattered that you've been so.... outgoing... with me, and I've enjoyed this evening. But this evening is my evening with Maria. I really like Maria, and I don't want to - no I can't even think about disappointing her. I'm sure you understand. And I'm sure that you won't be insulted by me leaving because it isn't about you, it's about Maria and I."

Vera stands in the room smiling thoughtfully as Marcus closes the door behind him.

Against his own better judgement, Marcus drives back to Vienna. It is two o'clock in the morning, and he has had too much to drink. He compensates by increasing his individual time. He makes a mental note that he must test his hand-eye coordination under the influence of alcohol. If he doubles his individual time when he has drunk alcohol, would that be the equivalent to his "normal" time when he is sober?

Just as soon as Marcus shut the door, Vera turns off her cassette recorder. She has recorded the entire conversation between them. She calls Maria, who picks up the phone on the first ring. "Well?" asks Maria anxiously, trying to

control her voice. She wants to appear only moderately interested. "Did you manage to seduce him? You felt pretty sure about it when I left...."

"No. I've never experienced a situation like this before. I tried all my tricks on him, and I made it more than clear that you would never hear about whatever happened between us. He did compliment me, and he did come to my apartment, but I really had to push him! So, long story short, I completely failed in seducing him. I made it very clear that I was a willing participant, and I flashed a lot of skin throughout the evening. Most men - no, all men - fall for it. Anyway, I've recorded everything that happened. Maybe you should listen to it now, if you feel as much for him as he obviously does for you Maria."

Maria does not hesitate. She will be right over. When Maria arrives, Vera has already ordered pizza. Vera tells Maria about the bars they visited and what they did. She then turns on the recorder. Maria swallows hard a few times as she listens. Vera, Maria's best friend, watches her closely.

"I think that the two of you have something nice going," says Vera quietly. She stops the tape and ejects it. "Here, in case you want to hear it again."

Maria embraces Vera. "Thanks for agreeing to test him for me Vera. It was a mean thing to do, I know. And I'm going to tell him about it."

Vera counters, "Yes, I agree it was a mean thing to do, but don't tell him. I'm sure you can reciprocate in another, nicer way. Drive safe on the way home."

Marcus is disappointed that Maria does not call him. He decides to visit his parents in Eisenerz, which happens to be close to Graz. 'Why doesn't she call me?' he wonders. The weather forecast is excellent for his trip to Eisenerz - excellent that is for a hike up the Reichenstein mountain, one of his favorite hikes.

After some contemplation, Marcus gives in. He swallows his pride and calls Maria, asking her if she would like to join him on the hike. She immediately and enthusiastically accepts. She is also happy to stay overnight in the guestroom of his parents' house so that they can get an early start on the hike. This is Maria's first time meeting Marcus' parents, and she feels as much at ease with them as they with her. Since Marcus wants to spend time alone with Maria, he decides to take her to the spot at Lake Leopoldstein where they first met.

As they're sitting beside the lake, Marcus tells Maria the story of the male mermaid who was caught at this very spot by fishermen about 3000 years ago. To be released, he offered the fishermen one of three things: gold for a day, silver for a year, or iron forever. The fishermen chose iron forever, so

the mermaid pointed at one mountain and changed it to iron. That iron mountain is called Erzberg. And that mountain has been mined, from pre-Roman times, for its iron. The mountain's iron is unlikely to run out for a very long time. The huge reserves are now only mined minimally since much higher quality iron is imported from Brazil, and it is cheaper to mine in Brazil and transport ore back to Austria than to mine it in Austria! The small mountain town of Eisenerz, which means "iron ore," has as its namesake the iron mountain Erzberg.

The night air is very mild, hundreds of frogs and insects start their chorus, and the moon is full over the lake. The setting could not be more romantic. Marcus and Maria arrive home very late.

Getting out of bed at six o'clock the next morning is not easy. And this is a late start by Austrian mountaineering time! By the time they reach the first plateau, about 30 minutes from the parking lot, they are both fully awake and enjoying the glorious morning. They continue on the path toward the top of the mountain and the peak's hut. He likes this hut, one of the few open all year round, (although getting there in the middle of winter is more than treacherous!) The delicious food and the nice accommodation make the steep trek worth it. Both Marcus and Maria keep up a good pace because they are both used to climbing. Since it is a weekday, they meet few people on the way up.

When Marcus uses his T-powers to send a pack of cows trotting off in every direction, they both laugh. Maria shakes her head. "You must have really scared those cows at some point because they seemed to run away as soon as they spotted you."

As they approach the top, the path gets more difficult. When they reach the fork, Marcus decides to take the experienced climber path rather than the novice's path. Maria follows him. He knows this trail like the back of his hand. He has also been watching Maria. She has managed the trail easily to this point, and she obviously trusts his decisions. They now approach its steep scree slope. Suddenly Marcus becomes taciturn. 'There it is,' he thinks. He picks up a small piece of cheese that a hiker has left near the trail and throws it with disgust off the trail.

Maria notices that Marcus, although watching the trail, is deep in thought.

A short distance from the cheese spot they reach the top of the Reichenstein mountain. Marcus hugs Maria and gives her a short kiss. They stand with their arms around each other, enjoying the scene. There is a clear view in all directions. To the west, they can see the highest mountain of Styria and its glacier, the Dachstein. To the south are some of the highest peaks of the main ridge of the Austrian Alps. And to the north and west they can see the rugged mountains of the Alp's northern limestone ridge.

At the top it is quiet except for the occasional whistles of marmots and shouts of the black jackdaws. Marcus walks over to the peak's massive cross and takes out the mountain book. He writes an entry in it - where they have come from and where they are heading. He then starts to write his poem. Maria now understands why Marcus was so quiet during the last few minutes of their hike. He was thinking about what to write in the book. He writes:

*When walking up the Reichenstein
with spirits high and weather fine,
we found a funny looking stone.
It smelled unpleasant, like a bone
that had been rotting for too long
its smell was cheesy (very strong).*

*Indeed: it was some ancient cheese
that looked like rock, but made you sneeze.
So, far away the piece I threw
I hope it will not bother you,
As to the peak you fight your way,
that's what I hope, that's what I pray.*

PS:

*I glued a piece of cheese I took
for disbelievers in this book.
(Hold your nose against this page
and do contain your vicious rage,
when smelling what I told you, dear,
yes, this is cheese, yes cheese is here).*

"Marcus, do you always write poems in the mountaintop books? And you compose them while you're doing the last stretch of the hike?" asks Maria. Marcus laughs. "Yes. I don't remember when I started. But as far back as I can remember, I've done it. I must have written over a hundred of these silly little rhymes. In this very book you'll probably find at least a dozen of my 'creations.' In a sense I'm sorry that I didn't collect them, since some of them are funny!"

They walk a few hundred yards from the Reichenstein peak to the hut. As soon as they open the door they can smell food. Suddenly they are famished. Marcus' poetry has sparked off a discussion on Austrian poets. They talk about everyone from Turrini to Bachmann. They both agree that Ingeborg Bachmann, with her beautiful poetry, is the best post-World War II poet from Austria. They enjoyed her original work as well as the translations included in "Miracles of Discontent" translated by Beate Josefi and Andrew Taylor. Maria surprises Marcus when she produces a slim booklet of Turrini poems

that she has with her. They pass the small booklet back and forth between them, pointing out their favorite poems.

Marcus asks Maria if she is aware of a new kind of writing, which Marcus discovered on the internet. In this writing, static letters are replaced by symbols with numerous variations, including size, shape, color, texture and position. He has used his computer to display these writings and has found the computer works well in capturing their transience. He is convinced that this new type of writing could revolutionize the way in which ideas and emotions are archived and communicated. Using such things as MUSLI and MIRACLE, it is possible to develop a secret language. The idea of a secret language captures Maria's imagination as much as Marcus', so they play with creating a mini secret language of their own. With their rudimentary language, they can communicate simple things without anyone else noticing. They enjoy the game as just that, a game. Little do they know this will be of crucial importance in the not-so-distant future.

They eat their bowls of Kaspressknoedlesuppe with gusto and wonder what the cook uses for the dumplings in the beef stock. Usually the dumplings are made from bread, cheese and herbs. These are the best dumplings they've both had in a long time. Maria is so glad this soup has replaced the traditional hut meal of "pea soup with sausage." After the Kaspressknoedlesuppe, both Marcus and Maria collapse in the chairs in front of the hut. After a short rest, they are ready for the descent.

Instead of returning on the same trail, they follow the ridge for awhile, then turn left onto the steep descent of the Krumpenhals. Further down they again turn left to reach Krumpen Lake, a small, clear lake. They kid that they deserve a swim after six hours of walking. Besides the day is warm and they have not passed anyone on this trail. Marcus strips down and gets into the water, from where he can watch Maria get into the water. Her body is toned, tanned and only slightly tanned. Marcus jokingly thanks the Alpine gods. Their lakes and waterfalls have provided him with more than one glimpse of beautiful and erotic sights.

Their swim is short but refreshing. Afterwards they sit close to the shore and have a traditional Austrian hiking snack of bread, cheese and sausage. To sit more comfortably, they lean against each other. They are a little tired but relaxed and happy.

Suddenly Maria is alert. She sits straight up, speaking earnestly. "Look, there's a glider. He must have taken off from the top a few minutes ago. He's in trouble! It looks like the steering ropes have gotten tangled somehow, and he's losing control of his glider!"

Marcus looks in the direction that Maria is pointing. He can just make out the glider and the pilot. "He's starting to spiral," shouts Marcus. "But I can't

see what's wrong." Marcus squints at the glider trying to make out more detail. He thinks, 'How can she see the ropes are tangled?'

"Marcus! The man is desperate! He knows he's going to crash unless he can do something fast, but he doesn't know what to do!"

The glider approaches the Krumpfen Lake bowl with breathtaking speed. Marcus tries to reach out to him with his pseudo-hands, but he cannot make contact. Within seconds the glider is close enough. Marcus makes contact.

With his hands he can feel the tangled steering ropes. He uses all of his ten hands to undo the knot. The pilot suddenly regains control of his glider. The glider tries to avoid crashing, but it is too late. The rocks of the Krumpfen Lake bowl are too near.

Suddenly the glider veers violently towards the west, away from the rocks and toward the lake. He crashes only seconds later into Krumpfen Lake. The water cushions the impact. Marcus and Maria stand at the lake's side, ready to jump in if the pilot does not surface within seconds. The pilot, however, quickly surfaces and swims to shore.

The man stumbles out of the water and Marcus runs to help him. Shocked, he keeps repeating, "A miracle. A miracle."

While Marcus is supporting the man, he and Maria look at each other for a long time. Both of them played a part in the miracle. They do not speak it, but they know it.

They help the man down the mountain, past the waterfall and into the valley. They come to the houses in the alpine meadows of Hirrnalm, a good spot for him to rest while he has a coffee and waits for transportation back to 'civilization'.

Before they reach the steep meadows of Vordernberg, they decide that they too want to relax a minute. They walk until out of sight of the houses and then slump down into the high grass. They lie on their backs, side by side, watching the grass sway in the wind. They hear crickets chirping all around them and watch butterflies flit and hover. The clouds slowly change shapes overhead. Their hands are touching each other lightly and lovingly. Both wonder if what they are feeling is love but neither talks about it.

Marcus is afraid of being in a close relationship because of his T-powers. How can he keep something so important hidden from someone who he is supposed to be so close? Maria is afraid that Marcus is too worldly for her, or perhaps she is not worldly enough for him, and both are sure that the other is hiding something of extreme importance.

Marcus drives Maria back to Graz. En route they listen to some of their favorite CDs, still amazed that they have similar tastes: Bluegrass, Hillbilly and Country. They talk about classical rock, in particular "Roll in my Sweet Baby's Arms" by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, about the theme song of

Bonny and Clyde, about "Blue Moon of Kentucky" by Bill Monroe, and about Carl Jackson, Jim and Jesse, and The Blue Grass Cardinals. They both know and are fond of the "Railroad Trilogy" by Gordon Lightfoot. While Maria looks for her Lightfoot CD, which she brought for the day's drive, Marcus mentions his favorite song, "Light as a Breeze" by Leonard Cohen. Maria turns to face Marcus, forgetting her search for Lightfoot. She thinks of all the times she has listened to "Light as a Breeze," has studied the lyrics, and has admired this masterpiece of ambiguity!

If asked, Marcus and Maria would swear the road they were on was a cloud, so absorbed are they in each other, they look at everything around them, but see nothing. Instead of talking about their feelings, they talk about a myriad of other things. And instead of discussing what happened that day, they occasionally catch and hold each other's gaze. When they get to Maria's house, they awkwardly say good-bye.

The high that Marcus felt at the start of the next day wanes as the day passes and Maria does not call. Early the following day, Maria does call to ask if he is available that evening. She can come to Vienna if he is free. That evening Marcus picks up Maria from the South train station. She looks stunning in a short black dress with thin straps. She carries with her a stylish bolero for the night air. Her high-heeled black shoes accentuate the beautiful curve of her calves and thighs. She has also gotten a few bright streaks put in her hair. 'You look stunning,' he's thinking as she steps down from the train.

When Maria sees Marcus, she rushes toward him and they embrace, turning a few heads in the process. Marcus feels a surge of emotion and power entirely new to him. He's happy he was able to get a reservation for them at his favorite restaurant and that Maria correctly interpreted his invitation, "I want to take you out this evening to a very special place." The bond between them is as strong as the food is unusual. They have lobster on sauerkraut (!). Marcus chooses an excellent wine from Cloudy Bay, New Zealand, which beautifully complements the dinner.

After a leisurely dinner it is only nine o'clock, which leaves them an hour and a half before the last train to Graz. Marcus invites Maria back to his apartment. As he does, he feels butterflies in his stomach. "I live just around the corner. Do you want to see where I live? I, ah, chilled some champagne just in case." Maria accepts without hesitation. She likes his apartment, despite a somewhat disorderly collection of trinkets and pictures. She also realizes that Marcus has probably tidied up, just in case. First they sit in the living room, but then move onto the big sleeper sofa in the bedroom, which is cozier. They drink champagne and nibble on pretzels, talking about nothing and everything. They touch each other once in awhile to emphasize a point or to interrupt each other. Marcus feels as if he and Maria are the only

ones in the world. At some point he forgets himself and kisses Maria. This is their first kiss, and it is a light, soft kiss. Maria responds, but puts her fingers on Marcus' lips when he wants to continue.

"Marcus, it feels good to be with you, but there's something I'm desperate to know. When you skipped the stone over the water at Lake Leopoldstein when we first met, why did the stone go below the surface of the water and then reemerge? That stone defied all laws of physics. It just kept skipping along." Marcus answers slowly. "Maria, how could you see that? I couldn't see that. No one else could see that. And you didn't have binoculars."

Maria hesitates. Finally, Marcus continues, "Maria, I think I'm falling in love with you. Can I trust you? If I tell you something that no one else knows about, will you swear to me that under no circumstances whatsoever you'll repeat this to anyone?" "I promise Marcus. And will you promise me the same if I tell you my biggest secret that no other person knows?"

Marcus nods solemnly. Maria continues, "Okay, I'll begin. I'm trusting you completely that you'll not tell anyone what I'm going to tell you. You also can't use it against me, no matter what happens."

Maria stops for a moment and shifts so that she faces Marcus. "I have a kind of parapower - you might call it teleseeing. I can focus on things far away and see them as clearly as if I were using a high-resolution telescope. I realized this when I was a kid, but I didn't dare tell anyone about it. I was afraid people would treat me like a monster with two heads or like one of those mutants you see in science fiction movies. I know I can help people with my powers, but I don't want to reveal it. I want to live a normal life with someone like you, not live life as a human outcast."

This is the first time that Maria has spoken - articulated out loud - her parability. She seems to be listening to someone else speaking. She is so terrified that Marcus will reject her that she cannot look at him. She looks down at the pillow in her lap. Marcus pulls Maria close to him, embracing her gently but firmly. "Maria, I think we belong together. I think we somehow saw this in each other from the first moment we met. I too have a parapower, which makes me wonder whether I'm human or some kind of monster."

Maria leans back so that she can look at Marcus. He continues, "I don't know if I'm the first human to possess it, but I know I'm the only human I know of who has it. I have telekinetic powers with extras. I call them T-powers." Maria asks, "You mean you can move things just by thinking?"

As an answer, Marcus floats Maria's glass from the table through the air to her mouth. Marcus says, "If I could just move small objects over short distances, I guess it would be okay. Well, I've heard of stories like that, anyway. But my T-powers are very different from that. My powers are so

strong that I'm afraid they may be a threat to some people. I could be regarded as dangerous from an opponent's view. There's nothing more I fear than being found out. I think it could be the most beautiful thing if we decide to spend time together, but I doubt if our relationship would be a normal one."

Maria interrupts him. "That means that together we saved the life of the glider at Krumpfen Lake. I saw that he was in trouble long before anyone else could have, and you straightened out the ropes and rerouted him from the boulders to the lake?"

Marcus nods. He starts telling Maria about his T-powers. Maria listens fascinated for almost two hours, interrupting only occasionally for details. When Marcus pauses to make them coffee, he realizes what time it is. Where has the time gone?! He wants to listen to Maria's story, but can she stay? Her parents must be worried, and she has missed the last train to Graz.

Maria smiles. "Don't worry. I'm a grown up. I warned my parents that I might not come home tonight. So, now it's my turn to tell you about my teleseeing. I just hope you won't be too shocked or horrified when you hear the details."

Marcus settles back into the cushions as Maria starts her story. Maria surprised her parents on many occasions - when she pointed excitedly to a barely visible animal in the distance, when she noticed wasps or insects that others could not see or when she complained about a dirty dinner plate that others saw as spotless. Just like other children, Maria quickly learned that some things she can do are taboo. However, unlike other children, Maria's list of don'ts was much more extensive. Maria had a sort of in-built telescope she could switch to macro mode. In macro mode, her eyes acted like a microscope, and she saw the world completely differently than others.

"I can see flowers in incredible detail," explains Maria. "I can see their tiniest of veins. And I love looking at animals. If I really 'look' at a dog from a distance, for example, I can see the dog's individual hairs. Or I can see a small piece of grass caught in the beak of a bird flying high in the sky. And the moon. Or better yet - the moons of Jupiter! With my naked eyes I can enlarge the moons thousand fold! I can even see the faces of people as they gaze out of airplane windows."

Maria realized slowly that others could not see what she saw. Well, they could, but only with the help of specially tailored glass materials. They could not, however, see past the surface of things. Maria could. When she focused on a wall, she could see the wall. However, if she focused behind the wall or a series of walls, she could see as clearly as if no walls existed. As a child Maria thought this was normal. Normal was seeing her parents, her relatives, the neighbors, and the kids in kindergarten nude whether they showered or

bathed. Rituals, such as closing doors and changing inside a towel at the beach made no sense to Maria. She simply learned them as rituals that she would one day understand.

As a child there were many things that Maria saw that she did not understand, such as the strange things that her parents did sometimes in their bedroom. And the purpose of a striptease bar, well, she just could not get it. Of course with her unusual power she sometimes helped others, much to their astonishment. One day, for example, she helped find a lost child.

It was only when Maria started school that she began to realize that her world was not the world of her classmates. In many ways she was an outcast. Games like "hide-and-seek" did not make sense. She could always see where everyone was hiding. Well, almost always. Sometimes she could not see her classmates. Maria later realized she could only see where there was light or certain types of radiation. If a room was completely dark, Maria could see into the room and see the blackness, but she could not see anything in the room.

After realizing the darkness limitation, Maria experimented. Theoretically, she could see every layer of someone's brain. But because it was dark, she could not really *see* anything. Many blood vessels followed the same principle. Some blood vessels, however, were close enough to the surface that they were not completely dark. In these cases she could easily recognize blockages. As she grew older, this ability bothered her more and more. She could warn someone of a potential thrombosis (and she did do that once), but how could she explain that? She was not a doctor and she did not want to give away her teleseeing powers.

Maria cannot look around corners. She can only see what is in her direct line of sight. When Maria played cards with other children she realized that she could focus on the back of their cards and move slowly through each level of card until she came to the front of their cards. She could, therefore, see all the cards no matter how they were held. This made card playing the least favorite of Maria's pastimes. What was the point of playing cards if you could see everyone's hand? She still played, just to stop the name calling.

"We could be a great duo in casinos!" laughs Maria. "You could win as much as you want at roulette, and I could win as much as I want in poker. But by what you've said, you've been down that path and have already won millions. And it doesn't sound like you want to return to it."

Both Marcus and Maria comment about how similar - yet different - their powers are. They both have their fishing techniques. Maria can spot fish in a lake regardless of the lake's depth. She slides an un-baited hook through the water and into the side of the fish. Not sportsmanlike, but it works. Marcus

can use his pseudo-hands to feel for fish in the water and then grab and throw them ashore.

Their powers complement each other. Maria sees shapes and colors at great distances with almost microscopic accuracy, but she cannot manipulate what she sees. Marcus cannot feel things with his pseudo-hands at great distances, but his paratactile sensations can extend much further than his eyesight.

Maria proudly recounts one situation in which she prevented a bank robbery. She warned a bank employee that "Someone with a mask and a sawed off shotgun is going to enter the bank." The bank employee set off the silent security system, and the robber was surprised by police soon after he entered. "I had a hard time explaining that one," reflects Maria. "How could I know the robber was coming unless I was somehow connected? I couldn't say that I saw him through the wall, so I invented some story about reflections in the windows of the store across the street. Anyway, the bottom line was that everyone was happy that the robbery didn't happen, and they dropped it. This situation made it clear to me that I can help others, but it's hard not giving away my parabilities."

Marcus agrees. "This has got to be one of our biggest problems. How do we reconcile what we feel we have to do for some people while hiding it from those very same people." They quietly sip their coffee for a few minutes, then Marcus says, "Maria, what's the worst experience you've ever had with your teleseeing?"

"Easter. For me Easter was always a very sad time. We had this typical Austrian tradition of Dad hiding the Easter eggs and us three kids hunting for them. Of course, I always knew within minutes where the eggs were. I could see them behind the bush, in the oven, or wherever. But I had to pretend to search and I'd have to be surprised when I discovered the hard-to-find ones, so nobody would wonder. I felt very, very lonely on those Easter Sundays. I always wanted to tell my parents, but I didn't dare. I feared that they'd get so excited that they'd tell others, and my life would never be the same."

Maria continues, "We're talking about the same things. We've had some of the same experiences. I think that only if you've lived through these things, do you really understand what it's like. But this probably applies not only to paraphenomena like ours, but to all kinds of situations."

Maria continues. "But sorry, you asked about my worst experience.... Easter is right up there. That's hard. I guess I can't give an answer. There have been situations where I wanted to help and could have helped, but I didn't. I was afraid that if I helped I'd give myself away. One time comes to mind. Our neighbor was desperately looking for his dog that had run away. He was gone for days. I saw the dog. It had killed a young deer and was

guarding it. I tried to give hints, but everyone ignored me for making nonsensical comments. I felt so frustrated. Or the time when I saw through the corner of a house. A car was approaching an intersection at high speed and a tram was coming at a right angle to the car. I couldn't do anything. The best I could do was call the ambulance right before the crash. It might have helped a little. I don't know."

"Or maybe the worst thing I remember was when a farmhouse burnt down," continues Maria leaning back into the cushions and looking up at the ceiling. I saw a child in the house, but everyone said she was somewhere else. I *knew* she wasn't. She was in the house! No one believed me. I didn't know what to do, so I ran toward the burning house. Only then did the firemen change their mind. They put on breathing equipment and went in. They came out with the girl, who already suffered from smoke inhalation. "

Marcus interrupts Maria. "Can you turn your teleseeing on and off? Can you telesee or microsee any time you want?"

"Yes, I can turn it on and off - otherwise I'd go crazy." Maria smiled. "Can you imagine what it would be like without that control? I'd always be looking into rooms around me and through the clothes of everyone."

Marcus swallows. It had not occurred to him that Maria can see through his shirt and pants if she wanted to.

"Maria do you know how your parabilities work? I mean in the sense of physics?" asks Marcus.

"No, not really. I *do* know that I see a larger spectrum of light than normal people. The short wave length must become dominant in extreme teleseeing and microseeing because I lose a sense of color. But, radiation also plays a part. For example, I can see when it's completely dark if radiation is involved. One time I looked into the completely dark interior of a nuclear reactor. Because radiation was there I could see into the room."

This explanation intrigues Marcus. He has troubles with certain materials like lead, which he explains to Maria. "Can you see through lead?" he asks her.

"I did try lead at some stage. As a matter of fact, lead increases my power. In a way, a foot thick sheet of lead acts like a telescope. It can increase my natural telescope by a factor of about 50. For that reason alone, I considered becoming an astronomer. If I look at the moon on a clear night - enlarging it 50,000 times - it's like I'm floating only about 5 miles above it. Can you imagine how cool that is? I also use teleseeing when I hike. I can see the faces of hikers who are 45 miles away! But back to lead. I find it really strange that lead increases my powers. Since lead is a good shield for short wave radiation, it seems contradictory!"

They laugh as they describe to each other the testing they have done on their powers and the predicaments they have gotten themselves into. At daybreak they are so tired they can hardly stand. They get up long enough to pull out the sleeper couch and make it into a bed. Marcus wakes up first, just before noon. When he comes back from the shower, Maria gets up to shower. He hesitates a minute then decides to follow her. He watches her as she steps into the shower.

Maria looks over her shoulder as she turns on the hot water. "I want to see you nude," Marcus explains. "I'm only being fair. After all, you had a chance to see me naked just minutes ago by looking through the wall."

Marcus laughs, but she is quiet. "Do you mind me watching you?," he asks. Maria answers with a sad smile. "No, I don't mind. I'm just afraid that it won't be long before you're not interested in seeing me nude. Does that make sense?"

Marcus understands. Maria has seen, willingly and unwillingly, so many naked bodies in her life that experiencing voyeuristic pleasures is something that she only knows rationally, not emotionally. Nudity is not intriguing to her at all. She agrees that some bodies are more beautiful than others, but the erotic sensations one feels when seeing someone partially or totally nude are something Maria cannot imagine. Marcus feels sad for Maria. She also must feel isolated.

Maria's mood lifts when Marcus tells her that she is attractive and sexy. When she finishes her shower, Marcus asks, "Maria, do you trust me?" Maria looks directly at him. "Yes." "Okay, then don't fight what is about to happen to you."

Without moving Marcus uses his pseudo-hands to gather all four bath towels. He lovingly pats Maria dry. Those same hands carry her to the bed and roll her onto her stomach. Four, five, six pseudo-hands. Maria loses track of the number. They massage her with body lotion.

"This feels great," moans Maria. She does not want Marcus to stop. Then the hands roll her over, massaging her neck, her breasts, her belly and her thighs. Maria is laying as if in a trance. She notices Marcus is getting excited too.

But she is confused. She wants Marcus to continue and she wants him to stop. Her "no" comes from a strong resolve she made herself the day before. Her "yes" comes from her excitement and her passion. She has never felt like this before. Now, Marcus is kissing her deeply. He feels a similar turbulence. He wants to continue and is cursing himself for seducing Maria with his pseudo-hands, not with simply himself. Marcus calms himself and eventually stops kissing her. He ends up stroking Maria with his own hands.

Maria looks disappointed that they had not gone further, but also grateful for their restraint.

"Maria, get ready. We're going fishing today at Green Lake. Let's try out the techniques we talked about - even if they are a *little* illegal! We'll have breakfast - no, brunch - along the way. Okay?" Marcus seems to suddenly be in a hurry. He insists on taking a few portraiture shots of her with a digital camera, which he quickly e-mails off somewhere. "I'm sorry, but grant me this little foible. You might find out about the pictures at a later point! What I'm doing right now is probably nonsense, but I want to try it. Trust me!"

Maria shrugs off his odd behavior. As they are driving out of Vienna, crossing the Semmering pass, Marcus makes a few mysterious, indecipherable, phone calls. "Just a small surprise," he says smiling.

Marcus finally turns north onto the narrow road to Green Lake. To Maria's surprise he stops a few miles later in front of a small house. They seem to be in the middle of nowhere. Marcus beams. "Just pretend that your name is Maria Simmer, and we just got married, and this is a house we're about to buy."

Before Maria can react she notices three people approaching from under the shade of a tree. The group introduce themselves as the real estate agent, the house owner and a notary public. They have prepared everything for them as Marcus requested earlier. In less than 20 minutes the formalities are over. Maria and Marcus are the proud, joint owners of this remote little house. They all shake hands when they are given the keys.

After the others leave, Marcus gives Maria a short tour of the house. It is tastefully furnished, and the cellar shelves are stocked with non-perishables. The yard is small but nicely manicured. "I've arranged to have someone come every second Wednesday afternoon to take care of the yard and the garden," explains Marcus.

Marcus gives Maria a set of keys and shows her where he plans to hide a spare set. He takes the last set of keys and explains, "This is a good place between Graz and Vienna for us to meet. It's also not that far from my parent's home in Eisenerz. But most importantly, it's a place of refuge if we ever need one in Austria. It's registered under Simmer rather than our real names. Please don't tell anyone about this place - not parents or relatives or friends. It's our secret." Marcus continues, barely pausing for a breath. "When we're here, we're Maria and Marcus Simmer. We want to have as little contact as possible with our neighbors, so whenever we're here, let's put the car in the garage. The yard is private, so when we are here no one who hasn't seen us drive into the garage will know that we're here."

Not able to figure it out, Maria finally asks, "Why? What's all this?" Marcus shrugs, embarrassed. "I'm probably paranoid, but I can't help feeling

there's a chance that someone, maybe even the police, might try to find us at some point. And it could well be because of my T-powers. I thought about it this morning. Your being with me increases your risk of getting dragged into something you might not want to be dragged into."

Maria laughs. "You're talking nonsense. You might scare someone or some group enough that they might want to lock you up. But then again someone might not like the fact that I can look into any room of any building I want. So, we're even. Let's forget about this." Maria pauses, then continues more thoughtfully. "I'm sure that at this very moment we feel like we're in love. Your giving me a half a house is somewhat overwhelming to say the least! It shows that you have a lot of trust in me. But have you considered that maybe we're not in love? Maybe we're feeling close because it's the first time in our lives we've been able to talk about our talents? We can finally talk about our fears and experiences?"

Marcus' eyes cloud up. "Maria, I hope you're not right." He clears his throat and then continues, "We're getting too serious."

Marcus sweeps Maria into his arms and hugs her tightly. They kiss passionately for a few minutes. Marcus gets very excited, thinking they might christen their new home. He says, "I think I have to prove to you that we're compatible in more ways than one!"

Maria smiles broadly. "Well I might be persuaded, but now we've got fishing to do!" They drive the remaining stretch to Green Lake. It is a small gem at the end of a valley, surrounded by steep limestone mountains. The stands of larch, fir and spruce and lusciously green meadows reflecting in the lake give it its name.

They walk along the shoreline until they come to a small hidden cove, where they start fishing. Maria, who is able to see clearly where the fish are, directs Marcus. He uses his pseudo-hands to grab the fish and throw them ashore. They find it disappointingly easy. After they catch a half dozen fish, they hide them in their backpacks. They do not have a permit to fish here, and even if they had, their technique would be illegal.

With their work done, they spread out a blanket in the grass. They bask in the sun, taking occasional dips in the clear, cool lake water. They alternate between eating, sleeping, kissing and caressing. The day disappears much too quickly. Maria calls her parents and asks if she can come for a short, late visit. She also asks if she can bring Marcus along. Her parents respond quickly, "By heavens, yes, it'll be great to see you. And since your apartment is almost ready, we won't be seeing you much soon. So please come by."

Marcus, who cannot help overhearing the conversation, asks, "You're getting your own apartment? Where? In Graz or Vienna?" "Whether you like it or not - Vienna."

Marcus' face lights up. "That's *great* news! By the way, about what you said earlier today, I've thought about it a lot. As far as I'm concerned, I love you not *because* of your special gift, but *despite* it." "You'll have lots of opportunities to prove it to me," smiles Maria.

Maria's parents welcome them home like lost children. They quickly notice a "glow" about both Marcus and Maria. They are delighted with the fresh fish that Marcus and Maria bring. They wonder later, however, about the conflicting "fish stories." Maria told her mother one story and Marcus told Maria's father another story about how they caught the fish....

"You said my apartment in Vienna is almost ready?" asks Maria. "It's actually all ready except for a few small things that can be done later," says her mother.

Maria looks at her parents, unsure whether to ask.... "Since it's almost ready, do you mind if I go back to Vienna with Marcus and stay in my new place?"

There are no objections. As Marcus and Maria are leaving, Maria's father hands Maria her new apartment keys. "You almost forgot these, and then you'd have to sleep under a bridge."

On the way back to Vienna, Maria rests her arm around Marcus' neck. Marcus thinks, 'I could drive like this forever. Maria decides that she would rather see her apartment in the morning. "Do you mind if I stay with you tonight?"

Marcus does not object at all. They have had a long day. They shower and then go to bed. Although the weather is warm, they snuggle closely. When Marcus opens a package of red condoms, Maria laughs. "With a little bad luck you might have bought those from my Mom the other day!"

They enjoy each other, exploring lovingly. Marcus does not use his T-powers. Yes, he could, but it is not necessary. Maria loves Marcus as a young, considerate man, not as someone with T-powers. The love and pleasure of this night will stay with them for a very long time.

Over the next several days, they alternate between Maria's apartment and Marcus'. They study and take exams, living the life of students. They often discuss whether there might be other paratalents in Vienna, and if so how they might find them. They both feel that it is their responsibility to find other talents. Maybe they can all work together for the benefit of others? With their ability to help others, is it selfish to just lead their own lives?

"Maybe we should start an institute of parapsychology?" Marcus asks half seriously. Maria's thoughts have been along similar lines, and she has already begun thinking about details. They have to consider the idea carefully. They do not want to be discovered. Once spoken, however, neither can let the idea go.

9 The Institute for Unorthodox Phenomena

September/October 2003

Maria and Marcus are increasingly interested in finding other parataleants in Vienna. They often talk about forming a strong group of persons with parabilities to practice with and learn from. In contrast to the "mutants" in movies and books, however, their group will work for the benefit of other people. And unlike movie mutants, they will work in secrecy, avoiding problems that inevitably arise when mutants try to mix and be accepted into the larger community.

Since "parabilities" is not a normal topic of conversation, they decide to form an Institute for Unorthodox Phenomena. Clearly there is risk to Maria and Marcus in founding such an establishment, but they feel the potential outweighs the risk, especially if they proceed cautiously.

To deflect suspicion and to attract a fair number of persons, they start by focusing on "traditional methods." They negotiate with well-established groups involved in meditation and relaxation, group dynamics, leadership, teamwork, cognitive psychology, hypnosis, esotericism, acupuncture, acupressure, and homeopathy.

Their negotiations with specialists start out well, but then take a turn for the worse. The reservations usually surface when Marcus mentions that their institution will also deal with unorthodox topics, not yet scientifically established fields like telepathy and telekinesis. When this part of the dialogue begins, some of the experts refuse to lecture or even join the supervisory board of the institution, despite generous financial honoraria. Even the Austrian Society for Psychology and Psychotherapy has strong reservations that only a combination of money and lecturing concessions alleviates. These experts insist on offering more traditional courses from the schools of Freud, Jung and Frankel.

Another obstacle to the Institute's formation is money. Although Marcus has large sums of money in accounts in Switzerland and the Bahamas, getting large sums of money out without creating suspicion is proving difficult.

Once again, Marcus' friend in Chicago, Peter Cobb, comes to the rescue. Although the money is Marcus, he routes it through Peter. Peter becomes the owner of the school, providing the necessary seed funding. Marcus trusts Peter completely.

Despite all the challenges they encounter, they manage to advertise the new institution in less than two months. Interested persons can sign up for courses and discussions at "student" rates.

The opening ceremony launches the Institute with style. A well-known hypnotist entertains and surprises the guests and Maria and Marcus as well.

During one feat he gives a post-hypnotic order to a man from the audience. The order is that he cannot put down his glass of beer after he next picks it up. The man comes out of hypnosis and the show continues. At some point the man picks up his beer for a drink. He finds, however, that he cannot release his hand from the glass. It is stuck to the glass like glue. He tries to hide his surprise and annoyance by trying to pry off his hand using his second hand, but to no avail. By this time the audience is roaring with laughter. It is only the hypnotist who finally breaks the spell.

Maria and Marcus thought hypnotists would be perfect to show that - as Shakespeare said - there are things between heaven and earth that cannot be explained rationally satisfactorily. They use this link into phenomena that are not yet established scientifically, advertising subtly parabilities.

Their opening strategy is successful. Over 80 people sign up for the first major talk on paraphenomena, which is to be given by a recognized professor for cognitive psychology from the University of Vienna. The professor's talk, however, is not at all what Maria and Marcus expected. In fact, it is to the contrary. The professor reports at length about unsuccessful attempts to prove phenomena like telepathy and telekinesis. He also mentions - unenthusiastically - a list of other phenomena that Maria and Marcus had asked him specifically to address.

Maria and Marcus try to salvage the event by talking up their next event, which is a free seminar on "Detecting unusual paraphenomena." They also individually talk to people following the professor's talk, trying to salvage the evening. The results, however, are disappointing. The professor's talk seems to have dampened the original enthusiasm of the attendees on the topic of paraphenomena.

Some of the more traditional courses being offered have overflowing audiences. The *real* interests of Maria and Marcus - the paraphenomena topics - however, attract only a handful of people. As person after person fails the detection test developed by Maria and Marcus that identifies parabilities, the small group further dwindles.

Marcus and Maria become disillusioned. Every scheme and angle they use to identify other paratalents leads to dead ends. Either there are no other paratalents, or they have not yet tapped into them.

After much thought, Maria and Marcus come up with three methods of bringing out the parabilities, if any, in the participants.

The first method is patterned after what happened to Marcus. Someone is exposed to a situation in which they can help a person they are close to only by activating a hidden talent.

The second method is based on a belief that "faith can move mountains." Persons are convinced that they can telepathically communicate with

someone else. This is done by showing one person a number between one and ten. The person concentrates on the number. The telepathic partner in another room guesses the number. The first person says that the guess is correct, regardless of whether it is. Their correct answer builds the confidence of the person being tested that they can communicate telepathically. By just believing that they can do so, the second person breaks down inner barriers and becomes telepathic.

A third method is a combination of the first two. After convincing two people that they can communicate telepathically, one of them is confronted with a situation in which only telepathy can help rescue the other.

Despite numerous experiments based on their methods and refinements of those methods, including the use of hypnosis, Maria and Marcus discover no paratalents. Marcus, Maria and the participants are frustrated and discouraged. Eventually the group of participants dwindles to just four.

Klaus Baumgartner has now been in Vienna for over four months. Despite numerous strategies, he has not been able to locate the man with the strong telekinetic powers that he has been looking for. He also has not located any other paratalents with one exception, the weak emotiopath Greta. He is about to give up and return to Brussels when he reads something too good to be true - the opening of the Institute for Unorthodox Phenomena! He not only reads the advertisement, over the next week he is bombarded with advertisements on TV and radio.

Klaus attends the Institute's opening with much curiosity and excitement. He feels he has hit a goldmine! The Institute's founder is Marcus Waller, the very person he has been looking for in vain for months. He finds out that Marcus is one of Greta's former lovers. He was this close all along! He also finds out that the co-director of the Institute is a young woman named Maria Bungl, who has an aura that he has not yet encountered.

Klaus immediately signs up for their special parapsychology seminars. He also orders his team members to join him in Vienna and to attend the seminars. After all the other paraphenomena seminar attendees have left, disillusioned, it is the "Klaus Baumgartner team" - Klaus, Justo Campo, Jan de Keep and Sandra Hill - that comprise the remaining seminar cohort.

Klaus quickly puts into place an action plan for the team. Justo will make sure that his weak telekinetic talent is discovered. Klaus hopes that the discovery will lure Marcus out into the open about his parability.

At the same time, Jan de Keep will try to influence Marcus to open up using his parability while Sandra Hill will keep tabs on Marcus' emotions. Klaus himself will focus on Maria, trying to figure out her paratalent. To be

fair, Klaus decides that if Marcus and Maria reveal their talents, then he will also reveal his and those of his team members.

Since the paraphenomena seminar group has gotten small - only six of them including Marcus and Maria - their discussions are more focused. In their first session they talk about hypnosis and meditation techniques. Marcus and Maria share the facilitation of the discussion, trying to find out where the interests of their seminar participants lie.

In a later session they discuss phenomena in gray areas, such as divining for water. Such gray phenomena are widely accepted but little or no scientific proof exists for them. The aim of the session is to exchange experiences and to differentiate between fact and myth.

During the session, Marcus and Maria do not notice that Jan and Sandra work together to gain consensus on unorthodox occurrences. Jan motivates participants to focus on particular issues and Sandra discerns the topics that Marcus and Maria are interested in.

After this session they go for a drink and dinner, a recent routine they all seem to enjoy. They are starting to learn more about each other and find that the more they get to know each other, the more they like each other on a personal level. Justo, however, often keeps to himself.

Following each session, an intense discussion goes on between Klaus and Sandra, who provides Klaus with a blow-by-blow analysis of Marcus' emotional state during the sessions. With his preoccupation with Marcus, Klaus forgets that he alone is monitoring Maria. That means Maria is getting little "para" dissection, which will be to Marcus and Maria's benefit in the near future.

Klaus also reports to his boss, Adler in Brussels, that they are making significant progress. They have located the telekinetic and are in regular contact with him. Adler, in turn, passes on the update to Dirkmann, his boss and Director of the ESP. Adler is both amazed and put off by Dirkmann's reaction.

"We have to find out more about what Marcus Waller can do. If he's as powerful as the Russian guy we talked about, then we have to make sure he's under our control. Only *then* can we finally be powerful enough to use the ESP and PPU to be influential within the EU Commission. But, Mr. Adler, some kind of loose connection with Marcus Waller is not good enough. If we can't control him, then he's a danger for us and mankind, and he must be eliminated. I don't want to dwell on this right now, not because I won't give the orders to kill him but because I don't want to lose him - he could be a powerful tool for us. Be that as it may, you now have two tasks, *both* of which must be done *without* Klaus Baumgartner. Klaus is a mutant himself, so he might be too soft with fellow mutants, including Marcus Waller."

Adler does not like the derogatory manner in which Dirkmann uses the word "mutant." Adler would rather use a term like "paratalents," which he thinks much more appropriate. Dirkmann's whole attitude makes him shudder.

Dirkmann continues. "We have to prepare ourselves. First, you have to set up an isolation chamber to hold Marcus if he doesn't want to join the PPU. Locating the chamber near Vienna would probably be wise so you don't have to transport him far once you've got him. Marcus will have to stay in the cell until he either fully accepts being controlled by the PPU or until we decide to eliminate him. Second, put together a top team from the ESP and use any means necessary to examine Marcus' past. I need a pretext to put him into prison, or at least threaten to do so. Depending on what we find, it might be enough for him to accept our conditions."

Adler understands the concept of "finding skeletons in the closet" for purposes of control. After all, he himself has serious matters that he would go to extremes to keep hidden. Sometimes Adler suspects Dirkmann of knowing his secrets, which is another reason for his discomfort around Dirkmann.

Adler tries to clarify: "What do you mean when you said the PPU has to be able to control Marcus Waller?"

Dirkmann shrugs his shoulders abruptly as if annoyed. "He has to know that we can immediately - at *our* will - make him unconscious or kill him if he uses his powers against our orders. He must know that if he ever acts against us we can hurt him. If this means that we have to implant a device into him that we control remotely, then so be it. A person with strong telekinetic powers can be more dangerous than an entire army. I haven't told you all I know about the Russian telekinetic, but what I've told you should be enough to convince you."

Adler is horrified and sickened. He can follow Dirkmann's logic about a strong telekinetic, but he can also see Dirkmann's power trip. He suspects that Dirkmann's vision reaches far beyond the PPU. Adler also has a moral dilemma. He and Klaus Baumgartner have a good working relationship. He is being asked to do things that directly counter Baumgartner's plans and wishes. How much should he tell Baumgartner?

For the time being, Adler decides to keep Baumgartner out of the "Dirkmann loop," asking him to find out as much about Marcus' powers as he can - their limitations and ways to neutralize them if possible. He does not even hint to Baumgartner that he is negotiating with the Austrian government about the construction of a high-security prison for a dangerous criminal....

At the next paraphenomena seminar, Marcus begins by giving a summary of scientific facts. "It's clear that humans with ordinary sensory organs can't

perceive many phenomena that occur in nature. Our eyes, for instance, see only a very narrow spectrum of the electromagnetic wavelength. We don't see longer wavelengths, like infrared wavelengths. Nor do we see shorter wavelengths, such as ultraviolet wavelengths, let alone X-rays, etc. We have no known organ that can identify magnetic fields or radioactivity."

"Likewise our ears don't hear sounds below or above certain frequencies. And our noses don't smell certain substances. Let's take smell as an example of our limits.... Instead of recognizing limitations with our olfactory system, we assert that substances are 'odorless'."

"We have many such limits. Our arms can carry certain weights, and we generally can't run faster than about 20 or 25 miles an hour. Our life expectancy is about 80 years old, if we're lucky. In short, we're limited in many ways."

"However," continues Marcus, "we must not forget three important aspects. First, there are animals with organs or properties beyond perceived human limits. The eyesight of an eagle is much better than that of a human. A cat can see much better in the dark than humans. Bats fly using a sonar-radar system. Dogs can hear at much higher frequencies. There are animals, such as sharks with their 'sideline' organ, that can recognize magnetic or electric fields. And there are even animals that can produce electric fields, like the electric eel."

"Regarding longevity, some giant turtles - let alone trees - live much longer than humans. And as for traits, many animals can move faster and carry much heavier loads than we can. Some animals can live under water, while others can live both on land and in water. Whereas humans communicate mostly by talking, dolphins communicate by sounds and in ways that we don't fully understand. Bees communicate certain information with dancing. Considering all these variations, who are we to say that some humans may not also possess traits or abilities more like other animals than humans? Perhaps certain humans possess ways of sensing, smelling or acting that stretch the norm of human limits. And if there are humans possessing such additional abilities, can those abilities or properties be strengthened or further stretched through training and discipline? Might they also be teachable to others?"

"Second, the instruments that we humans are naturally equipped with have many shortcomings, as my previous illustrations have highlighted. Many of these limitations, however, we have compensated for or extended through technology. We have developed devices that give us sight in otherwise total darkness, by enabling us to see in the infrared spectrum. Using technology we can measure and recognize sounds beyond what our ears can pick up unassisted. We can detect magnetic fields and radioactivity."

We can travel fast, not by ourselves, but through our developments. We cannot take flight ourselves, but we can fly. We can survive for long periods under water using submarines and scuba equipment. And using equipment we can carry huge weights and can communicate virtually instantaneously in the world. Clearly I could go on and on. Today we take this technology for granted. But 500 years ago much of this would have been considered witchcraft, and 100 years ago science fiction."

"To put it differently, we have learnt to amplify and extend our abilities and properties using appropriate technology. It then follows that were we to find someone with telekinetic powers, we should be able to extend that phenomenon by examining and amplifying it. However, to do so, we must first locate such talent. With our limitations, the 'finding' may be harder than the 'amplifying.' The biggest hurdle, therefore, is finding people who can accomplish things with just the power of their mind or emotions."

"This brings me to my third item, which may be somewhat surprising. Such talents, which I'll call parabilities, are not only possibility, they are a reality. We are aware of a number of them. We all know that someone who is excited tends to blushes or sweat. So, you may ask, how is that relevant? Actually, it is very relevant. Blushing or sweating when excited is a typical example of how emotions and thoughts influence the human body. The psychological can influence the physical."

"Let me explain this in another way. If we hurt our physical body, we feel physical pain. That physical pain can create a feeling of pain that we experience emotionally. Now let's take the reverse, going from the mental or emotional to the physical. Many meditation techniques have been shown to influence pulse rate, body temperature, breathing tempo, etc. And no reasonable person doubts that severe mental or emotional stress can make a person physically ill. We have heard more than once that someone has 'died of a broken heart'. Have you? Where has this come from, if not from what I'm referring to?"

"Conversely, some physical illness can be influenced by the psychological or mental state of a person. Take for instance the oft-quoted placebo effect, in which a person gets better just because he or she is taking medication. That medication may not be anything other than a vitamin. Or take the occurrences of divine miracles, such as those recorded at Lourdes. Those who believe in divine miracles will say the source of their healing has come from outside them, from a divine source. However, those who do not believe in such miracles explain them as being achieved through a strong belief. If divine miracles occur - regardless of their source - then strong belief can have a dramatic power over one's body. Again, the proverb 'faith can move mountains' may be quite fitting...."

"What I have discussed so far happens within a single person. What about interaction? Are there any indications that the mind of one person can influence another person or even inanimate objects? I certainly think so! I think we illustrated this quite effectively during our Institute opening, through hypnosis. I've also heard about this in other contexts, such as a person getting sick in response to a severe illness in their partner. There are also instances in which the dog of a sick person starts acting very strange.... Does this not indicate that persons communicate on some level - non-verbally - with their animals? In brief, it is clear to me that the minds of some individuals indeed influence the minds of others, and perhaps even animals or inanimate objects."

"I'd like to close with a few questions. If we take it that parabilities exist, might it be possible to recognize them? Might persons with talents in influencing or motivating others, for example, actually emit some kind of aura or quality that we can recognize if we're sensitive to such parabilities? With increased sensitivity, might we be able to recognize talents in non-verbal communication? Or one step further, if we do find individuals sensitive to paratalents, might they have characteristics or properties, such as a sort of fine antenna that picks up the emotions or thoughts of others?"

Marcus is so involved with his talk that he has not noticed that Jan and Sandra are sitting erect in their seats, listening attentively. There is a moment of silence, before Marcus continues.

"I think it is likely that there are humans who are slightly telepathic or who can do more than control their own bodies. Perhaps these individuals can even manipulate objects without being consciously aware of such powers. If this is true, why haven't such persons been found?"

Klaus Baumgartner, the parascout and head of the PPU, speaks up first. "I think you're talking about talents that a majority of people would consider nonsense. However, there is a realm in which parapowers have always been not only accepted but embraced - science fiction. Just think of all the books and movies full of mutants or other creatures with all kinds of wonderful powers. It might be interesting to systematically examine parapowers depicted in the genre and then have a discussion about them."

Jan adds, "I agree. I don't know about others, but I've been reading science fiction for years."

A series of nods answer Jan's statement.

Jan continues. "We can't forget about another category, which is taken less seriously than science fiction, but has equally, if not more, interesting ideas. That category is comics. Just think of the characters - Superman, Batman, Spiderwoman, or Professor X who tries to find all paragifted persons to bring them together to protect each other and to help mankind."

Marcus swallows hard. It is not a long stretch to see that he is trying to do just what Professor X tried in the comics.

Justo, however, interrupts Marcus' thoughts. "Klaus, you use the word 'mutant.' Do you think that human paratalents are mutants? By that I mean do you think powers result from some outside occurrence, such as nuclear radiation? I don't like that concept. I prefer to think of abilities like telepathy to be just another developmental step - developmental in the sense of Darwin."

Klaus nods. "Yes, you're right. We should select the words we choose very carefully. I think the words influence the talent and how we think about the talent. Like Marcus I think there may be persons with special powers to sense other's feelings and persons who can motivate or persuade exceptionally well. Whether these abilities are special talents or gifts of evolution I couldn't tell. I wonder how much it is just a question of definition or rhetoric?"

Maria, who has been listening closely to the dialogue, speaks up. "We're not sitting here by chance. We're here because we believe in paraphenomena or maybe even because we've seen in ourselves things that we can't explain outside the realm of parapowers. Let me make a suggestion for the next meeting. Jan and Justo, can you please compile a list of paratalents that occur in the literature genres we mentioned, and then we'll discuss them, ranking them by probability."

Maria continues, "I think we need an additional document before we proceed much further. Specifically, I think we need a document that all of us sign agreeing that if any talents are revealed, they are not mentioned outside this circle. I think this partially addresses Marcus' question regarding the lack of discovered parapowers. I think anyone with such powers might be afraid to talk about them, especially under the context of mutants and other labels. Additionally, it seems to me that if someone's powers were to be revealed publicly that person would no longer be able to live a normal life. That person would likely be considered a monstrosity to stare at or worse a danger to be eliminated. I'll prepare such an agreement for our next meeting. To reiterate, it'll state that paratalents within the group will not be communicated to the outside world, okay? And, so the whole exercise doesn't remain too theoretical, I'll mention a talent that I've discovered in myself."

Klaus breathes a sigh of relief. He is relieved that Maria has changed her words from "this circle" to "outside world." He can agree to that. He can then continue reporting back to the PPU and the ESP on his findings because those organizations are not the "outside world." To prevent Maria from writing up a document that his group cannot sign, Klaus volunteers to help Maria draft the document.

Everyone in Klaus's group presses Maria to talk about her special talent right now, rather than making them wait for the next session. Maria smiles but reneges. "Next time, and only after everyone has signed."

Klaus is pleased with what he sees as real progress. He finally has something to report to Brussels, and none too soon as Adler has begun to pressure him. Klaus believes he will have the most important facts about Marcus within a week, and Maria's details even sooner. Maria is close to exposing her parabilities. As soon as Klaus knows enough about Marcus he will tell Maria and Marcus that he, Justo, Jan and Sandra are members of the PPU. He will explain to Marcus the purpose of the PPU, and then he will make him a very generous offer to join them.

Klaus is unaware of the orders coming out of Brussels. Adler has managed to secure Stein, a large prison near Krems, upstream the Danube from Vienna. The official reason is a complete overhaul of the facility. The real reason is that a special building is being constructed, under Adler's supervision, for Marcus, in case a "holding tank" is necessary while Marcus considers joining the PPU.

If Klaus had known about Brussel's plans, he would have wondered about his loyalty to the PPU. He might even have warned Marcus. Klaus views Marcus as a strong ally, not a wild animal, like a wild horse that must be broken, an analogy used once by Dirkmann in discussions with Adler.

Maria and Marcus are still deciding whether it was a good move for Maria to agree to reveal her parabilities at the next session. They had not discussed the possibility beforehand. Maria confesses that she is not sure where the idea came from either. She just suddenly had an overwhelming impulse to talk about it.

Marcus mulls over the session and Maria's explanation for some time, then asks, "Do you think someone hypnotized you or parainfluenced you in some way?"

"I'm not sure," responds Maria slowly. Then she adds, "If somebody is influencing us, it's Jan. I think he has a way of persuading or convincing people to do things. Remember when we all went to dinner in the Steirereck restaurant? Everything was full. Nobody was able to get us a table. Well, Jan talked to the headwaiter and a group of people gave up their table - without any logical explanation. There were complaints around the whole situation, but the bottom line was, we got a table."

Marcus is appalled at his oversight. "You're right! It didn't register with me at the time. But you're absolutely right! Have you also noticed how Justo, Jan and Sandra seem to look at Klaus, almost like he's the one giving the orders? I wonder if they work together somehow. I'll get a good detective agency to find out who Klaus really is and whether the others have

something to do with him, or they just all happen to be in this seminar series."

Marcus does not receive the detective report before their next meeting. Had he received it they would have known to be much more careful. They agree to reveal only parts of their parabilities. If one of them is about to say more than they have agreed upon, the other will intervene dramatically to prevent it—just in case Jan or someone else is capable of influencing them.

At the next paraphenomena session, everyone is in their seats and ready to start well before the set time. Maria presents the agreement that she discussed with Klaus on the phone. Klaus has managed to get the wording "nothing transpiring in the group is to be told to the wider public" into the document. He believes this wording gives him leeway to freely report to Adler and Dirkmann on the group's development without breaching their trust and incurring the stiff penalties outlined in the document.

Everyone signs, then looks expectantly at Maria. Maria speaks without hesitation. "When I was a child I discovered that I could 'telesee.' What I mean by that is that I have a sort of in-built telescope that I can activate at will. After exercising my talent I'm able to see about 100 times further than ordinary human eyes. If someone holds a piece of paper with small lettering at a distance of 30 yards, I can read it as clearly as if it were a foot from me."

The initial response from the group is to test Maria, which she passes with flying colors.

Jan asks, "Can you show us how you can see around objects?" "I'm sorry. I can't see around objects in a curve-like fashion. I can only see in a straight line, like all of us," responds Maria.

Jan looks at Sandra, who nods slightly. Marcus notices Jan's glance and Sandra's nod. He starts to closely, but unobtrusively, watch them. Once again Jan questions Maria. "Can you show us how you can look through objects?"

Marcus looks at Maria, who hesitates, seemingly unsure of how she should answer. Marcus intervenes. He writes the MUSLI symbol for "big danger" on a piece of paper, then takes an empty glass and places it on a table halfway toward the back of the room. Behind it he holds the paper with the message. The attention has been diverted from Maria to him.

"Yes, I can see that you have written or drawn something on a piece of paper," says Maria. "Can you read it Maria?" asks Marcus.

Yes, Maria can read it and she's understood Marcus' MUSLI danger message. "I can see the glass clearly, but what's behind it is very distorted."

When Marcus holds the paper in front of the glass, Maria can read the message, but claims that now the glass is "of course" invisible since it is hidden by the paper. The group conducts many other tests on Maria, some of which Marcus leads when he senses Maria's hesitation. Maria manages to

keep concealed the most important facts about her parataleents. For instance she tells them she can only zoom 100 fold, when she can really zoom 1000 fold (and even more with the help of lead as a magnifier). Although Jan continues to prod, Maria does not tell them that she can look through objects. Nor does she tell them that she can put her eyes into macro-mode, using them as a microscope.

The group discusses the parability of Maria with excitement. They use examples of her past to illustrate her power. Maria talks about rescuing a child in distress. The child got into trouble while out on a lake. Using her teleseeing she alerted the parents to the boy's distress, which they could not see. Motivated by Jan, the group finds many possible applications for teleseeing: recognizing from a distance when a person is harmed or in trouble, identifying the license plate of a distant car, helping to find a route when boating, flying, hiking, etc.

The session is going as Klaus has planned. Klaus gives Justo a nod, indicating that it is his turn. Justo admits to having a strange talent, telekinetic powers. Klaus's team acts surprised when Justo moves a glass without touching it. He pushes that same glass off a table and catches it before it hits the floor and returns it to the table. It is now Justo's turn to be tested by the group. Justo extinguishes the flame of a candle without blowing it out. He puts a glass on a cupboard out of reach, drops a cube of sugar into it, then lifts the cube out again.

Marcus can hardly restrain himself. He tests Justo, trying to ascertain whether he has some of the same limitations with metals, such as lead. Marcus puts into the glass a small piece of lead that he happens to have with him - he's an avid fisherman. To Marcus' surprise, Justo removes the ball of lead as easily as if it were a cube of sugar. Marcus could not have moved the lead with his T-powers! Justo is surprised and intrigued that Marcus sees so much difference between a cube of sugar and a small ball of lead!

Marcus continues testing, mentally noting similarities and differences. Justo cannot move anything in the glass if the glass is covered, even if it is covered with just a piece of paper. He also cannot move anything that he cannot see. "The object needs to be in my line of sight, and I have to have free access to it if I want to move it," explains Justo.

Through his questions and the tests he poses, Marcus is revealing a lot about his own powers. It is now Maria's turn to observe the group's dynamics. She observes Jan's concentration and Marcus' increasing openness. Finally, Marcus feels he cannot hold back any longer. He explains that he too can move objects telekinetically. His powers, however, are slightly different. He cannot move objects made of lead, but he can move them in the glass even if the glass is covered. Marcus is on a roll, and Maria

is getting worried. She interrupts Marcus, taking control of the discussion. "I think we should first finish learning about Justo's paratalents. It can be Marcus' turn next time."

Maria overrules the loud objections from the group. Unwilling to budge, Maria turns to Justo to continue describing his paratalent.

Justo is unable to move anything that is more than about 30 yards away. He also says that although he has tried, he can't lift anything heavier than about 10 pounds. Heavier (10-pound) objects take time and concentration to lift, slowly. He can throw small objects far, about 100 yards. After the first 30 yards, however, he cannot control an object's flight path, so where the object lands is anyone's guess.

The group discusses telekinesis at length. Finally Maria closes the session, saying, "We'll meet again in a week on Kobenzl Hill in the Vienna woods. Justo will be able to show us how far he can throw things, and I think Marcus can use the space to show us some of his 'tricks.'"

Immediately after the session, Klaus meets with Sandra. Sandra reports that Maria is hiding "a little, but not much" about her talents. It is Sandra's choice of words - "little" that makes Klaus underestimate Maria for years to come. Sandra is certain that Maria cannot see around corners, but she probably can see under poor light conditions. Marcus clearly has powerful telekinetic powers, about which they will find out more next time.

"I did notice," remarks Sandra, "that when Justo was able to telekinetically work with lead that Marcus was more shocked than he let on. He must be completely unable to manipulate lead at all with his telekinetic powers. Lead and possibly other lead-like metals seem to be out of bounds for Marcus' parability."

Klaus forwards a preliminary report about Marcus' parabilities to Adler and Dirkmann. A day later Adler gets a call from Dirkmann, who sounds uncharacteristically up, almost gleeful. "We now know how to at least partially control Marcus Waller. Unlike his claim, he's not a serious fisherman. It's not coincidence that he carries lead or that one of the first experiments he tried with Justo involved lead. Lead is Marcus' Achilles' heel. It sounds crazy but lead must be to Waller what kryptonite is to Superman. Kryptonite reduces Superman's abilities and can even kill him. What this means to us is that Waller's prison cell must be lead, completely lead on the inside - the tables, bed, everything. I hope everything is progressing well otherwise with the prison cell for Waller?"

Adler confirms that everything is on track with the prison cell. He then continues, pride entering his voice, "I also have an update on Waller. I think we've got enough on him for a serious charge - enough to lock him up for awhile anyway. He's cheated in casinos in both Austria and the U.S., he's

made a lot of money that he hasn't declared as income for taxation, and he's involved somehow in the deaths of two people not far from Denver."

Dirkmann is pleased with Adler's update. "Very good. Don't tell Baumgartner about any of this. That guy identifies too much with his mutants."

Adler finds that he now physically reacts to Dirkmann's derogatory use of the word "mutant." Dirkmann is using it more and more in relation to Marcus and Klaus.

When they are finally able to discuss it, Maria and Marcus are pleased with how the last paraphenomena session went. They worked together well in fending off what they think was paramotivation coming from someone in the room. Maria is happy she revealed just enough of her parability to convince Justo to "confess" his telekinetic powers. Unless he is hiding the extent of his powers, much in the same way Maria is, Justo's powers appear to be fairly weak. They can now think through how much of Marcus' T-powers they want to reveal.

Their discussion is suddenly interrupted. A courier delivers the report from the detective agency that Marcus hired to investigate Klaus Baumgartner and the other three seminar attendees. The report is sealed and marked "Strictly Confidential." The first page contains a strong warning: "Attention: Read this report at your own risk. The contents of this report are highly sensitive and involve high ranking officers of the European Union, who might go to extremes to ensure these findings remain top secret."

Marcus looks at Maria, who nods. Marcus opens the report to the Executive Summary:

Klaus Baumgartner is the head of the PPU (Para-Psychological Unit), a division of the ESP (European Security Police). The head of the ESP is George Adler, who directly reports to the head of the EU (European Union) Commission, Dirkmann. It appears the ESP is unknown to everyone outside Dirkmann's circle. Dirkmann uses the ESP to solve critical situations. From our sources, we have learned that the means with which Dirkmann solves those situations may not be entirely legal. The ESP is mainly gathering material on political or other opponents and using that material for extortion. The PPU is tied into this, but has also been successful in situations whose outcomes have been used by Dirkmann to strengthen his position. One positive example was the successful conclusion of a hijacking incident. Other, less positive examples, involved the abduction or killing of high ranking, international government officials. The

collateral damage from these latter situations seem irrelevant to the ESP. (See Appendices for details.)

The PPU is still in its early stages. Its head, Baumgartner, is a so-called parascout, capable of feeling and or seeing the aura of people who have parabilities. He has located three paratalents thus far: Jan de Keep, an emotioactivator, Sandra Hill, an emotiopath, and Justo Campo, a telekinetic. These three persons and Baumgartner are currently in Vienna and in contact with the person commissioning this report, Marcus Waller. It is clear that they know that Waller has strong parabilities. The task of the PPU in Vienna is to find out exactly what Waller's powers are and then to make sure that he joins the PPU, using whatever "persuasion" necessary. There is no similar order concerning the partner of Marcus Waller, Maria Bungl, although the PPU is aware that she also has parabilities. At the writing of this report, Maria Bungl's parapowers had not yet been reported by Baumgartner to his superiors in Brussels.

In the course of our investigation, we have repeatedly seen references made to top secret reports on two paratalents in Russia whose deaths have yet to be explained. Our investigation causes us to question whether their extreme parapowers had a direct influence on their untimely deaths. The reports require such high secrecy clearance that we have not been able to access them. Not even Baumgartner or his direct supervisor Adler can access them.

ATTENTION: Marcus Waller's past is currently being scrutinized by an ESP team. This investigation is likely being done to find incriminating evidence through which to control Waller, possibly pressuring and or forcing him to join the PPU.

Maria and Marcus are thunderstruck. Maria flips back to the beginning of the Executive Summary and re-reads it. Marcus has hired a top detective agency for the report, but they are both surprised at the agency's thoroughness, even about their own abilities. They thought their parabilities were well hidden, but apparently not so.

They are also disappointed and disillusioned with the group, especially Klaus Baumgartner. Both Maria and Marcus had started to like and trust him. It is clear that they didn't find the four, rather the four had hunted for and found them. Just moments ago they were optimistic about the seminar and the group. Now the situation looks entirely different, almost dangerous.

Maria summarizes their plan and takes it further. "We'll continue as planned, mostly. Next time you can show a little bit of your T-power. Basically, you'll show them what they've seen with Justo, but a little expanded. It's probably best if you don't show them that you can reach

through objects. And under no circumstance should you show them that you can change your subjective time. What do you think?"

Marcus nods and Maria continues. "At this point in the meeting Klaus - or Jan and Sandra themselves - will probably reveal their parabilities. If they don't and they want to play dirty, then we have to listen carefully to his offer, because there *will* be an offer for you to join the PPU. I have to say that the report's summary of using whatever force necessary to get you to join the PPU does sound daunting. But to be quite frank, I'm not sure how they can force you. I think they've underestimated what you can do. Perhaps Klaus is basing your powers on what he's seen with Justo's weak powers. Unless of course Klaus doesn't even know what's being planned by people above him."

Maria and Marcus wait for the next meeting with suspense and apprehension. At the meeting, they greet the others cordially but coolly. Justo performs a sort of "shooting practice" using small pebbles to hit targets at least 20-25 yards away. Although Justo's aim is impressive as are some of his other "tricks," everyone including Justo is waiting for Marcus to demonstrate his parabilities.

Marcus moves objects just slightly larger than those Justo moved. He moves them slightly faster and further. Marcus also manipulates objects through glass "as long as he can see them." He admits that he cannot handle certain materials, like lead. Jan almost gets Marcus to admit that he can manipulate objects through walls, but Maria intercepts.

Klaus is impressed. Based on his aura, he suspected that Marcus' powers were much stronger than Justo's, but to what extent had been unclear.

"Can you really catch the swallow that's flying overhead and deliver it to us?" asks Klaus.

Instead of answering, Marcus drops the bird from the sky like a stone, then sits it gently on his arm until he releases it.

"Could you force me to cut my throat with my own hands?" asks Klaus.

Marcus forces a stick from the ground into one of Klaus's hands. Marcus then lifts Klaus's arm and presses the stick against Klaus's neck, clearly against his will. Klaus remains with the stick at his throat, until Marcus releases Klaus's arm.

Klaus grows pale, but he still wants to try another test. "If Justo and I run away simultaneously, could you stop both of us?"

"If you run in the same direction, yes," lies Marcus. "Try it. Run."

Marcus waits until they're about 100 yards away, then he grabs their legs with his pseudo-hands. He forces them to slow down until they come to a complete halt. He turns them around and pushes them with such force that they both stumble back, straining unsuccessfully against the pressure.

○ Klaus can hardly contain himself. "Marcus this is incredible! Come on. Let's all go to a restaurant. I have a few things I want to tell you."

○ At the restaurant, Klaus tells Maria and Marcus about the ESP and the PPU. He tells them that both organizations have been created for the benefit of Europeans. It seems apparent to Marcus and Maria that Klaus is idealistic, or naïve, in thinking that the organizations and their founder are beyond being motivated by power. It seems outside Baumgartner's realm to think that Dirkmann might be power-hungry and thus using the unit for personal and political gain. In such a scenario, the ESP is more like a powerful personal army.

○ Maria and Marcus feel that at least Klaus seems to be honest and open. He tells them about his own parascouting parability, and the parabilities of Jan and Sandra. He even admits sheepishly that Jan and Sandra have been told to direct their powers toward Maria and Marcus a few times in the past. Jan has tried to persuade them to reveal more than they would have contributed normally, and Sandra has been monitoring their emotions to determine whether they were telling the truth.

○ Klaus does not bring up the situation in which he first encountered Marcus. What he does repeatedly discuss is the value of the PPU. Klaus says, "Marcus and Maria, please join us at the PPU. You won't regret it. Together we six have power to help people wherever possible, strengthening the European Union. I can offer you substantial salaries and all kinds of fringe benefits, from palatial houses to cars and more."

○ Marcus challenges Klaus's offer. "If we work for the PPU, we'll only be able to use our powers as dictated by the PPU, not when and how we want. What's worse, if we trust you and work for the PPU, then we'll have to take orders not only from you but also from your bosses. What if we're told to carry out missions that we don't agree with? What if I'm told to kidnap or kill someone and I don't feel the action is justified?"

○ Marcus, still angry that Jan and Sandra were told to work against him, turns to Jan and says. "We should probably remain friends, but if you try to influence Maria or me one more time, you'll pay for it. Today you'll just get a couple of slaps from Klaus."

○ Before anyone can react, Klaus's hand slaps Jan on the face. Twice!

○ Marcus immediately sees that he overreacted, but it is too late. Jan tries to influence Justo to throw an ashtray at Marcus' head and to spill red wine down Maria's dress. For a couple of minutes, the air is thick with objects and tension.

○ After fending off the ashtray and the wine, Marcus regains control of himself and the situation. "Please, no more nonsense. Jan, I'm sorry. I was

angry that you tried to influence us. Please accept my apology. Here, it's your turn now. You can slap my face."

By this time Jan has also regained his composure. He says, "No, it is okay. I understand." Jan extends his hand to Marcus.

The crisis has passed. The discussion continues at a much less emotional level. Two hours later and although many words have been exchanged, the opinions of both sides remain the same. Marcus and Maria are unwilling to join the PPU. Marcus claims the aims of the PPU are not transparent enough. He sees too many possible dangers and pitfalls.

It is clear to all of them that people with parabilities can help in many situations where other means would fail. And they agree that many others may be afraid of their parabilities, as illustrated in the literature review that Justo did. Marcus gets the group thinking about paratalents and their uses.

"Isn't it a pity that parabilities can only be used in the context of the PPU for the political and personal gain of one or two - oh, and the occasional positive fallout that might trickle down to society?" asks Marcus.

It is apparent that Klaus and his team members have already given Marcus' question some thought, albeit limited. They feel, despite its drawbacks, that the PPU can make a positive contribution to mankind. Much of this belief, they acknowledge, comes from Klaus's enthusiasm. Within Klaus group they feel special. "Gifted" is the word Klaus uses. He buffers them from the ostracism and dangers that Marcus speaks of.

Marcus turns to Jan. "Why do you feel safe? Since you can influence people, you could theoretically influence Dirkmann himself. That ability alone would make Dirkmann fearful of you. How does Dirkmann react to you? Maybe he just makes sure you never see him?"

Jan shifts in his seat. He had not thought about it, but Marcus is right. He has never seen Dirkmann.

Marcus turns to Sandra. "And what about you Sandra. Since you can read emotions of people you know, regardless of whether you can see them, then why isn't Dirkmann, Adler and your whole team afraid of you? I feel uncomfortable around you just knowing that you can read my emotions."

Sandra looks at Marcus with a frown. "To be honest, I don't understand. I can read your and Maria's emotions, but not those of my colleagues or of Adler or Dirkmann. I'm not sure why not...."

As Sandra's voice trails off, she sees Klaus looking at her. Klaus says guiltily, "Sandra, I should have told you, but I didn't want to upset you. When you were hired, you were given a post-hypnotic command. You can't read the emotions of the people in this room—except Maria and Marcus."

Sandra first looks startled, then angry. "You mean you manipulated me without my knowledge and consent? Did you do that to all of us?"

Klaus breathes deeply. "Yes. We used post-hypnotic commands on all of you. With Justo we made sure that he couldn't use his powers against Dirkmann, Adler or me."

It is Justo's turn to look upset. Marcus speaks with renewed conviction. "You see, they're afraid of you. They've probably also done something to you Klaus without your knowing it. Might this be why you keep defending the PPU against all rational arguments? Anyway, you can certainly see that the first thing they'd do to me is restrict what I can do. And I can guarantee you that this wouldn't be easy. Take Justo as an example. He's shown us his telekinetic powers, but those powers are restricted. However, despite those restrictions, Justo's parabilities are still lethal. He could pick up a stone and throw it forcefully into the eye of an opponent standing yards away, killing him. Or he could pull the pistol from a police officer's holster and shoot someone. The police officer, not Justo, would take the blame."

As Marcus talks, Maria notices a slight change come over Justo's face, a change that chills her. Years later Maria will remember that look and the evil she saw in his eyes.

Marcus continues. "Well if they consider Justo a big enough threat to restrict him, can you imagine how dangerous I must appear? You've already seen that I could kill someone by simply driving a stick through their body. Do you really think I'd be accepted as a member of the PPU without someone carefully restricting and controlling my powers? Klaus, what happened to the two powerful Russian paratalents who came to 'untimely deaths'?"

Klaus would have preferred to avoid this topic, but here it is. Marcus looks at him, waiting for his response.

Klaus speaks with hesitation. "I know about the two, but not much. The documents are classified and I can't access them. Neither can my boss. Adler has asked Dirkmann about them. Dirkmann indicated that one of them was a powerful telekinetic who died in an explosion. The other was a strong emotiopath, like Sandra, maybe stronger. She was executed for spying for the U.S. I believe."

"Well, so much for the security and safety of paratalents," comments Marcus dryly. "Maria and I will not join the PPU and we're sorry that the PPU has found us. I just hope that our meeting doesn't create problems for any of us. Let's try to avoid that." Maria and Marcus promise that they'll never mention the ESP and the PPU to anyone. They ask the others to do the same regarding them and their parabilities.

Klaus interrupts. "Marcus, the ESP already knows about you. I told them. Our deal was that we wouldn't spread what we know to the general public. The ESP and Dirkmann are not the general public. We didn't break any promises or agreements."

"I see," says Marcus. His mood has changed noticeably from challenging to somber. "No, I don't blame you. Let's part as friends."

Marcus looks at Jan and Sandra, then says, "Make sure you do only those things that you believe in. Anyone who ever wants to leave the PPU and go into hiding, try to contact me somehow. If I have to 'disappear,' put ads in the *Herald Tribune* until you hear from me. I'll try to read or have someone check that paper regularly. Anyone who joins me will be part of a team that makes decisions for the team. There will not be a Dirkmann making our decisions. I'm sorry to repeat what I said earlier, but it looks to me like you're part of an organization led by power-hungry politicians using you for their own gain. Maria and I can't be part of that, so it's best we leave. It'd be nice to see you again under different circumstances. I truly hope that we'll never have to work against each other, and I hope you can respect our decision."

Klaus tries one final time. This time the urgency in his voice is obvious. "Marcus, join us voluntarily. The PPU and the ESP need you. I don't know what will happen if you don't join us voluntarily. I don't think the ESP will tolerate that."

"Are you threatening me Klaus?" asks Marcus.

"No," answers Klaus in a low voice. "I'm not threatening you, I'm just telling you that I might not be able to control things any further if you don't join us."

Marcus looks at Klaus, Jan, Sandra and Justo in turn. "You just heard what I feared. It isn't Klaus who calls the shots, but someone higher up. This is exactly why Maria and I won't join. Anyway, you have to make your choices. We've made ours."

Maria and Marcus leave the table and inn to a chorus of well wishes and farewells.

Maria looks at Marcus. "What should we do now?"

"Honestly? I'm scared. I don't know what to do next. Let's get some sleep and think about it. But let's not go to our places. I don't know how Brussels will react when they get Klaus' report. I know a nice hotel not far from here. Let's go there. At this time of year it should be pretty quiet there. We shouldn't have a problem getting a room. We can decide how to handle the situation tomorrow."

Marcus and Maria, like Klaus, are unaware that they are being watched. The ESP has had them under constant surveillance for a number of days. While they have a relaxing drink at the hotel bar and then go to their suite, three members of the ESP and three police officers position themselves outside the castle Wilheminenhoehe, which houses the hotel. They are ready for orders from Adler in Brussels.

Klaus sends an encrypted e-mail containing the day's developments to Adler. He writes that Marcus has not accepted, but that he is still negotiating. Klaus tries to soften Marcus' rebuff by making his response sound less certain than it actually is.

Adler reports immediately to Dirkmann, who shows little surprise. "I'm prepared for this. We'll use our other option. We can't take any risks, so make sure the hearing takes place tomorrow morning. Tell Baumgartner only after we carry out our coup, and then make sure he stays away from the action for 10 days. I'm relying on you. Baumgartner is too soft."

Sometime during the night, Marcus hears someone knock loudly at the door of their suite. Marcus groggily looks at his watch, 5:00am. He slips a pseudo-hand through the door and gently touches the persons in front of it. They are oblivious to his touch. Marcus sits straight up, his eyes now wide. The men outside the door are uniformed and armed! 'It's starting,' he thinks.

Marcus wakes Maria gently but urgently. "There are police or secret service outside the door to pick me up. Please, hide in the bathroom. I'll play along for the time being, but please stay in contact with me using your wonderful, powerful eyes."

They embrace quickly then Maria give Marcus a kiss. "If you can't look after yourself, I will," she says.

As Maria hurries to the bathroom, Marcus goes to the door. He has left only his clothes on the sofa near the suite's entrance. He opens the door a crack, keeping the chain fastened.

"Yes? Who is it?"

He can see several police officers and other uniformed guards. Marcus guesses that the latter must be ESP guards. "Are you Marcus Waller?"

"Yes."

"Due to serious accusations we are here to escort you for interrogation. Open the door immediately or we will use force."

Marcus smiles, "My lawyer has prepared an open letter for the major media in Europe about the ESP and the PPU organizations. If you do not show me more respect, I assure you that letter will go out. I am asking for a cup of coffee and 10 minutes to shower and dress. I will cooperate with you and will go with you without resistance if you allow me these two requests. I will then call my lawyer to inform him not to release the 8:00am letter. However, if you refuse my requests and my lawyer does not hear from me, that letter will go out at 8:00am sharp. I suggest that you inform whomever you're working for of my requests, and you can let me know their decision."

With this said, Marcus closes the door. He goes to the bathroom where he showers, shaves and dresses. After seven minutes there is another knock on

the door. Marcus opens the chained door just a crack. One of the uniformed men extends a cup a coffee.

"Here is your coffee Mr. Waller, and something to eat. We'll wait outside for another few minutes while you finish. It appears that it's better for all parties that the letter remains unpublished."

Marcus adds, "I haven't said that the letter won't be sent. I've just said that it won't be sent now."

So far, they have not called Marcus' bluff. He can fight his way out with his T-powers, but he decides to "go along for the ride." He is curious to see what they are planning to do and how they think they can "convince" him to join the PPU.

Marcus drinks his coffee, makes the "promised" phone call, kisses Maria and then walks toward the door. He looks as if he is off for a usual day's work. Looking unconcerned he leaves the room.

"Mr. Waller, we're sorry, but we have orders to handcuff you. This is the reason that we are early. We thought it would be less embarrassing with fewer people around."

Marcus notices that no one in the group has mentioned Maria. For this "oversight" he is grateful and relieved. About the handcuffs, he would rather not, but he does not feel like struggling against it. He can always overwhelm them if he needs to. They have obviously paid attention to what he has said in the seminars. The clumsy handcuffs look like they are made of lead, which of course he cannot break with his T-powers.

Marcus extends his arms forward. Had he been less tired and more observant, he would have reacted differently....

Under tight security, the entourage arrives at an office in the center of Vienna. Marcus finds himself surrounded by unfamiliar faces, one of which is Adler, who introduces himself.

Adler makes sure that Marcus is comfortable, and that they release one hand so he can eat the breakfast they have served him. Then Adler summarizes succinctly, "I am, as you probably already know, Klaus Baumgartner's boss. You know that we'd like your help within the PPU and we're willing to generously reward you for your loyalty. However, you don't seem receptive to our offers. I'm sorry that I have to give you firm 'alternatives,' as you have the potential to be one of our most valuable PPU members, but I have to make clear to you that you have only two choices. Choice one is that you reconsider and you cooperate with us. Choice two is that we have a criminal trial against you. We have a number of charges pending against you: multiple robberies in Austrian and U.S. casinos, involvement in the deaths of two U.S. citizens near Central City in Colorado, tax evasion on a grand scale, involvement in the kidnapping of a Mr. Koehler

Junior, leaving the scene of an accident, illegal mining of gold, and a few others. I'd say that you're easily looking at 15-20 years, or more. So, it is your choice."

Marcus is aghast. His casino winnings may border on illegality, depending on whose side of the roulette table you are on, but the other charges are clearly nonsense! Hoping to win some time, Marcus remains firm.

"Your organization is as illegal as some of your actions, and I will not in any way be part of that. How you've worked today is just one illustration of what the ESP really is, namely a terrorist organization working for the personal gains of a few politicians. It is time that the public knows about the ESP and the PPU. I will not cooperate, so I choose the trial. The media will love the story - the ESP, the PPU, the role of Dirkmann and yourself."

Adler looks disgruntled. "You have no evidence to back your accusations. I think you underestimate us. But, as you like. You'll have your trial. The pre-trial hearing to determine if you'll remain in custody until your trial will be held in 20 minutes, at 7:00am sharp."

Marcus cannot believe what he is hearing, but Adler shrugs his shoulders. "As I said, you underestimate us. Of course you'll have a public trial eventually. Today is just a pre-trial hearing to determine whether you'll be kept in custody while awaiting trial. With the accusations as serious as they are, I wouldn't bank on being released on bail. I'm sure that you can and will hire the best lawyers that money can buy for the trial, which will probably take place in a few months. We too have to prepare for it, getting witnesses from the U.S., etc. However, the material that we have is ironclad, so I'm sure that you'll be spending quite awhile behind lead bars."

Marcus suspects that Adler's tough talk is just a show to scare him, but he cannot be sure. His use of "lead bars" rather than just "bars" sounds threatening. Still, he believes in his T-powers. They will be enough to break him out of prison if necessary. So, Marcus ignores Adler and keeps defiantly silent.

Marcus' pre-trial hearing starts a few minutes later, 7:00am sharp. The judge looks at Marcus and says, "Mr. Waller, the accusations in the documents before us are serious. You have cheated Casino Austria of large sums and U.S. casinos of still larger amounts. You have admitted this yourself."

To Marcus' surprise, the judge orders a tape to be played that was supposedly recorded in Las Vegas. He hears his voice. "I'm a physicist. I've found a technique that I can use to improve my chances when I'm on certain roulette tables. There's no one else who knows this trick."

"Marcus Waller, is that your voice on the tape?" asks the judge.

Marcus sits speechless and appalled. It *is* him. He remembers the conversation, but someone has tampered with the dialogue. Someone has erased the part where he says that European casinos are secure! It dawns on Marcus that the ESP probably has as much fake and incriminating evidence as he has fake passports. Thus, Marcus is no longer surprised to hear further accusations and distortions of facts. Marcus admits to himself that he also feels guilty. The evidence is distorted - true - but there are a number of things that he has done that are at best immoral and at worst, illegal.

When the judge hands down the verdict that Marcus is to remain in custody with no bail, Marcus is not surprised. The ESP has done a good job of cornering him.

The hearing is officially closed. While the judge rambles on Marcus decides that he has heard enough. It is time to free himself. He examines the room and its security. First he will get rid of the policeman's pistols so they cannot shoot him. With his pseudo-hands he grabs the pistols and throws them into a far corner.

As the pistols clatter into the corner, Marcus feels a sting under the handcuff he is wearing. It takes him a fraction of a second to understand what is happening. There is a remotely controlled injection needle inside the lead cuff - out of his reach! They have just shot a dose of something into him. Will they stun him or kill him?

Marcus increases his individual speed to its maximum. He jumps up, pushes the security guards out of the way with his T-powers and runs for the exit. Before he is out of the building, he collapses, unconscious.

Adler and Baumgartner are observing the courtroom via cameras, while Dirkman is hooked up via video-conferencing. Baumgartner protests loudly against the treatment of Marcus and their whole approach. Dirkman and Adler, however, are shocked to see Marcus almost escape in spite of the injection.

Dirkman shouts, "What happened?! I thought we were prepared for Waller to use his powers. The injection was supposed to work immediately." Adler remains silent.

Dirkman continues, threateningly, "Waller cannot escape us. He is to be placed into the special prison cell you've prepared, and he is to be observed around the clock. Make sure he accepts all conditions."

When Baumgartner interjects that this action goes against all agreements between the ESP and the PPU, he can hear the sarcasm in Dirkman's voice. "You better read the small print in the agreement you signed when you became the head of the PPU."

That day Baumgartner re-reads his contract, which he admits he only skimmed through initially. He feels his stomach drop as he reads it. He can

understand why Marcus does not want to join the PPU. Under the contract Klaus must carry out all orders from superiors or face stiff penalties. He cannot leave the PPU before his contract expires, which is several years off.

But another person watched the court proceedings from a distance. Maria followed everything that transpired. Although she could not hear anything, the actions did not need explanation.

She races along the Danube River, driving from Vienna to Krems, where they are transporting the unconscious body of Marcus. Maria knows he isn't dead because she can see him breathing, but what they plan on doing with him is anyone's guess.

10 The Escape

Early November 2003

When Marcus regains consciousness, he is in a nicely decorated room. He lies on a comfortable bed with cushions and blankets. Even though the room is small and tastefully decorated, there is something not quite right. Marcus sees a table and two chairs, a side table with newspapers and magazines, and a bookshelf with a vase of flowers. Suddenly Marcus realizes what is wrong. Everything except the cushions and blanket are made of solid lead with a thin layer of color to hide it! His attempts to move the vase with his T-powers or to reach through the wall. But he fails. He cautiously and easily moves the flowers, the blanket and the cushions. 'At least I still have my T-powers,' he thinks. Item by item, Marcus makes his way around the room. There is not a single hard object in the room that is not made of lead. Someone has made sure he cannot use his T-powers.

When Marcus moves, he realizes that a solid band of lead is still around his left wrist, part of the handcuff from the courtroom. Clearly there must still be a needle inside to stun him anytime they want!

Marcus is impressed with the careful arrangements they have made to contain him. He is amazed at their forethought. This room, for example, must have been prepared weeks in advance, at a time when he had not even revealed his parabilities to Baumgartner and his team. Had Baumgartner been lying to him all the time? Marcus looks around the room again. It certainly looks like it.

Marcus continues his exploration of the room without getting up. It may be better that they think he is still unconscious while he examines the room with his hands. Marcus is sure he is under surveillance by well-hidden cameras.

The room contains the outline of a door, but it has no doorknob and clearly cannot be opened from within the room. Adjacent to it is the outline of another, smaller door or hatch. Marcus wonders about its purposes. On the other side of the larger door is a proper door, with a door handle, which is also made of lead. He suspects that this door leads to a small bathroom.

The lighting of the room interests him so he explores it. The lamp is made of glass, as usual. The wire leading from the lamp is made of copper, so he follows the wiring using his hands. His route is aborted when Marcus' pseudo-hands are blocked by a piece of lead wire. From an energy conducting perspective, the wiring is nonsense. But from an escape perspective, he is effectively trapped.

Next Marcus searches his room for cameras. He finds a total of six, positioned so that every nook and cranny of his room is under surveillance.

He is sure the same is true of the bathroom. Like the lamp, the cameras have had all kinds of precautions taken so that he cannot tamper with them.

They have even designed the ventilation of the rooms carefully. The blades of the ventilator are made of lead and turn rapidly. He cannot reach through the ventilation channel with his hands without destroying the fan. That assumes he could destroy the fan, which is questionable considering it is made from lead as well.

Marcus thinks about the fan for a few minutes before deciding to explore the bathroom. Suddenly he hears Klaus Baumgartner's voice, loud and clear. "Marcus, I'm sorry that we have to imprison you temporarily. I hope you can understand we have no choice. The good news is that you can have anything you want in your room. The flip side is that there's only one way out of the room. They're asking for complete cooperation with and subordination to the PPU. Since all of us in the PPU are your friends, we want you to seriously consider this option. I'm sure you understand that you must submit to some external controls because of the enormity of your parabilities. Some people see those talents as threatening."

Klaus continues, "Until you agree with us and you're ready to follow all the steps necessary to join the PPU, you will have as much comfort as possible in your room. I'm sure that by this time you've already noticed the lead band around your wrist. What you suspect is right. You can be stunned remotely any time it is considered necessary. The ring also has several sensors that measure your temperature, pulse, skin conductivity, etc. We're aware that you've been conscious for about 20 minutes and have been inspecting the room without moving. You guessed correctly that you'd be under observation."

Marcus remains still and silent.

As Klaus continues, Marcus thinks he detects less formality in his voice. "Perhaps you'd like to eat something now. I'll visit you later so we can discuss where to go from here. I must request before I come, however, that you give me your word of honor that you won't attack me when I enter the room *and* you won't use my visit to escape. An attempt would be foiled anyway. Marcus, I trust you, and I assure you that I'll always try to protect you."

"I, however, don't trust you anymore Klaus," responds Marcus. "You've been preparing this room with painstaking care for weeks. Then you tell me that your aim is to help me. You just want to win. You're like a hunter and I'm a trophy, a particularly good trophy since you caught me despite my parapowers. Why did you lie to me Klaus? I don't need friends like you."

When Klaus speaks again his voice is lower, dejected. "I can understand your reaction Marcus. Nevertheless, hear me out. I assure you - and you have

to trust me on this - I had nothing to do with the preparation of your prison cell. I didn't know about it. I'm afraid your assessment of the ESP has been more or less correct. Still, we have to find a solution that's suits *all* parties, not just you. I think it will be easier to discuss this face-to-face rather than through a series of microphones."

Marcus finds out what the small door near the entrance door is to serve him his food. The design is ingenious really; they have been thorough. It is a reinforced, locked shaft system. When the little door that Marcus sees is opened, another small, lead door has already closed at the other end, giving Marcus absolutely no chance of reaching through with his pseudo-hands. Although he cannot see the inner construction of the larger door, he is sure they were built with the same plan.

The food is typically Austrian and tastes good. Through the little door he receives a meat-strudel soup, stuffed breast of veal and a mixed salad. They serve with it a light Styrian white wine and a fruit dessert and coffee. Marcus is almost touched that Klaus remembers his favorites in detail. But the fantastic presentation loses some of its impact when it's served on a plastic plate with plastic cutlery. They have thought of everything.

When Marcus has finished, Klaus enters the room with a bottle of excellent dessert wine as a gift. Klaus extends his hand to Marcus, who shakes it with hesitation.

Klaus tries to defend his role and the measures taken so far. What he does not tell Marcus is that he has been removed from the job. Only by begging Adler to give him a chance to arrive at a "peaceful" solution with Marcus, has Klaus been able to talk with Marcus. Klaus, like Marcus, is currently under surveillance and is being fully controlled.

Klaus tries again to convince Marcus to join the PPU. He talks about Marcus, like other paratalents, walking a very fine edge. He can choose to do a world of good, or he can find himself lured into borderline legal or worse, illegal activities. Those things raised at the pre-trial hearing - yes, possibly exaggerated - illustrate exactly what Klaus is talking about. If the world is to run smoothly and equitably, nobody should be able to live outside the laws. However, this means that there must be ways to enforce the laws.

Marcus interrupts Klaus. "How can this ever work with me? Even if you believe I'll go along, others won't."

"Yes, you're right," agrees Klaus. "Unfortunately, your word isn't enough. You'll have to undergo a procedure during which a small stunning gadget can be remotely activated will be implanted in your head. The remote signal would only be able to be sent by one of two trusted people. Those people would live at a distance from each other so that you couldn't eliminate them simultaneously with your powers, if you ever got tempted. Marcus, you have

to realize that trust is being shown from the side of the ESP as well. What if you agree to the surgery and you're released. What would stop you from hiring people to kill the two persons at exactly the same time? Those are risks that the ESP is willing to accept because many of us believe in you. The ability to stun you is being taken as a last and really unnecessary resort."

Marcus is appalled that Klaus thinks he would consider an implanted stunning device as a viable option. What Marcus does not know is the lengths that Klaus has gone to and the arguments he has fought to avoid much more drastic actions against Marcus - from life long imprisonment to the "eradication of the monster" as Dirkmann put it.

As they talk, Marcus senses that Klaus has tried his best to find a solution acceptable to all parties. Marcus sees three possible options: to accept Klaus's proposal, to stay imprisoned forever, or to escape. However, the only one acceptable option is to escape. That is where he decides to turn his attention and thoughts.

Marcus pretends to listen, but only catches snippets of Klaus's monologue. He has to make sure Maria can help him from the outside. Without her help, there is little chance of him getting free. Hopefully Maria knows where he is.

Marcus wants time to think about the operation and requests more details about it. Klaus helps Marcus by asking whether he wants to talk to the surgeon who will perform the operation.

"That would certainly help me decide. I'm not exactly thrilled to have surgery on my head, especially when I know nothing about the procedure."

When Klaus prepares to leave, Marcus says, "Klaus, please stay in contact with me. Of all the persons from the ESP, I know you best and trust you more than the others. I have one more request. Can you give me honest answers to three questions? First, if I promise to spend my life on a totally isolated island, like Tokalau in the South Pacific and the ESP drops me off there, is that an acceptable option? There are only about 10 boats a year visiting Tokalau, so my continued existence on the island could be easily monitored. Second, the ring with the injection needles, is it capable of killing me? And third, where am I? Still in Vienna?"

Klaus looks around Marcus' room as he, Marcus, talks. He looks at Marcus, resigned. "I don't think you'll be allowed to leave this room without the operation no matter what you promise or where you go, whether in exile or not. Second, yes. I'm sorry Marcus. The needle can kill you. Believe me when I say that I had no idea that these special handcuffs were being made for you. And third, I'm not allowed to tell you where you are."

With his last sentence Klaus starts to shuffle his feet in a very strange manner. Marcus almost asks him what he is doing, but then thinks better of

it. Klaus continues, "I guess I can tell you that you're not in Vienna anymore. Marcus, please, be rational. I'm sure you don't like what you've heard. But try to understand that some measures to control you are necessary, from the ESP's perspective. Don't position the parties as 'us versus them.' You could have an interesting and challenging life when you join the PPU. You can't remain in this room for the rest of your life, even if I do get you a larger one."

Klaus leaves a reflective Marcus in his room. And Marcus plays the role of a thoughtful person well. He slowly paces back and forth in the small room, picks at the flowers and the blanket, and he wonders if Klaus's strange shuffling of his feet meant anything. He bends down to pick a piece of napkin off the floor and notices a tiny pebble where Klaus shuffled his feet. He picks it up, unobtrusively, as he picks up the piece of paper napkin. Stone! Of course, in German, Stein!

'Stein is one of the largest prison complexes in Austria, in Krems, about 30 miles upstream from Vienna on the Danube. Did Klaus try to indicate that I'm in Stein,' thinks Marcus.

The more Marcus replays the conversation and Klaus' behavior, the more he is convinced that Klaus is trying to help him. It all fits. He read about a month ago that Stein was closed down for complete renovation. So, the ESP has been planning to capture him for at least a month, which means they have had time to prepare for all eventualities.

'If what I'm thinking is true, then I might be the only prisoner being held in Stein,' he thinks.

Of course Klaus and Marcus' entire conversation was recorded and watched by Adler and Dirkmann. After Klaus leaves Marcus' cell, he is under interrogation and attack for his words and behavior. Why did he suggest Marcus talk with the surgeon? Certainly Klaus knows the urgency of this operation. Now Klaus has introduced a delay. Why did he tell Marcus the injection needle could kill him? And why did he violate a direct order not to tell Marcus where he is?

"I didn't tell Marcus where he is," Klaus defends himself. "I just told him where he isn't, so I haven't violated any order. Also, you're treating Marcus like an enemy. I think you'd do much better by treating him like a powerful ally. Try - just once - to put yourself in his place. Would you be happy to hear that someone you don't know is ordering an operation on your skull - during which time you'll have something implanted that can kill you? Oh, and they can kill you remotely at any time as well? I know there's no alternative, and I know Marcus will realize this in due course, but he needs time to think about it. We've been looking for him for months, a few days longer shouldn't matter."

As always, Dirkmann is the hardliner. "There's no doubt that we can make good use of Marcus' powers. But we have to be in complete control of him. We have to get this device implanted as soon as possible. I emphasize this because you can never underestimate mutants. Marcus may have things up his sleeve we don't know about. He may have allies on the outside who are planning to help him. If he doesn't agree soon we'll just stun him and perform the operation without his consent. There's no way I'm going to handle him with kid gloves and treat him like a king forever. My deadline is... one week. After one week, the operation is going to take place, regardless of what Marcus decides."

"I'm also going to consult with experts," says Dirkmann. "What if Marcus can shield himself with some kind of 'Farraday cage?' Then a remote signal to activate a lethal injection won't work. He'd be as dangerous after the operation as he is now."

As Dirkmann talks, Klaus thinks about his mention of the Farraday cage in which a person can be shielded against electromagnetic waves by surrounding themselves with a web of metal wires or metal plates. Mobile phones are a good example. Sometimes they do not work in concrete buildings because those buildings are reinforced with steel. Klaus' mind continues wandering. Similarly, people in cars and airplanes that are hit by lightning are not impacted. The car and the plane may be destroyed from the lightning, which may then impact the people, but the initial strike does not hit the people. Could Marcus protect himself in a similar manner?

When Klaus pulls himself back into the conversation, Dirkmann is saying, "We'd have to kill him as quickly as we can. We can't have a mutant running free."

Klaus is disgusted. "How can you kill someone just because of his talents?"

Dirkmann looks at Klaus with disdain. "There were many who would have liked to have killed Hitler, and they would have been justified. As a Commission, we've removed a number of dangerous potentates in the past. Marcus is just another. If it is a question of saving many by killing one, the decision is not hard."

Klaus tries again. "Marcus' operation isn't without risk. It may kill him. If he's willing to take that risk, then we should honor our part of the deal."

Dirkmann's patience is wearing thin. He's angry. "We agree Marcus is a chance or a risk. You, Klaus, are no threat with your parascouting powers. The members of your team pose a limited threat, which we've neutralized. Take Sandra's case as an example. She was a threat and she's been neutralized. But even neutralized, mutants must be observed and controlled. Is that clear? The more powerful members you recruit, the more this will be

true. Marcus is particularly critical. I'll have him killed at his first attempt to escape. Maybe you should let him know that. And you Mr. Baumgartner are under constant surveillance. You identify too closely with your team. One day you may feel you have enough power to neglect orders from above, or to omit critical information from your reports. I think you need to think about your loyalties Mr. Baumgartner. I am temporarily suspending you as head of the PPU until Marcus' case is resolved."

Klaus goes pale. His thoughts race. He promised Marcus to protect him no matter what. Now, it looks as if he will not be able to keep that promise. Klaus cannot go to Adler because he will follow Dirkmann's orders, even if it means killing a person. Does Dirkmann know about Maria? He has not submitted anything official to Brussels about Maria. Is that what Dirkmann meant when he referred to omitting information? Or was that who he referred to when he mentioned people who might be helping Marcus? Did Dirkmann or Adler notice that he dropped a tiny stone in Marcus' cell? Did Marcus even notice the stone?

Klaus returns to the observation room where he appears to be zooming around the room aimlessly with the cameras. In the midst of his zooming, he zooms in on the spot where he dropped the small stone. It's gone. Marcus has picked it up. He must understand what it means. And although the stone is small, it is hard and not made of lead. Marcus might be able to use it as a weapon.

In his next meeting with Adler, Klaus manages to bring forth from him all the information Dirkmann has told him about the Russian paratalents. As Adler recounts Dirkmann's information, Klaus is increasingly repulsed by Dirkmann. He is obviously willing to be ruthless when he considers it necessary.

Klaus decides to warn the members of his group. They must know, as he does, that politicians above them do not just consider them allies but also formidable threats. They should seriously consider their continued allegiance with the PPU. Klaus realizes he will be in serious breach of his contract and will unleash a whole series of problems for himself if his actions are ever leaked to Adler or Dirkmann, but he feels a responsibility toward his staff.

Klaus is alone in the room with the monitors showing Marcus' cell and bathroom. He watches Marcus closely. He appears distracted and unsettled. With a creased forehead Marcus puts blankets on the table. They appear to cushion the hardness of the table, but they are also hiding a small part of the wall. Marcus takes a newspaper, puts it on the table and appears to read it, his elbows resting on the table. The remnants of his meal seem to bother Marcus, so he piles up the plastic plates and utensils, then goes to the little door. He opens the door and pushes the trash through it. In the process, the

cutlery falls off the plates and onto the floor. Marcus bends down to pick it up. "Coincidentally" the cutlery has fallen at exactly the spot hidden by the blanket. It seems to Klaus that Marcus is bending down much longer than necessary to pick up a spoon, fork and knife. Is he doing something that should be examined more carefully?

Klaus is not going to interfere - even if Marcus is doing something that might help him to escape. Klaus cannot see how bending down to the floor briefly can be of any help, but he smiles to himself, hoping it might.

Marcus stands upright again, stretching himself as if bending down has hurt his back. He puts the plastic fork that he picked up into the shaft and sits down to continue reading the newspaper. It seems that not just the table is too hard, but also the chair. Marcus gets up and lies down on the bed. Only after he is on the bed does he remember the blanket which he left on the table. Cursing under his breath he gets up and reaches for the blanket.

Klaus does not notice that the wall spot covered by the blanket now has a few new lines. Even if he did notice, it would have looked like little more than random scratches. Klaus does not know the MUSLI symbols, so he would not have recognized the message.

After Klaus leaves the windowless room, Marcus accelerates his subjective time and focuses on formulating an escape plan. There seems only one way possible. Maria has to be able to see into his room. He has to communicate to her somehow that he needs a few tiny pieces of stone, like the one Klaus left, or something similarly hard. The only way this seems possible is through the ventilation system. He can collect the little pieces and somehow join them together to form a projectile. He can then use that projectile to destroy the ventilator blades. If he manages to destroy the blades he can reach through the ventilation shaft and try to open his room from the outside. He can then go into high subjective speed to battle his way out. He will meet up with Maria and escape with her, but he will make his pursuers think they do not escape a car crash.

Although only a few objective minutes have passed, by increasing his time 100 fold Marcus has outlined a detailed escape plan. However, it all hinges on the assumption that Maria can see into his room!

If she *can* see into his room, Maria will be able to translate meaningless scratches on the wall:

Caught in lead room. Need small solid pieces through ventilation system. Then wait at parking lot in rented car in front of road tunnel leading around Duernstein.

Does Maria know he is in the Stein prison? If she does, can she see into his room? Will she notice the scratches? Will she remember the MUSLI code

they joked about? Marcus finds it ironic that they will meet around Duernstein, the place where Richard the Lionhearted was imprisoned until his assistant freed him. Duernstein is now a picturesque small city overlooking the beautiful Danube valley, watched over by the ruins of a once powerful castle.

To the surprise of the crew monitoring Marcus, he does not turn off the light that night when he goes to sleep. He sleeps restlessly, doubting Maria can surmount the hurdles separating them. Even if she does know where he is and can look into his room, how can she get small solid pieces through the ventilation system?

Maria is with Marcus at each step of the way. She immediately hires a team of detectives, offering them such lavish conditions that they will do just about anything for her. She knows where Marcus is and she can look into his cell from a room she has reserved at a nearby hotel. She watches the discussion between Klaus and Marcus, and Marcus' blanket decoy. Maria, of course, can see through the blanket and sees clearly what Marcus is writing.

Contrary to Marcus' belief, Maria is convinced that Marcus can escape. She knows how she will get the small solid pieces into his room and will find the workman who installed the ventilation system. She'll manage to "convince" him, using a substantial sum of money that he has to fix it. She is concocting a sad story about the guy inside who desperately needs medication. Then she will give him the special capsules, which she will have refilled with iron dust.

Her team of detectives finds the workman within a few hours. Maria's money convinces the workman the guy in prison desperately needs his medication. When the workman later receives the medication from Maria, he thinks that the guy in prison must be pretty sick because the capsules sure are heavy.

The workman is interested for personal reasons as well. He is curious, as are all the locals, about what is going on with the prison in their town. Maria tells him the man is imprisoned because he knows the details of a political scandal the government is trying to cover up. Maria's story sounds not only plausible but likely. Why else would the papers have reported that the prison would be closed down for complete renovation and those renovations never transpired.

Construction work at the prison did happen, but only minimally. And that construction was strange. Take the workman's task of installing a ventilation system for example. Who would request a ventilation system whose shaft and ventilator blades were made of heavy, soft metals? There seemed to be a new, small building constructed, and that was it. There were also machine

guns and armored vehicles positioned around the small building. Was this all done to keep the lid on a scandal? Boy, what a scandal that one must be. Anyway, the workman was satisfied and happy with the money. He agreed to help get the medication to this poor guy. He would also have new stories to tell in the bar later.

Maria actually has to hold back the workman, who wants to go in immediately. She first has to get the capsules ready. She also wants to let Marcus know the time he can expect the material to be delivered.

Marcus has a discussion with the surgeon who is supposed to do the operation. The surgeon describes the operation as "not particularly dangerous, but interesting." Although the discussion has bought Marcus time, it has not convinced him to have the surgery.

The day after the discussion, Marcus is reading the daily newspaper, studying them front to back, line by line. He does this painstaking task daily so that no one observing him will get suspicious when he reads the advertisements section of the Austrian paper he and Maria agreed they should use to communicate. He immediately sees Maria's ad: "Interested in MUSLI? New shipment to be shown today, 3:00pm, usual location." Marcus is excited! She knows where he is, she can see him, and she has a plan to help him.

Although Marcus tries to sit still and appear to be reading, he is unable to control his pulse rate, which goes up when he reads Maria's ad. The staff note the fluctuation and report it immediately to Adler. Adler hurries into the observation room, where he sees Marcus sitting, reading the paper as quietly and carefully as he had for the past two days.

Adler shrugs and smirks, saying, "Don't worry about his pulse rate. The guy might be thinking about some pretty girl. I wouldn't be surprised. He must be lonely in there. Even his bathroom is under observation."

The staff look at each other and then shrug their shoulders. If Adler is not concerned, why should they be? Their oversight is just what Marcus needs.

Marcus is relieved to hear from Maria. The last two days have been boring and frustrating. He has not been allowed to see Klaus. He informs Adler that he wants one more day to think about things, and if nothing new comes up he will be willing to go along with the proposed operation.

Adler is happy that 'Marcus is softening up'. He was not looking forward to ordering the operation without his consent. At one point Adler contemplated going public with Marcus' situation. He had doubted whether he could live with himself if he ordered the operation and something went wrong. However, fear of Dirkmann pushes him on. That Marcus appears to be giving in is a relief. Adler responds with a reduction in the rigor of his observation.

That afternoon - the afternoon of the delivery - passes slowly. It is hard for Marcus to continue his routine. By 3:30pm nothing has happened.

Marcus cannot know that the delay has come about by the workman hitting snags when he tries to fix the ventilation system. The supervisor on duty refuses him entry. Only when the workman says, "Okay, I don't care, but you have to sign here saying that you refuse the repairs and that I warned you the person in the room may suffocate during the night because of a failure in the system."

Since Adler is nowhere to be found and Dirkmann is offsite, the supervisor reluctantly relents.

Minutes later Marcus notices small capsules falling into his room from the ventilation system. Marcus' pulse rate jumps again. However, because of Adler's earlier remarks, the staff ignores it. 'Maria has outdone herself on this one,' he thinks. The capsules are small and exactly the same color as the floor, making them barely visible.

The tricky part is about to begin. Marcus has to pick up the capsules and shape them into a projectile by wrapping them in a small piece of plastic that he has ripped from the shower curtain. With the projectile he hopes to destroy the ventilator.

The rain of capsules has ceased. The repair noises have stopped. Marcus waits patiently for another 20 minutes. He can't endanger whoever was doing the repairs.

However, he must act fast. He increases his subjective speed by a factor of 3000. The three minutes it takes to pick up the capsules and form them into a projectile takes about a fifteenth of a second of clock time. Marcus has prepared himself for the incredible air resistance that he encounters when he moves at such quick speeds. Just before he throws the projectile, guided by a pseudo-hand, he pulls back his time to a factor of 100 fold. At this speed he will have force but also accuracy to hit the ventilator. He must hit it exactly in the center or it will not be destroyed. It must be completely destroyed if he is to reach through it with his pseudo-hand.

Marcus hits the exact center. The ventilator stops. Marcus shoots two of his pseudo-hands through the shaft. He has to find a heavy object to use to smash his cell doors open. He is lucky. He finds an object, a bicycle just to the side of the door. He grabs the bike and smashes it against the outer door of his cell. After three attempts the door gives. He then concentrates on hitting the inner door that leads to his room.

By now the observation staff has noticed that something is going on. Adler has walked into the room and is watching with the crew. He looks in disbelief as a bicycle - just a bicycle - smashes through the outside of Marcus' cell and bangs at the inside door. Adler reaches quickly for the red

button, which directly connects him to Dirkmann. Adler says, "Marcus Waller is trying to escape."

Dirkmann answers within seconds. "I authorize you to kill him immediately."

Everyone in the observation room hears the order. They freeze. It all seems unreal. Adler hits the button. Marcus should be receiving a lethal dose through the arm right now.

If Marcus were not operating at 100 fold subjective time and if he were not expecting an injection, he would have died within seconds. However, at his increased time, he notices a light vibration in the lead band. He slides a thin pseudo-hand between the skin and the band and hardens the hand. The motor operating the needle hits the resistance and burns out. The needle breaks. When the motor burns out, all sensors stop working, including the sensors monitoring Marcus' pulse. The monitoring system reads the stoppage as a subject death, not a system failure. It reflects on the monitor that the subject no longer has a pulse. The monitoring machine states in its bland, computer voice, "The heart of the subject has stopped. The subject is dead."

Adler hears the report and feels sick. He just killed Marcus Waller. Dirkmann, who is now linked in on tele-observation, is satisfied. He breathes a sigh of relief. However, there is the problem of witnesses to deal with. Adler and his men openly heard him give the orders to kill Marcus Waller. They cannot leave the premises with that information. He moves his hand to a key. When he turns it, an electrical explosion will occur in the prison's control room, killing everyone in it.

Adler will learn 16 years later that his life was unknowingly linked to the survival of Marcus Waller. If Marcus had not survived, Adler and the others would have been killed as well.

Just before Dirkmann turns the key, he sees movement. In the last 20 seconds, the bicycle has broken through the inner door to Marcus' cell. At 200 fold speed - slow enough for Marcus to act carefully and purposefully - Marcus rushes at 2/3 the speed of sound through the corridor into the interior of the prison courtyard. He is still enclosed. There is a large, thick wall separating him from the outer courtyard. Marcus uses his full T-powers to throw objects like cannonballs into the wall. Dirkmann, Adler and his staff are baffled. If Marcus Waller is dead, what is happening in the courtyard? Something horrible is loose down there and it is completely invisible.

Marcus' speed makes his movements invisible. Even the video cameras fail to record him at such high speeds!

Adler is not sure what he is fighting. He orders the gunners stationed on the courtyard walls to fire at will. They do not know what to aim at, but they take the order, shooting thousands of shots randomly. Even though the shots

are coming at 1/200th of their ordinary speed, Marcus finds it difficult to shield himself from all directions. He enters a shelter in the wall used earlier by prison guards. He grabs a megaphone and shouts into it, "This is Marcus Waller. I don't want to hurt or kill anyone. However, I am saying no thanks to your hospitality. Anyone who tries to shoot me will be considered my enemy and risks being killed. Your bosses are trying to cover up a scandal that I can reveal. Don't get yourselves killed defending them. Ask yourselves what you're really killing for."

Most gunners stop their fire. Marcus starts, again at increased subjective time, to smash his way through the wall. He suddenly feels very tired. Is he really a monster that must be killed? How easy it would be for him to turn the firing guns around and kill those trying to kill him! He really does not want to do that, but he is not willing to be killed either.

Although they cannot see him, they can see the section of wall that is being smashed. One gunner decides to shoot in the direction of the action. Marcus throws the gunner and his helper over the wall. The fall alone could have seriously hurt, possibly even killed the men had Marcus not cushioned their landing. Fortunately, their fall and soft landing will contribute to the many wild stories regarding Marcus in the near future.

By this time Marcus has created an opening in the wall through which he escapes. The courtyard video cameras now directed at the hole in the wall do not record any movement through the hole. This recording adds to later speculation that Marcus must have escaped not through the hole, but through a secret exit. The hole was simply used as a diversion tactic.

In the outer courtyard a number of massive vehicles are being moved. He recognizes a heavily fortified Hummer among them. A friend of his let him drive one of these super jeeps a couple of years ago, so Marcus heads for the Hummer. Although a Hummer resembles a tank in sturdiness, it drives like a limousine.

When interrogated later, the driver of the Hummer will report gibberish. He will say, "I don't know what happened to me. I was sitting in my Hummer one minute. Next thing I know I'm sitting on the ground, and someone is driving away in my Hummer. I must have blacked out or something. I don't know what happened. I wasn't hit. I don't have any bruises or anything."

All told, everyone seemed to act crazy that day. Perhaps they hallucinated. The theory that Marcus Waller used a special kind of gas to knock out everyone is the theory that's soon accepted.

At any rate, Marcus drives the Hummer through the busted door. A few shots are fired after him, but they are very few. Marcus has a feeling a James Bond-like chase will *not* ensue. Krems is a peaceful city. The PPU does not

want attention drawn to themselves. And they definitely do not want to endanger innocent bystanders.

The firing stops. Marcus drives at high speeds up the Danube to the place where he hopes to meet Maria.

Adler reports to Dirkmann. "I don't know how he did it, but Marcus Waller survived. He escaped from the compound and is driving a Hummer westward, following the Danube."

Dirkmann realizes he still needs Adler. He cannot kill him or his team, nor is it necessary. After all, Marcus Waller's death sentence never really happened. Although Dirkmann is stewing over Adler's stupidity and oversight, he remains calm. "Alert the police and the special anti-terror unit Cobra that Waller has escaped. Inform them he is armed and dangerous. Snipers might be their best bet. At close range it may be difficult to kill him."

Marcus shocks locals and tourists. He drives the massive Hummer at high speeds, ignoring all traffic signs, rules and overtaking cars recklessly. Around each curve Marcus expects a roadblock. It is only close to his destination that he encounters one. Marcus is not worried about himself, but he is concerned about injuring someone in the process of getting through the block.

To build a roadblock against a Hummer is not easy. To build one against a Hummer driven by someone with T-powers is plain crazy. There is no way to stop him.

Like the gunners at the prison, the officers at the roadblock will find it hard to explain why all of them dropped their weapons. Waller had a single pistol. They will not be able to explain why they fell to the ground and just watched as he drove into the barrier of police cars with his Hummer, flattening a few cars and damaging his Hummer. They did not try to stop him when he jumped into one of the police cars in the process. The explanation of "It all happened so fast" will not be convincing - but probably just as plausible as the explanations that come out of the prison breakout.

Marcus only has a few miles before he reaches the spot where he hopes Maria is waiting for him. What he needs, he decides, is blood in the car. He needs them to think, at least temporarily, that he is dead.

The poor piglet that Marcus lifts out of the field will never know what hit it. At one minute it is feeding in a field, and the next minute it is in a speeding car. Luckily it collapses dead from shock. Two hundred yards before the Duernstein bypass tunnel, Marcus slows down and jumps out of the car. His pseudo-hands cushion his fall into the ditch. He then uses his pseudo-hands to push the piglet into the driver's seat. As he runs to the parking lot where Maria is hopefully waiting for him, he pushes the gas pedal of the car hard with his T-power and he steers the car directly into the right

pillar of the tunnel's entrance. The noise of the crash is tremendous, but the fire that erupts is not as spectacular as Marcus had expected. The cars in U.S. action movies must have much more gas in their tanks than Austrian police cars!

Marcus finds Maria waiting in the parking lot in a rented car. Marcus jumps into the passenger side. Their eyes meet. All Marcus can say is "Thanks."

Maria smiles. "Well done on the breakout. Good stuff for a movie. But seriously, I'm proud of you. Not that you made it - I knew that you'd make it - but because you didn't hurt anyone in the process."

Marcus looks at Maria with admiration. But they have to go, and quickly. "Maria, take a left turn toward Krems. Don't take the main road, it'll be blocked."

"I know," says Maria.

Marcus slaps his forehead slightly, apologizing sheepishly. "Sorry, of course you know." Using her teleseeing Maria has followed everything. She does not need instructions on which route to take. She can see numerous police cars driving to the burning wreck. Some stop further back, blocking the road. As they guessed, the side roads are open. They bypass the roadblock, easily and quickly reaching Krems. They take the bridge across the Danube without a problem. The police are all in the vicinity of the accident. The piglet seems to have done the job.

When the police can finally get near the burnt, smashed car, they see blood and burnt flesh. They radio colleagues that Marcus Waller, the dangerous escapee from Stein, has died in a car accident. No further search is necessary.

Not everyone shares the belief that Marcus is dead, least of all Klaus Baumgartner. But as soon as he hears the news, he phones Adler. "Well, that's the end of this I guess."

Adler would like to believe that Marcus is dead, but he is not convinced. Dirkmann wants 100 percent assurance.

Dirkmann orders DNA tests on the blood, "Compare it to the blood we took from Waller when he was unconscious. In the meantime I want all roads out of Krems and Austria carefully watched until we are certain that Waller is dead. I'm scared of this guy."

By the time Adler orders police controls at every Danube bridge and roads to the Czech Republic, Maria and Marcus have already crossed the Danube. Police armed with photos are also looking for Waller at train stations, major highways, and airports. When Maria and Marcus come to the intersection of the main East-West highway, they veer off, driving on deeply rutted dirt roads.

Marcus and Maria drive towards the Styrian mountains, taking side roads, not yet sure what to do once they arrive. Clearly, they will have to leave Austria. But before they can do so, they have to hide out. There will be police looking for them. Their house on the road to Green Lake is the obvious place to hide. They talk about the last few days. Marcus tells Maria about the prison cell and his conversation with Klaus and the surgeon. He congratulates and thanks Maria for the ventilation repair idea.

"It was the obvious solution," says Maria. "But I think it will backfire. I had to cash a lot of money for the plan. The repairman knows my name, and I'm sure he'll inadvertently lead the police to me in connection with your escape. That means that we'll both be hunted. You for your powers and I as an accessory to your escape."

"Maria, I'm sorry for putting you in danger. If your father gets you a good lawyer, I'm sure he can get you off any charges coming out of this. I'm the real danger for them, and for you. Maybe I should tie you up and drop you off. Then you can tell them that I overpowered you."

"And you really want to flee without me?" asks Maria. "I hope you don't. If you love me as much as I love you, then we better stay together through this, no matter how hard it is. Neither of us wants to leave Austria or Europe, but that's what we'll have to do for awhile."

Throughout the past few days, despite everything that was going on, it never occurred to Marcus to break up with Maria. But he is also aware that he is pulling Maria into a dangerous quagmire. He reaches over and squeezes her hand.

'It feels so good to be free of that lead cuff,' he thinks. He looks at his wrists. Using tools that Maria brought with her, Marcus freed himself from the lead cuff earlier, throwing it out of the car window.

Their goal is to get to Zurich to withdraw a large amount of money from one of Swiss accounts. They must then get out of Europe. Key to their getaway is patience. They have to wait until the flights are no longer monitored. But first, they must contact their parents. Marcus is aware of the grave shock his parents would have if they heard the news reports first. He must reach them in time. And Maria must prepare her parents for the future. She is an accomplice to a crime. She and Marcus must leave Europe, and they may not be able to return for awhile.

They cannot use Maria's mobile. And they cannot call Marcus' parents. Marcus' parents' phone will certainly be tapped by now, and they are likely to be under surveillance. They might be able to get away with a phone call to Maria's parents. Marcus is sure that Dirkmann will not believe the pig trick for long. It might have bought them a couple or three hours, at the most.

Marcus is right. That evening Adler receives a report on the wreck and the blood analysis. The blood is that of a pig. A piece of pig ear was found in the car. Adler realizes that Dirkmann's fears are justified. Waller has managed to escape. Adler does everything he can to increase traffic surveillance. He makes sure that phone calls going to and coming from Marcus' parents and close friends are monitored. The evening news will announce the death of Marcus Waller - there is no way to change that now - but he, Dirkmann and the police know otherwise. The hunt for Waller will continue.

Maria calls her parents from a phone booth, and mentions that something extraordinary has happened, which she will tell them about later. She and Marcus are fine. And she emphasizes that they have not done anything criminal, regardless of what they might hear. It is very important that they and Marcus' parents meet up without anyone knowing about it.

"Can you meet at Eisenerz, behind the primary school at 10:00pm tonight? Marcus' parents will get there at that same time. Please take them to our hut in the mountains, near the city of Bruck - only if you're sure that nobody is following you. Marcus and I will be waiting for you at the hut. We can explain everything then. Please, do exactly as I've described it. And please don't ask me to explain now. Just trust me as you've always done."

Maria's parents discuss their daughter's message at some length. They have always felt that Maria had more than the usual share of imagination. They sigh and decide to go along with it. She did sound serious.

Marcus contacts his parents through a neighbor, Ernst. The PPU most likely have his parents' phone tapped. Marcus asks Ernst to call Marcus' dad and ask him to join him for a drink at the bar. His dad will immediately know that something funny is going on because Ernst is a teetotaler. While in the bar, Ernst will tell his dad that no matter what he hears in the evening news he should know that Marcus is fine. Marcus then explains to Ernst that Marcus' parents need to meet up with friends at 10:00pm behind the primary school. However, since their house might be under surveillance, they should leave from the back door. His sister can leave at the same time through the front door, acting as a decoy.

Maria and Marcus reach the junction near the hut at about 9:30pm, not hitting any police blocks. Marcus parks the rented car at a distance from the hut, well out of view. They are both nervous about the meeting with their parents. Will they understand what Maria and Marcus have to do? They walk up to the hut and sit quietly in the dark. This is the first time all day they have had a chance to embrace each other.

After about an hour, a car approaches. When they see their parents getting out of the car, Maria turns the light on and they run outside. Everyone is hugging and laughing. Marcus' parents are relieved to see that Ernst was

right. Marcus is okay. The evening news reported his death and made sinister implications about unusual criminal involvement.

As they go into the hut, Maria and Marcus explain as much as they can without giving away their parabilities. Maria summarizes by saying, "We can't tell you everything right now for reasons that you'll understand later. Just trust us. No matter what you hear in the future, know that we've done nothing wrong. We've discovered something about the European Union that we're not supposed to know. As a result, they're determined to silence us. We need to leave Europe for awhile, until it all blows over."

Marcus continues, "Maria and I love each other. We'd like to get married in the next few weeks. Even though we won't be at this address, you can contact us here." Marcus shows them the Las Vegas address. "No, don't write it down. Please, just memorize it. Never put yourself as the sender on any envelope, and use mailboxes that are not located close to your homes. I know this probably all sounds melodramatic, but as Maria said, we've stumbled onto something big, and need to take all the precautions we can."

It takes time, but eventually the shock of the day wears off. The parents start swapping "Maria and Marcus stories" and before long everyone is laughing. They decide that Maria and Marcus should stay in the hut a few days. When Maria's parents decide to celebrate their children's engagement with some local brandy, everything starts to look up.

At one point Maria needs to make sure her parents know the severity of the situation. She says, "I'm happy that everything is fine right now. I've really learned to enjoy the moment, but I've also learned not to trust it. Our enemies are very organized and persistent. So, *please*, if something unforeseen happens, know that Marcus and I are taking care of each other. Don't worry about us. And we'll make sure that you know we're fine by sending messages to one of Dad's lawyer friends. The message will read 'Things are okay with the M&M problem.'" Everyone laughs, but Maria's dad catches her eye and nods. He knows she is serious.

Although it is getting late, Adler cannot sleep. How could Marcus have escaped? The roadblocks came probably too late, but they are up. He doubts they will result in anything but annoyance. He tries to think like Marcus. Where might he be right now? His death was just broadcast over the nightly news. Certainly he would contact his parents. However, the monitoring of the phone calls coming in and out of his parent's house reveal nothing. He must be missing something. Adler phones the staff in Eisenerz and drives them crazy with yet another round of questions. He keeps probing. Something is not as it appears.

The details do not fit. Marcus' father and his neighbor go into a bar for a drink. Apparently they chat but do not drink anything and they leave. Then

Marcus' sister goes out, and the house appears empty. The girl returns after not having done anything of substance. In the meantime, where have Marcus' parents gone?

Adler pulls out all stops. He has his operators swarming all over the vicinity of Eisenerz. A guy at a gas station remembers filling up a car at about 10:00pm, right before he closed. He had wondered about the couple, who seemed nervous. And why was it important to fill up at 10:00 at night? He gets another report that a car was noticed going behind the primary school at Eisenerz. That alone is not unusual, as young couples often go parking there. The couple, however, just seemed to sit and wait. Piece by piece Adler constructs the scene. He receives word that there is a hut near Bruck that belongs to the owners of the car behind the primary school.

Only minutes later Adler is in a helicopter en route to Bruck. He organizes an assault on the hut.

It is approaching 1:00am. The parents are preparing to leave.

Suddenly the night turns to day. Powerful search beams light up the hut and the area. A voice amplified by a loudspeaker says threateningly, "We know that there are five people in this hut. We are looking for Marcus Waller. Please come out of the hut, one at a time, with your arms raised above your heads. If there is any resistance, we have orders to use whatever force necessary. We suggest you comply."

Marcus increases his subjective speed by a factor of 200 to analyze the situation. He knows Adler's voice. How does Adler think he can capture him? Surely he knows that Marcus can inflict tremendous damage to everything and everyone outside, without even leaving the hut, without the danger of being hit by a needle that can knock him out.

Knock him out! That must be it. They must be planning on using some kind of gas to knock him out. But why all the light? And why are they causing a ruckus rather than going about it quietly? Having experienced firsthand Marcus' prison escape, he thinks Adler wants all possibilities covered this time.

Marcus whispers quickly to the parents. "Please deny that you met us here tonight. We can manage to get out of here, so don't worry about us."

Marcus detects a smell... gas! He increases his subjective speed more, takes Maria into his arms and goes for the back door. He moves to the cover of the forest in less than a tenth of a second, too fast to be noticed. He keeps moving fast, reaching the parked car in just a few seconds.

He knows that within minutes Adler will discover that Marcus has disappeared again. The precautions he has taken come in handy now. Just a few miles down the main road is the turnoff for Green Lake, the road on

which he and Maria recently bought their just-in-case house. Marcus quickly drives there, keeping the car lights off. He hides the car in the garage where they stay for a few days, watching the news on the TV and listening to the radio.

Marcus and Maria discuss what will happen to their parents. Unlike Marcus, Maria is not worried. "Our parents did nothing wrong - rather, the opposite. Adler will have to back peddle once he realizes that you're not in the hut and my dad is an influential lawyer."

The scene at the hut turns into a debacle, much as Maria predicted. The gas stuns the four adults. A few minutes later, when the police and the ESP enter the hut wearing gas masks, they find no trace of Marcus. And when Maria's father regains consciousness and sees the hut surrounded by police, within the fences of his property, his professional experience comes to bear.

The string of questions rattled off by Maria's father seems endless. What is this all about? Where is the search warrant? What is he being accused of? Why are they on his property? Is it lawful practice to disturb - to gas - two couples who are friends on a retreat?

Maria's father insists on speaking directly to the person responsible within the next minute or he will telephone the newspapers and the association of lawyers which he belongs to. He starts to dial the number of the Austrian Press Agency, explaining to his friends what he is doing. This makes Adler nervous. Adler orders his operatives to leave the hut. He then tries to regain control of the situation. He says, "You have harbored, protected and hidden a criminal and fugitive from justice. You are certainly aware of this!"

"Who are you talking about?" asks Maria's father. "I am talking about Marcus Waller, as you heard a few minutes ago."

Marcus' mother erupts into tears. 'Good timing,' thinks Marcus' father. Interrupted by sobs, she says, "Whoever you are, you must be crazy. You must be violating dozens of Austrian laws. My son, Marcus Waller, died today. Don't you listen to the news? I hope it will be clarified soon as to what he was supposed to have done. He most certainly was innocent. Someone must have made him desperate to drive so fast and have an accident. Our friends from Graz realized our shock over Marcus' death and were kind enough to pick us up and bring us to their hut to relax. But how can we? You storm in here like you own the world. I sure hope that you will be thrown into prison for doing all of this to us."

Marcus' mother is nearing a collapse. She is being supported by her husband and Maria's mother.

Adler is starting to feel more and more uncomfortable. Could he have been wrong? No, he is *sure* that Marcus was here and that this is all an act.

But, he *has* trespassed without a search warrant. Furthermore, he does not have a shred of evidence, yet, that Marcus was here.

Maria's father says in his best courtroom voice, "I suggest that you do not malign Marcus Waller any further. Indeed, the media better report a correction. Marcus Waller was interrogated by mistake. He was innocent. If this correction does not happen, I guarantee you Mr. Adler that you and your operatives will be dragged into a court on counts of trespassing, threatening with violence, causing bodily and psychological harm." With this statement, he points to Marcus' mother, then continues, "*And* you can be sure that we will very carefully investigate why you interrogated Marcus Waller *and* the strange circumstances around his death."

Adler realizes that these threats can cause serious problems for the PPU and the ESP. Fuming with anger, yet unable to do anything, Adler bites his tongue and apologizes. He and his team leave quickly.

The combination of threats and crying has delayed Adler. By the time he gets outside and orders roadblocks for the whole area, Maria and Marcus are home, with their car safely hidden in the garage.

Maria's father calls Eisenerz to let Marcus' sister know that her parents will be staying with them overnight. He reiterates that everything is okay. Her parents will be home tomorrow morning.

When he hangs up the phone, Maria's father explains, "I'm sorry for insisting that you spend the night, but we've got a lot of work ahead of us, and we'll need your help. Marcus and Maria's fingerprints are all over the hut. This guy Adler, who was here, knows that Marcus was here, and he knows that Marcus outwitted him. Adler will come back here as soon as the hut is empty, again illegally, to look for clues to prove that Marcus was here. I don't want him to find any of Marcus' prints. I don't want him finding any of Maria's prints either because then he'll put two and two together. I don't think he knows Maria and Marcus are together because he asked for five people to come out. So, we have to do a really good job of cleaning and then we have to leave our fingerprints all over.

When Adler returns to the hut, as Maria's father predicted, with a team of experts, they do not find any of Marcus' fingerprints. They find a very clean hut.

It is not just ambition that drives Adler to relentlessly hunt Marcus. It is also Dirkmann. Adler understands Dirkmann and fears him. Again, Adler follows the old adage of "put yourself in my shoes." Since the roadblocks yield nothing, Adler thinks Marcus is probably hiding somewhere nearby. To eventually leave Europe, and Adler is pretty sure that Marcus will try, he will need money. His bank accounts in Austria and Germany are monitored. Marcus will be aware of this. Marcus will try to get to Zurich to use one of

his numbered accounts. From there he will likely go overseas, probably to the U.S., a country that Marcus evidently knows well.

Adler makes sure that the major banks in Zurich and the airport in Kloten are put under tight security. It takes huge sums of money and hours of insistence to get the operation underway but Adler succeeds in record time. He also issues air pistols containing stun needles to all operatives. When Marcus is caught, he will be stunned and provided with lead handcuffs with an injection needle, an improved version of what they had before.

Marcus and Maria wake the following days to the news. There is nothing on the episode at the hut last night. Marcus' deadly accident, however, is still being reported. The accident is now seen as particularly tragic as it turns out that Waller was mistakenly incarcerated. Waller's escape attempt was thus the attempt of someone trying to free himself to prove his innocence. Unfortunately he was driving too fast and was killed in a car accident.

Marcus, who is sitting next to Maria on the couch, turns to give her a kiss on the cheek. "Your Dad must be really good at what he does."

"What do you mean?" asks Maria. "Your father must have used the illegal operation at the hut last night to clear me. I'm sure of it. Yesterday I was portrayed as a criminal, and today I'm vindicated. Today I'm a man killed trying to prove his rightful innocence! I want to have him as a father-in-law sooner rather than later."

"Well? I have no objections."

They try to guess Adler's next moves. Surely he would have ordered roadblocks all around Eisenerz. Adler, therefore, must know that Marcus has not gone far. He would expect Marcus to hide for a day or two and then try to escape to somewhere overseas. Therefore, they decide to wait more than a few days before making their next move. They have enough stocked food, and they can get news of the outside world through the TV and radio. This is an advance on a quiet honeymoon.

Days fly by. They never leave the house. Maria has a prepaid phone card, which she uses to contact her friends in Graz, asking them to pass on short message to her parents. Maria's parents meet with Marcus' parents almost daily. Thus the monitoring of the phone calls of individuals closest to Marcus show nothing. Frustrated, Adler waits, trying to think of all possibilities.

Maria and Marcus are wrong about one thing. Maria has not yet been connected to Marcus. Neither Klaus Baumgartner nor the other paratalents have mentioned Maria to Adler. And the ventilator repairman decided to keep his mouth shut. The money was good enough to indicate that whatever was going on at the prison was big. The size of it alone was enough for him to know that he did not want to be dragged into it. For these reasons, Adler

still believes that Marcus escaped on his own. There is no accomplice as far as Adler is concerned.

They enjoy days of intimacy, sometimes passionately making love, sometimes gently. They enjoy hours of talking, reading poetry, books and snuggling as they watch late night movies. After a few days Maria suggests that it may be time to continue on to Zurich and begin their life together. Marcus is wary. "I'm not sure how stubborn Adler is. He may still be monitoring the banks and the airport in Zurich. Let's not risk getting caught."

Marcus is right. Adler and his team are waiting in Zurich. Adler extends the surveillance for another 10 days.

Maria and Marcus leave the rental car in a parking lot in Bruck, the rental payment placed in an envelope in the dash. They notify the rental company before boarding a train to Luxembourg. As they stroll to the Luxembourg city center, they suddenly freeze. On the other side of the street is Klaus Baumgartner. He is walking in the opposite direction of them, but he is looking at them. Klaus has recognized their aura from a distance and has been watching them. The two men look at each other. Klaus crosses the street and walks toward Marcus.

Marcus says in a low voice, "Are you still trying to catch me for the PPU? Will you give me away again?"

"No," responds Klaus. "The PPU I knew has fallen apart. I'm still in charge of it, but even that will probably change. I'm only there because I'm bound by my contract *and* I'm determined to prevent the things that happened to you from being repeated with anyone else. I don't know if you realize it, but when you were in prison, I did as much as I could to help you. The day I talked to you I was overruled and cut out."

Marcus looks silently at Klaus. "Klaus, I believe you. You *did*, after all, leave a stone in my cell. You did that on purpose to let me know where I was?" Klaus nods.

"Let's say good-bye for now," continues Marcus. "You're one of the good guys, but you're still on the other side. Let's hope that our paths cross again in the future under better circumstances. Maria and I are going to lead a quiet life now."

"Well, good luck to you both," smiles Klaus. "But don't kid yourselves. Your lives will be anything but quiet. Anyway, give it a try. And you can be sure that no one will hear about this meeting." They shake hands and part. Marcus looks over his shoulder, watching Klaus as he walks away. He has a feeling that they will meet again in the future.

At an internet café, Marcus books a flight to the Bahamas. Suddenly Maria turns pale. "By now they must be looking for us. They'll find us when they check our passports."

Marcus laughs. "No, they won't find us. I have a fake passport for me. I'm Marcus Simmer, a New Zealand citizen. And you are Maria Simmer. You might want to get your hair done to match the curly blonde hair on your passport."

Marcus hands Maria her new, fake passport. Sure enough, it is her face, but she has curly blond hair. And the name on the passport is Maria Simmer!

"Where did you get this - and when?"

"Remember the day when we left Vienna for Green Lake, and I insisted on taking a few portrait shots of you, which I then sent on e-mail? Well, they went to a friend of mine in Chicago, Peter Cobb. He used your face but redid your hair. Sorry for keeping this from you, but actually there are more documents that you're not aware of." Marcus looks very embarrassed. He pulls out a New Zealand wedding certificate. "I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you - you got married to me while we were fishing at Green Lake."

Maria laughs and punches him in the arm lightly. "You're not getting off that lightly Marcus Waller, or Marcus Simmer, or whatever you're calling yourself. I insist on a real wedding."

After Maria gets her hair done to match the passport photo, they take a plane to Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas. They go through immigration with no problems, and they don't notice anyone following them. After they successfully withdraw a large sum of money from one of Marcus' bank accounts, they finally relax. They have thrown Adler and Dirkmann off their trail. And Klaus Baumgartner does not seem to be an enemy any more. Life has turned itself around dramatically from just a few days earlier!

They spend several beautiful days on North Eluthera, one of the outer islands. They get diving certificates and take sailing lessons. Within days, they look like they have been on the island for weeks, tanned and relaxed.

They decide New Zealand will become their new home base. Marcus has fond, albeit short, memories from his visit a few months ago. He has an apartment in Auckland and a tract of land on Great Barrier Island. Starting a new life sounds exciting with one exception, family.

"We're going to miss our families," Marcus muses one day. "I guess we better hurry up and start our own." "Your wish is my command," says Maria, opening her purse, pulling out two packages of birth control pills and throwing them in a garbage can. She turns to Marcus with an expectant, "OK-let's-get-started" look.

"Okay, I'm putting in an order for two kids," Marcus laughs.

"No, I want three," counters Maria. "Two are enough," insists Marcus. "I'll have a vasectomy after the second one."

"Do as you like," quips Maria. "That's your problem. I only hope that you love the third as much as if it were your own." Marcus looks at Maria with

amazement. "You're a spunky one, aren't you!" and takes Maria into his arms.

11 Retreat at Barrier Island

End of 2003 - July 2007

Using their fake New Zealand passports, Maria and Marcus arrive in New Zealand as Maria and Marcus Simmer. Although they smile and chat easily, inside they are holding their breaths. Will they be caught and deported? They cannot go back to Europe.

Luckily, there are no problems. They clear immigration without questions. Relieved, they rent a car to drive to Ponsonby, a district of Auckland, where Marcus bought a furnished apartment a few months ago. Maria likes the apartment immediately. The rooms are big and bright. From the living room they have a direct view of the harbor. The neighborhood is quiet, but they are only a few minute's walk from the restaurants and stores of Ponsonby.

The next week passes quickly as they act like tourists, exploring Auckland and the surrounding area. First they head to the volcanic hills scattered throughout the city, from Mt. Eden to One-Tree-Hill. Maria finds it odd that One-Tree-Hill is treeless, until they find out that the Hill lost its single tree five years ago when it was attacked! The volcanic hills and the stories around them give Auckland its unique feel.

They visit the Sky Tower and the casinos in the heart of the city. Both Marcus and Maria behave themselves in the casinos - they do not use their parabilities - not wanting to draw attention to themselves. They enjoy a dose of culture by seeing the shows and movies of the Aotea Center, and they taste the flavors on offer in the city's many tiny ethnic restaurants, from Korean to Chinese to Japanese to Indian.

They both love water. They are impressed by the beautiful beaches, such as Mission Bay and Takapuna, which are only a stone's throw from the city center. Even getting to the north of the bay is interesting. Although it is named the Harbour Bridge, it is locally called the "Nippon-Clip-On" bridge. This name came about when a Japanese company "clipped on" two additional lanes when the existing four lanes were insufficient for traffic.

Marcus and Maria quickly become regulars at some of the Irish pubs, a few exquisite restaurants, and some of their favorite wilderness stores, almost like LL Bean in Freeport, Maine. Since their apartment is furnished, they do not need much, just a few small things, which they pick up here and there.

Interspersed with their short city tours, they explore the surroundings. They take a boat ride to Rangitoto, a volcanic island just offshore, which surfaced only a few hundred years ago. They take a ferry ride to Waiheke Island and enjoy immersing themselves in the island's alternative lifestyle. While on Waiheke Island they seek out a restaurant known for its cuisine and

its rustic atmosphere. They find the Mudbrick restaurant both top notch and rustic!

They find that there is so much to explore with variety on offer. In addition to the islands, they are drawn to the heavily wooded hills and sandy beaches of the Waitakere Range, between Auckland and Helensville. On these trips they use their new Four Wheel Drive RV, which makes them self contained. There is enough room in the back for a double bed and cooking. The only interesting challenge is the outdoor shower, which is a tad short in height!

The first time they stay overnight in their RV is in the dunes of Bethels Beach. They arrive shortly before dinner, so they stroll leisurely along the wide beach southward until they reach a rocky cape with a small cave. They follow a barely noticeable path running around the cape, which leads to beds of beautiful New Zealand green-lipped mussels. They chisel the mussels right off the rocks, collecting a bag full. In front of them is another huge sandy bay, deserted. They are amazed that all of this remote beauty is only a 40-minute drive from Auckland, a city with almost a million people!

When they return to the RV, they take out their camping stove and cook a delicious soup, using fresh mussels. The weather is beautiful. With no sign of other people, they feel like they are on an island paradise. The sun is slowly setting, a pleasant wind is blowing, and the water is invigorating. They quickly become lulled with the crashing of the waves on the shoreline. Maria and Marcus are both falling under the spell of this beautiful country.

Europe and its threats may seem distant, but Maria and Marcus can never leave behind their paratalents. As they sit on the beach, Maria spots a small rubber dinghy way out in the rough water. With her teleseeing she can see that they are in trouble. Marcus and Maria quickly take down the small motorboat from on top of their RV and rush out to the dinghy. They find two men being tossed seaward.

Later, they sit around a campfire. Marcus plays with his T-power, throwing pieces of wood into the fire or grabbing a burning branch and lifting it skyward. This latter trick looks good enough to be part of a fire and light show.

Where they would have felt uncomfortable camping on a beach in Europe, they feel completely safe here. Here they are alone. Maria can see danger and Marcus can defend them if need be. Neither can imagine what danger might lurk here, unless an unlikely drunk counts as a danger?

The next morning Maria and Marcus wake up to glorious sunshine. By now they have learned to grab the beautiful sun when it's out (it is often out only for a few hours in the mornings). They run into the waves, naked - the best way to avoid getting sand stuck in various spots when the sand is fine

and the waves high! After wave jumping and body surfing they come back to the RV, exhausted and exhilarated. They have just enough fresh water to wash the salt water off their faces. The rest can wait for a shower when they get home!

Maria and Marcus make friends with Alice and Bob Gilles, their next door neighbors. They learn a lot about New Zealand from them. They also learn a lot about themselves, specifically the missing pieces of their lives. They realize they must create a credible story about their lives, their histories and their professions. Marcus decides he is an investor and an active day trader. This fits him well since he has been investing large sums of money since his return from the U.S. Maria's chosen profession is as a psychologist, which fits nicely with her interest in parapsychology.

When talk turns to Wellington, their supposed former home according to their story, they have trouble. They have never been there! They decide they must visit Wellington soon to be better prepared for their stories.

Bob and Alice show Maria and Marcus the glow worm grotto at Waitomo, one of the main tourist attractions of the North Island. To get there they go down into a system of caves, first on foot and then by boat. The cave eventually opens into a small lake-like area and there are millions of small glowing dots, like stars. Marcus can understand why the first explorers thought they were looking at the night sky. Instead, they were looking at a high cave ceiling and millions of tiny glowing worms. The lights of the glow worms attract the worms' food - minute insects, some of which get caught in the sticky strings that dangle from each glow worm. The worms eventually turn into larvae. Each larvae changes into a small moth-like insect, which lives only a few hours, enough to lay tiny eggs that will hatch into the next generation of glow worms. The job of the matured moths is finite - they are born to produce and perish. They have neither a mouth nor a digestive tract!

Marcus and Maria are amazed at this experience - the beauty of the millions of tiny night lights and the transience of their existence.

Bob and Alice have another surprise up their sleeves. They talk Marcus and Maria into black water rafting. They climb down into another cave, this time with a creek in it. They put on helmets with caving lights, wet suits, rubber gloves and shoes to protect them from the cold creek water. They then climb into tire inner tubes to drift along on the underground creek. It's very dark in the cave, the only light coming from the small headlamps. From the plentiful rains, the creek is still higher than usual. In one spot they actually hit the ceiling. Here they get out of the inner tubes and swim a few feet underwater. Although Maria and Marcus are good swimmers, pulling along the inner tubes makes it difficult to make quick headway.

The fun adventure almost turns to a tragedy when the guide, Alice, Maria and Marcus surface downstream as planned, but Bob is missing! The guide gets nervous and dives into the water again, fighting against the current to go upstream and search for Bob. He does not see Bob, nor does he see Bob's headlamp. Alice and the rest of them start to panic.

Bob has accidentally gone too far to the left when swimming underwater. The current is pressing him into a crevice with no exit. In panic, Bob has smashed his light, so he is in complete darkness, underwater and he has no air left. Marcus looks at Maria, who locates Bob temporarily but then loses him because of the darkness. Fortunately, Maria has guided Marcus that he is able to find him using his hands. Marcus pulls Bob toward them, at first against the current. Bob hardly notices. He thrashes, swallows water and then goes unconscious. When Marcus brings Bob to the top of the water, the guide grabs him. He is able to resuscitate Bob, who appears to be in shock. The sweet, hot tea helps a bit, but Bob continues to shiver.

Despite Bob's condition, they must continue - it is the only way out of the cave. Marcus supports Bob the rest of the way and then ensures he climbs out safely. Bob shakes so severely that he has lost his coordination, making climbing out of the cave almost impossible.

An hour later, they are sitting in the old hotel above the cave. The shock that Bob experienced has worn off. The world has returned to normal. However, both Bob and the guide wonder how Bob managed to get out alive. How did Bob escape the crevice against the current? They try out unlikely theories because they cannot think of any likely ones, but nothing fits. Finally, they resign themselves to never really knowing for sure. One thing they do know is that the crevice that trapped Bob must be closed off so it cannot endanger future visitors.

The incident with Bob reminds Maria and Marcus of how much they can help people. They still wonder if it is possible to help people and live a life with some semblance to normality.

As much as Marcus likes Auckland, he is itching to explore the property that he bought on Great Barrier Island. He often talks about building a house on the property. As curious as Maria is to see the property Marcus raves about, she is not excited about the idea of living in isolation, far from the city.

Marcus finally convinces Maria to join him in looking at the property on Great Barrier Island. When they first arrive, they stand together on top of "their hill" and look over the land. Maria thinks to herself, 'Marcus is right, this really is beautiful. Maybe I should try to live here without civilization.'

As they look around they see one beautiful view after another. On both sides below are rocks jutting out into the ocean. The rocks protect a calm,

deep cove with a pristine sandy beach. A creek that looks like it starts in a grove of Kauris tumbles down on one side of the rocks into a pool. From the pool, the water cascades down another waterfall into the sea. The beach itself is almost cut in half by a small creek coming out of the undergrowth, winding its way toward the sea.

Maria takes in this lovely scenery, but with her teleseeing she takes in even more. She sees a few clearings in the wooded area further away. It must be the home area of native animals. She sees a spring coming out of a rock which feeds into the smaller of two creeks. As she continues to look at the area, she is surprised to see there are an extensive series of caves hidden by trees.

Maria's eyes light up. In her excitement, she cannot decide where to start. She takes Marcus' hand and leads him through the dense trees to the clearing, where they are about 50 yards above the sea. The clearing is carpeted with high, fine grass and a Pohutukawa tree whose branches reach out fingerlike. The first signs of buds are popping out on the branches. By the end of December the branches will be covered with bright red flowers. From this vantage, the cascading waterfall of the larger creeks looks particularly impressive. The water is so clear they can easily see the bottom of the pool, which looks as if it were polished by hand.

Maria points to the other side and says, "It's hard to see from here, but there are three caves that we can get to on the other side of the cove. The lowest cave has an exit at sea level and is connected to the others by a series of narrow passages. The highest one has openings at the top, which lets light in - which means I can see clearly inside of them. The entrance to the cave is shielded by a large overhanging rock, so it's dry and doesn't have much vegetation. I can just imagine people living there a long time ago, seeking shelter from the storms. Their kids could have played outside on the natural platform up there. I don't think I've ever seen a spot as idyllic as this."

Like children, they run around, exploring the waterfall, the beach, the caves, the trees and the clearings. Maria is at least as excited as Marcus, if not more.

"Have you changed your mind about this place Maria? Do I have a chance you might agree to live here in a house with me? We'll get pilots' licenses and buy a light plane so we can go in and out of the city when we want, rather than relying on the irregular flights between the island and the city. And we can get one of those powerful yachts so we can navigate in any kind of rough weather."

Maria needs very little convincing. "If we can afford those things, I think we've found paradise."

Marcus nods, "And we'll keep the apartment in the city, so we can go there any time we want, stay overnight, go to the opera or a musical, go shopping, visit friends, whatever we want. And look at the flat area on the top of the hill - where we were standing - from this view. It looks like there's enough room for a whole collection of houses."

Maria looks at Marcus thoughtfully. "Do you still think that we'll form a group of paratalents - even after what happened in Vienna?"

"Yes, I do. And even if it is only you, me and our children - I think our children will inherit some of our parabilities. If this is the case, I'd rather they grow up here than in the city. Don't you?" Maria nods. She has thought about this herself.

When they discuss their plans with their neighbor, Bob, they discover that a good friend of his is an architect. They hire him to do part of the construction. They also assign other contractors to the job, splitting up the pieces of work among a few construction companies. They do this purposefully, preferring not to have a single firm know what they are spending.

They are building a number of self-contained units for visitors. Although Marcus does not talk about it much at the time, he hopes the units will be filled with other paratalents at some point in the future. They put some of the units in a separate building. Neither Maria nor Marcus know why they build more than one building, but go ahead with it, intuitively. Their foresight to build on a large scale will come in handy more than once in the future!

In addition to the buildings, other infrastructures must be built, such as an access road. Right now the only road which exists is a low grade road that runs the length of Great Barrier Island. They must also construct a water reservoir to be supplied by one of the springs; an efficient hydro-power station run from the upper part of the larger creek; a jetty for anchoring boats and a good, solid path and stairs going from the jetty to the house. They also need a 45-degree elevator between the jetty and the house to transport larger items from the boat to the house. They want to hide this elevator from view so it does not spoil the jetty's setting. They also build a landing strip behind the house for small planes and a sewage treatment facility. Although they do not need it, they plan a sauna in the house and a whirlpool outside.

Also, they both agree on a big winter garden for the front of the house, complete with artificial sunlight. This type of lighting is necessary for this side of the island - the seaward side - because as beautiful as the location is, it has many windy, rainy days. To be able to sit sheltered in a beautiful garden, overlooking the sea in sunny, misty or rough weather will be paradise. It will also stave off the depression that Maria has read hits people living in such climates during long stretches of gray, rainy weather.

The construction goes quickly, encouraged along by Marcus' determination and financial incentives. As time passes, Maria identifies more and more with their future home. Once in awhile, she comes up with potential problematic issues. "Marcus, if we have to take our yacht from our home to Auckland, we have to navigate the southern tip of the Island. This circumnavigation trebles the length of our trip."

"You're absolutely right. That's why we'll keep a powerful motor yacht on the western coast of the Island, at Port Fitzroy. We can easily reach that with our 4WD. At the jetty we'll keep a nice sailing yacht - more for fun than for transportation. We should probably buy the motor yacht under another name, just to make sure we're not perceived as being too rich. Come to think of it, we probably shouldn't even let friends and neighbors know all the things that we're up to. It might create suspicion or jealousy - which isn't good if we want to keep a low profile.

Despite Maria never having been officially sought by the police and Marcus being officially dead, their contacts have told them that they are both on the wanted lists of the PPU and Interpol. Their contacts in Europe - relatives and detective agencies - channel their information through Marcus' hired lawyer in Las Vegas. Since they are still sought, they have to make sure they do not give themselves away. Marcus contacts Peter Cobb in Chicago about their predicament. Peter assures Marcus that he can take care of it. He will settle the problem once and for all - although it may take him some time - by making sure that their names appear on the list of victims of a major airplane crash.

Despite Peter's assurances, for the time being they stick to their new identities of Maria and Marcus Simmer. They restrict their travel to places where they are not in danger of being recognized by people from their former lives as they now call it.

With the project well underway, Marcus and Maria decide to take off for a few days of diving at Poor Knight's Island, north of Auckland. They have heard a lot about this island from their Ponsonby neighbors as well as from a TV special, a Jacques Cousteau program, which called the island one of the most interesting diving spots in the world. The island's claim to fame results from its location - at the island's tip warm tropical water meets cold water from Antarctica, causing a dramatic change of sea life and coral.

This diving trip will be Maria and Marcus' first since they got their diving license in the Bahamas. The cold water dive will differ dramatically from their training course, which was in the warm waters off the Bahamas. They think they better get used to the cold water diving if they are going to live in New Zealand, since water temperatures range from 62 degrees to 71 degrees Fahrenheit. They wear thick wetsuits, gloves and head protection. At first

they feel claustrophobic in the heavy diving gear, but they quickly get the hang of it.

Once they get the feel for it, they start thinking about buying their own cold water diving equipment so they can dive off of their property on Great Barrier Island. This area is supposed to be rich in fish and lobster and have intriguing rock formations. Their one-armed guide leading the dives on Poor Knight's Island has dived in these and international waters for years. He highly recommends they buy their own equipment. By the guide's insistence and the number of invitations they have received from the dive enthusiast who runs the pharmacy on Great Barrier Island, they are convinced to do so.

Maria and Marcus enjoy diving at Poor Knight's Island. Here, however, like other adventures and tours they go on, they run into situations where they need their parabilities. It is Maria who is mainly called upon this time.

On their last dive, one of the dive-group is attacked by a large moray eel when he ventures too close to it. The eel bites viscosly into his leg and hangs on. The guide reacts instantly and professionally. He pulls his knife and stabs the eel twice until it lets go. The clouds of blood attract two large sharks, which are rare for the area. Long before anyone else can see them, Maria spots them with her teleseeing. They approach quickly. The guide knows that the blood may cause trouble, so he is signaling the group to swim to the dive boat as quickly as they can. He will remain behind to help the hurt diver. Maria realizes that they will not be able to reach the boat before the sharks are upon them. Thus she waves "No" to the commands of the dive leader, instead pointing them toward a rock. At least if they are against a rock they cannot be attacked from the back.

Communication under water is always difficult. Only when Maria indicates "shark" by putting her stretched hand on top of her head, does the guide understand. He looks around carefully, but cannot see any sign of sharks. He is confused. Marcus has understood Maria's signal and knows that the guide probably cannot see the sharks, so he too makes the signal for "shark." With two members indicating "shark," the guide acts instantaneously. He herds the group toward the rock and positions himself in front of them with his knife. Eventually he sees the sharks swimming toward them. A large grouper unaware of the danger swims between the divers and the sharks.

The guide acts quickly. He plunges forward at the grouper with his knife, cutting it badly. Small mushrooms of green blood burst forth from the grouper as it thrashes about, attracting the attention of the sharks immediately. Maria is at first surprised by the color of the blood, but then remembers what they learned in the Bahamas - blood under water appears green.

With the sharks' attention diverted, the group follows the guide's lead - to swim quickly but quietly toward the dive boat. When they have swum a distance from the sharks, the guide surfaces and signals "Help" to the boat pilot. The pilot does not hesitate, but rushes at high speed towards them, bringing them on board safely.

When the group members are all in safety, they turn their attention to Maria - the day's hero! She gets a hero's thanks, as they lift her - equipment and all - onto their shoulders, chanting, "Maria, Maria!"

Maria saw the sharks early, likely saving them from fatal attacks. The guide is particularly grateful, but he wonders how Maria was able to spot the sharks long before he could see them. Maria invents a story about diving in waters off the islands of Palau that are full of small sharks, so she has a heightened awareness - fright - of them. This story satisfies most of the group, except for the guide who stares at Maria.

On the way back to Auckland, Maria and Marcus stop for a swim in the hot pools of Waiwera. From the warm pool, they watch as the evening turns to night. The night sky is completely clear. As they are driving away from the pool, they decide to have a stop. They want to enjoy the warm weather and the beautiful night sky. They leave the main road, find a sheltered, flat spot and spread a blanket on the grass. Maria gets out a bottle of wine, crackers and cheese - emergency rations she always has packed in the RV.

They lie back on the blanket, finding the Southern Cross constellation above them. They recount their diving experience and laugh about the hero's reception given Maria. The wine and the pre-summer breeze help them to relax. They listen to the chirping of crickets and watch the moon rising. They embrace each other tightly. Marcus cannot imagine his life without Maria. He feels Maria's skin against his own.

"I wish I could show you the moon that I see," says Maria as she looks at it with her telescopic sight.

Suddenly Marcus feels as if he is losing himself. He cannot move. He feels like he is rushing toward the moon. In his panic he clings to Maria tightly. He speeds toward the moon and then just as suddenly stops. He finds himself just above the surface of the moon! Can it be true? Can he really be right above the moon? By being so close to Maria, physically and emotionally, might he be able to see using her parability? He sees the moon, a thousand fold enlarged, through Maria's eyes. Without loosening his embrace, Marcus explains to Maria what he sees.

Maria is startled. "I'll let go of you for a minute, to test if you can see without physically touching me."

Marcus agrees hesitantly. He is afraid of all the changes he feels with his body. What if he cannot get back into his body? When Maria lets go of

Marcus and rolls away slightly, he immediately loses her sight. The moon changes back into a small, bright, distant disc. Marcus and Maria embrace again and within minutes, Marcus sees the moon through Maria's telescopic eyes.

"I wonder if this works in the other direction?" wonders Marcus. "If you can give me your teleseeing, can I give you my T-powers?" Excited now, Marcus want to try. "Maria, can you see the stone over there? Try to move it, just by thinking."

Maria leaves behind the feeling of Marcus' tight embrace and concentrates instead on the stone. She lifts the stone and sets it down at some distance.

"Did you see that! That must have been me because you didn't know where I wanted to put the stone. When we hug we can share some of our powers!" Maria feels Marcus nodding and laughing.

They roll apart and immediately start talking about the 'what if's' and the seemingly endless possibilities of their discovery. Sharing their powers makes them feel closer than ever. They start touching, caressing and kissing, lightly, between talking and laughing, until words disappear. Their tongues explore each other lovingly and urgently. Marcus does something unusual. He begins to use his pseudo-hands during their lovemaking. Freely and unabashedly, he uses them until they feel like a true extension of himself. Maria's growing excitement feeds Marcus until both feel an urgency to connect physically as they connected mentally only moments before. The two are swept away in waves of passion, the Southern Cross above them.

Exhausted and happy they lie entwined until they feel the first cool breezes of the night. They pull on their clothes. I instead of sleeping in the back of their RV, they decide to drive to their apartment in Auckland. They are still wide awake from their discovery and have a lot they want to talk about.

In their apartment they are greeted with a much-awaited surprise, packaged in a grim story. Peter Cobb has left them a message that their names were on a list of passengers who died in an airplane crash on an Asian airline. Since the release of the passenger list, their cases have been officially closed by the PPU and Interpol.

Christmas is just around the corner. Building on their home is going well, but it will not be finished by the holidays. They can use the simple prefabricated house as their temporary home if they like, the builders who usually use it as their accommodation will be gone for the holidays. They decide to do so. They want to spend the holidays on their property, no matter how primitive the conditions.

On December 24 their Pohutukawa tree is in full bloom. The contrast between the flame red blossoms of the tree and the deep blue of the early morning sky is stunning. After enjoying this gift of nature they drive a short distance and then hike to a nearby hot spring, known only to locals. By evening, they are back in their temporary, prefab home, listening to the rain as it seems to bucket down on their roof. They have decorated a Christmas tree just as they would have in Austria, which, Maria admits, makes her a little homesick. She does not really miss Austria but she misses her family and friends. Marcus agrees. They cheer up a little thinking of the next day: Bob and Alice from Ponsonby and a few new friends from Great Barrier Island will be coming to their property to celebrate Christmas with them.

When evening finally arrives they are ready to spend their first Christmas Eve together. This is a night of feasting and presents in Austria, and they do not let each other down on either count. Both have surprises for each other. Maria has bought a complete set of diving equipment for the two of them, including a compressor, spare parts and tools. They can now dive from their own jetty! Maria has also, somehow, managed to get Marcus' favorite Styrian wine, Schilcher.

She has also prepared a typical Austrian feast for them. The highlight is a salad garnished with pumpkinseed oil, a key ingredient to most Styrian salads but an ingredient difficult to get in New Zealand. She has fried carp and made a traditional potato salad. She has even succeeded in making a delicious apple strudel, especially challenging since the thin sheets of dough available in all Austrian bakeries are not available in New Zealand.

"You really are something special Maria. You must be one of the few, Austrian women who can still cook a traditional Austrian feast." Maria smiles but also reproaches him, saying, "You still underestimate me Marcus."

Now it's his turn to surprise Maria. He has compiled a collection of Maria's favorite CDs and DVDs. He also gives her a new mobile phone that provides her anonymity when phoning. This phone enables her to call anonymously from point A to point B most anywhere in the world. It has a special forwarding system that blocks the receiver of a call and the receiver's service provider from being able to trace the origin of the call. Marcus also gives the two of them a trip to French Polynesia, including Bora-Bora and the nearby island of Huahine. Marcus reports that according to his research, a resort on Huahine, Hana Iti, is supposed to be the most beautiful resort in the world. Maria throws her arms around him. When she looks in his face, she can see that there is still more to come.

"Now you have to guess who happens to be in the same hotel at the same time in Bora-Bora?" asks Marcus, his eyes twinkling.

Maria is baffled. "Your parents!" Marcus shouts, unable to keep his secret any longer. "One of our Christmas presents to them is a trip to Bora-Bora. It's all booked. They are looking forward to it. We figured that French Polynesia would be a safe place to go."

Maria touches Marcus' hair. "I'm so happy I found you," she says softly. Marcus kisses her and says that he is the lucky one.

They spend the evening eating, looking at their gifts and talking about Christmases past and future. They laugh as they share memories of their families and family traditions. Maria finds the small knot in her stomach has gone since Marcus announced their trip to French Polynesia and the visit with her parents.

Against all logic, they decide to try out their diving gear. Since the longest day of the year has only passed a few days earlier, there is a bit of light left in the sky. They are cautious, however, because they have little experience with night dives. They fasten lights onto their head gear and Marcus carries an extra light just in case. They do not venture far from the jetty. They live next to an underworld wonderland. The variety of rock formations is dazzling and there are dozens of fish hiding and darting about. Large beds of kelp look like giant underground forests swaying back and forth in the current. Where the freshwater creek drops into the salty sea it creates long cloudy streaks. While they enjoy exploring, they also catch a number of large lobsters for tomorrow's guests.

The Christmas holidays pass quickly for them and before long they are off for French Polynesia. They land at the international airport on the main island, Tahiti. Both Maria and Marcus find this island disappointing. It is overcrowded, polluted and it seems to have very little island flavor. Instead, they agree that it seems more French than France! Despite the influx of U.S. tourists, they see at least no hamburger places, the usual the fallout of lots of U.S. tourists. Instead, they see crepes, crepes and more crepes!

The obligatory excursion to the nearby island of Morea provides their first glimpse of real Polynesia. But they are completely swept away with the breathtaking beauty of the Bora-Bora lagoon. The main island has steep, heavily wooded volcanic peaks. And even mass tourism has not been able to destroy all the beauty.

The reunion with Maria's parents is the highlight of the trip. There is a lot to talk about and so much catching up to do! The Bungls do not ask for more information than Maria and Marcus are willing to offer, although they sense there is a piece missing. Maria and Marcus have decided not to tell the Bungls about their parabilities. The Bungls do not pry. They are happy just to see the two of them in love and doing well.

One the last evening they are on Bora-Bora they visit Bloody Mary restaurant, the most famous restaurant on the island. As they look around the restaurant they see a big wooden sign inscribed with names of all the famous people who have eaten there. Maria teases Marcus about inscribing one of his famous hiking poems there. The fish is excellent, and Maria's parents are amused with the contrast between the sand floor and the elegant, white tablecloth setting. Maria makes everyone's evening when she invites her parents to visit them in a year's time to see their house which they are just building.

"You're building a place on Bora-Bora?" asks Maria's father. "No, not here," laughs Maria. "We'll surprise you next year when you get the ticket. Just make sure you keep two weeks free to visit us at Christmas time."

After dinner the Bungls pack to leave Tahiti for the Cook Islands. From there they plan to take an excursion to Aitukaki, famous for its lagoon. Years ago Aitukaki was a favorite stop over spot for water planes flying the Coral Route from Auckland to Los Angeles.

Maria and Marcus also leave, but head for Huahine and the much-applauded Hana Iti resort. Marcus is calling it their belated honeymoon - though Maria is not convinced there was a wedding just yet. They have 1 of the 30 bungalows making up the resort. Each bungalow is made of local material and individually designed. No two look alike. They are scattered over a large hill that slopes down to an idyllic beach with all the trimmings - white sand and clear, warm water. The resort also has a big swimming pool with a waterfall and a hidden cave. The superb restaurant is set in the middle of a lily pond and an airy bar. Even the large reception complex on top of the hill is tastefully designed from local materials.

Each bungalow is situated in such a way that it is very private. Sitting in the whirlpool outside their bungalow, Maria and Marcus are sheltered from neighboring bungalows by tall stands of palm trees. From the whirlpool they have a grand view of tropical vegetation, wild orchids and a sprinkling of small islands just offshore, called "motus" by the locals. They can also see the white shoreline against an azure bay. Maria looks over the top of her sunglasses at the many shades of blue, from brilliant turquoise through to deep midnight. She and Marcus lean back, sipping a local drink served in a coconut.

Every time Maria goes into their bungalow she is amazed at the creativity. They are staying in a place of art! The washbasin is a huge shell and the faucets are made from coral. The water is piped into the bungalow through pieces of bamboo, and the carpets and curtains are hand woven. Before long Maria names the geckos that live in the bungalow and near the whirlpool.

Marcus' favorite bungalow accessory is the small electric chauffeured carts that are on call 24 hours a day, just in case guests are too lazy to loll down the hill! They enjoy a few days of absolute luxury. They leave the resort only for an occasional dive to an offshore shipwreck.

In one of the neighboring bungalows is a beautiful Polynesian couple. Although it is fair to say that Marcus is not interested in any woman but Maria right now, he cannot help but admire this Polynesian woman. She is slim, coffee-skinned and young with long black hair, a tiny white bikini and a winning smile, which she flashes at Marcus and Maria whenever she meets them in the restaurant. Her partner is a tall, muscular, friendly man who turns into a child when on the beach, enjoying the sand and surf. Maria notices that he turns into an attractive, impressive gentleman at night when dressed for dinner. Everyone notices the beautiful couple, Elaine and Francois. The couple's unsolicited attention is evenly distributed among the male and female guests. Maria finds them both beautiful and is amused at Marcus who steals the odd look in Elaine's direction, almost guiltily.

As Maria and Marcus lie lazily on their bed one afternoon after lunch, Maria asks Marcus with an innocent smile, "Do you want to see Elaine naked?" Marcus is completely caught off guard. He looks at Maria confused. Maria continues, "I think Elaine is just about to take a shower."

Maria takes Marcus' hand and pulls him close, holding him tightly, as they did the night when they gazed at the moon. Just like that night, Marcus suddenly sees with Maria's eyes. He sees Elaine walking to the shower and stepping out of her bikini. He watches as the water beads and streams down her body. Marcus can see that she is enjoying the rich lather of the soap. She washes her body, sometimes inside the spray of the water and sometimes out. From her turning and bending, Marcus can see that besides her long black hair, she is completely shaved.

Much to his embarrassment Marcus is becoming quite excited, partially because he feels like a keyhole voyeur. Elaine steps out of the shower and Francois steps in. Before Maria shifts her gaze to follow Elaine, she has a look at the muscular, strong body of Francois. Maria then moves her focus back to Elaine, who has gone into the bedroom. Elaine throws herself just as she is - naked and wet - onto her back on the bed. She takes a strange boomerang-shaped, black object from her bag and slides it between her legs. Just at this moment, Francois walks into the room and lies gently down beside her.

Marcus loses the image. Maria smiles, "I think we owe them a token amount of privacy, don't you think?" She looks at Marcus questioningly.

Marcus agrees. "Besides we have something more important to do right now." He kicks off his trunks and reaches for Maria's bikini.

"But Marcus," says Maria laughing and trying to roll away. "I thought we were going to go diving." Maria's teasing protests are quieted when Marcus' lips close over hers.

"It's amazing to me to love you," says Marcus some time later as he is gently stroking Maria's cheek and temple.

"That sounds like a strange complement - at least I think it was a complement - and in that case I am happy to return it." Maria smiles slightly and continues talking, her eyes closed. "Apparently what I showed you was a turn-on for you?" "To be honest, yes. By the way, what was that strange boomerang-shaped object that we saw? What was she using it for?"

"I haven't a clue. I thought *you* might be able to tell *me*. I thought you were more experienced in such things and might know what it is. Maybe we can figure it out if we look at the scene again."

Marcus is confused. 'Look at the scene again?' thinks Marcus. Before he can make heads or tails out of it, Maria embraces him again, this time closing her eyes. Suddenly the scene replays just as before. Elaine walks into the bedroom and flops down onto the bed. She takes the boomerang-shaped object out of her bag. Marcus can see the scene just as vividly as before.

Marcus jerks himself away from Maria. "Maria, what's this? You can look into the past? How did you do that?"

"No, of course I can't look into the past," says Maria. "But I *can* restore pieces of scenes - just as you saw, and even a little longer - for awhile and play them back like a video." Marcus is surprised and a little hurt. "You've never mentioned this to me before."

Maria answers, a touch of reproach in her voice. "I've indicated more than once that I'm capable of doing things that I've not told you about. You've ignored the hints. I wanted you to notice this one. I've actually been surprised that you haven't said anything about it."

"How could I say something about it?" stammers Marcus. "Marcus, Marcus," says Maria. "I love you more than anything in the world. But sometimes you get too preoccupied with your own thoughts. When you're like that, you don't notice what's going on around you. You never noticed that I looked at the road map of Auckland only once, the hiking maps of the Great Barrier Island only once and the road atlas of New Zealand only once, yet I always navigate you to the right place without referring to a map a second time. How did you think I managed that unless I had some type of mental photography? Actually it's called an eidetic phenomenon. I can look at something for a fraction of a second, and I'm able to recall it in its full form later so I can examine the details."

Marcus feels shattered. She is right. He should have realized. He did notice that Maria always seemed to know where they were going, and that often surprised him, but he never thought anything further about it.

She continues, "Just before this trip I tried to force you to recognize that I had something special. When the *Auckland Herald* arrived I browsed through it for a few seconds and then handed it to you. As usual, you read it quite closely. I knew the details, just as you did, but I mentioned them to you from memory. You didn't notice that I knew the details although I had only skimmed the paper."

Marcus feels unsettled and depressed. What Maria has pointed out to him makes him think that he notices very little around him. "I'm sorry Maria. Can you forgive me?" Sensing Marcus' distress, Maria feels badly. "Stop it Marcus. I didn't bring this up to make you feel bad. I think it's just something we both need to be aware of. I need to tell you things, rather than make you guess them. And maybe we should both think about not taking each other for granted, or underestimating other people, including each other. If we see something strange, maybe we should question the oddity rather than accept it. If we're honest, I don't think either of us really understands our parabilities fully. So how can we understand our partner's talents?"

Maria talking about the limits of their powers reminds Marcus of something he has wanted to ask Maria. "There is one thing that I've wondered about - maybe you have the same thing? My powers don't always seem to be the same strength."

Maria nods. "Yes, I've noticed that with my powers too. I haven't figured out the pattern yet, but I suspect it has something to do with food."

"Food?" asks Marcus. "Yes, at least partially with food," Maria says. She is about to say more but stops. She wants to test the theory further before saying anything. It will be more than seven years before Marcus thinks back to this conversation and admires Maria's intuition.

Sensing that Maria is finished talking about the talent-food link, Marcus says, "Maria, tell me more about the memory phenomenon. And what about the boomerang-shaped object - have we figured that out yet?" asks Marcus mischievously.

"Let's talk about the memory phenomenon later," suggests Maria. "And about the black object, I don't think we found out anything more than we knew the first time we saw it. We may have to ask a local, if we dare! But for some reason I'm exhausted and I'd really like a cup of coffee. Want one?"

As they walk toward the reception area, they notice that not all bungalows are rented. Weather-wise this time of year is not optimal. Tropical rains interrupt the sunshine, often during the middle of the day. For some guests it

is a welcome excuse to disappear into the bungalows and into bed, but for others it is a nuisance. Sometimes the tropical storms get quite severe.

During dinner that evening, a moderately severe storm is predicted for later that evening. The resort staff explains to the guests how to securely latch the bungalows' doors and windows. They encourage the guests to ask for help if they should need it at any point. All the bungalows are stocked up with drinks and munchies as well as DVDs, books and magazines.

The resort manager assures them, "No need to worry about the storm. The worst of it should be here around 11:00pm tonight. It might get a bit noisy at that time, from falling branches and coconuts, but it should abate soon after that. If you have any questions, call using the internal phone system, which has survived many storms."

Maria and Marcus are no more worried than other guests. Around 9:00pm the wind increases in strength. An hour later a serious storm has landed. The rattling of trees and branches is so noisy that there is no way that they can sleep. Marcus thinks, "The storm was predicted for 11:00. It's only 10:00 now. I wonder if that means it will be worse, or is just coming early?"

Maria is sitting quietly in the room, looking with concentration through the walls and trees. She is trying to focus on the island of Raiatea, about 25 miles away. Finally she says to Marcus with a trace of anxiety in her voice, "The storm seems to be stronger than they anticipate. On Raiatea, large trees have fallen. The roofs of houses are blowing away and some houses, cars and yachts are badly damaged already. The storm is moving this way. I think we should warn management."

Marcus calls the main building, but the manager on duty simply tries to calm him down. Marcus gets angry, "I ask you to immediately call the police in Raiatea. That's the direction that the storm is coming from. They'll confirm how serious the situation is."

They wait for several minutes before the phone rings. The manager's voice is subdued. "There's no phone connection to Raiatea at the moment. But the meteorological office at Huahine airport has revised the forecast. The expected strength of the storm is now severe."

"There's no time to lose," shouts Marcus into the phone. "You must evacuate all guests to the main building while you still can. Call all guests immediately. Tell them to take the most important things with them, passports, wallets, etc, but to leave the rest of their luggage in their bungalows. I don't think you'll find many bungalows left standing in the morning. Believe me, I've had experience with storms," he lies. "Send a cart right now to my bungalow, number 26, and I'll help with the evacuation of the others."

Marcus barking orders into the phone has an impact. By the time he and Maria have gathered their valuables, the electric cart arrives. En route to the main building, they pick up Elaine and Francois and other neighbors. Even though the trip to the main building is short, the falling branches make it treacherous. Marcus uses his pseudo-hands to avoid damage. He continuously tells the driver what to do, when to brake, go left, go fast, slow down. The driver is amazed Marcus knows how to pick a route that avoids debris.

It's clear to Marcus that if the other bungalows are to be evacuated before the full brunt of the storm arrives, he and Maria must help.

When they reach the main building he orders the driver to take care of the guests. He and Maria will continue the evacuations. The driver refuses, not wanting guests to go back out into the storm. Marcus and Maria know that they will need to use their parabilities freely, so they insist on going alone. Marcus does not have time for explanations. He grabs the driver and Francois by the collars and lifts them - supported by his T-powers - up the stairs to the main building. Elaine needs no convincing. She is right behind Marcus.

The two men will wonder for days how this small European man so easily lifted two bulky, tall Polynesian men at least twice his weight.

Marcus follows a fixed pattern for evacuation, methodically going from bungalow to bungalow. On the way to the bungalows, Maria finds the tracks with the least blockage, then Marcus removes blockage using his T-powers. With each trip they evacuate two bungalows. The last trip stretches their parabilities. It is almost impossible to find a passable route to the remaining bungalows. The situation is made worse with rain that pelts and blows every which way. Bigger and bigger branches come down. Although Marcus is able to use his powers freely, he finds that he is nearing his limits.

On the way back from the bungalows, Maria has an idea. She tells Marcus to throw dirt into the faces of the two couples riding with them. In this way, she can convince them to get under a blanket with her, leaving Marcus free to use all of his powers. It works. They wrap a blanket over their heads. Marcus can do what he needs to do to get them back to the main building.

Just before they reach the main building, two huge palm trees fall across the path, missing them by inches. Marcus cannot move them. They have to get out of the cart and run. Marcus asks them to leave all their valuables in the cart. They fight their way through the rain and wind to the main building. Despite all Marcus' attempts to protect them and despite Maria's teleseeing, one of the women is hit by a chunk of wood. She collapses on the path. Marcus picks her up like a doll, again supported by his T-powers and everyone runs to the building. Marcus goes back out into what is now a hurricane to retrieve some of the luggage in the cart. He thrusts his hands out

into the full brunt of the storm and manages to get a couple of bags. There is not much more he can do.

There are now 40 people in the main building. They think they are safe but Maria can see they are not. Marcus and Maria talk with the general manager about the strongest of the interior rooms. Everyone is moved into that room. With them they take water, flashlights, a battery operated radio and a large pile of blankets and cushions. Just when Maria comments about the electricity still being on, it flickers and goes off. The general manager finishes explaining, in the dark, that they have been on emergency generator power for over an hour already. They are now left with the dim, circular lights from the flashlights.

"We're not in the clear yet," says Marcus. "This building can't withstand the storm. We'll have to try and reinforce the room as much as possible and prepare for water to come in through the roof."

Marcus gives everyone things to do to reinforce the room, using materials and supports from the other rooms. He and Maria then sit down in a dark corner of the room, both with their eyes closed. Maria shows Marcus the weakest parts of the building and Marcus uses his hands to support them. The exertion is draining Marcus to the point that he cannot stand, yet he manages to prop up their room for the next half hour. Finally the full force of the storm has passed over. Marcus falls into a trance-like sleep. Maria makes sure that he and the others are as comfortable as possible and everyone rests as the storm winds down.

With dawn they see the full extent of the destruction. Everyone calls it a miracle that the room survived. Little else of the resort remains standing. The famous Hana Iti resort is in complete shambles. The general manager proclaims with a choking voice, "We'll rebuild within months." Indeed, the resort will be rebuilt eventually, but in a more sheltered cove nearby, and nothing reaching the standards and beauty of the original Hani Iti.

Shortly after Maria and Marcus return to Auckland, Maria announces, "I've been to the doctor and I have good news. I'm pregnant!" Marcus is delighted. He hugs her carefully, saying "You'll have to be careful now, and I'll make sure the house is ready by the time the baby comes."

Maria insists on being actively involved with the construction of their house, especially with the interior decorations, the furniture, and the landscaping. The house is just finished when the baby, a healthy boy named Stephan, is born in July 2004.

Marcus and Maria hire a couple to help them with the house and the property. The man looks after the garden and small repairs, and the woman takes care of for Stephan. The couple live in one of the separate units of the estate.

In her spare time, Maria plans to continue what she started in Vienna, her psychology studies. She enrolls in an e-learning program in which her readings and assignments are all done over the internet. The company she goes through, Hyperwave, has students like her living in remote parts all over the world.

The Simmers, as they are called by many, have established themselves in the Great Barrier Island community and to some extent in the Auckland community. Everyone accepts that a big inheritance has given the Simmers more than adequate financial resources. Marcus works hard in his job, day trading, and Maria has resumed her studies. Neither is seen as the idle rich but rather as active, contributing citizens.

Marcus expands his job when he announces that he will found an Auckland company called SR Inc. (Salvage and Rescue, Inc.). He fastidiously looks around for a possible site for his company, and appropriate staff and technology. His friends and acquaintances admire the thoroughness with which Marcus plans for his company. They do not realize that Marcus has a bigger dream, namely to anonymously help people with their parabilities. He and Maria would also like to further research their and other paraphenomena. They are especially interested in the connections, if any, between information technology and paraphenomena.

The locals begin treating the Simmers like they have always lived on Great Barrier Island and in Auckland. They gain a reputation of helping friends in need, of donating generously to charities, and of being good company whether as hosts or guests. They travel with and without Stephan, but avoid the U.S. and Europe. They also have a number of visitors, often relatives posing as friends, who help them recreate their pre-New Zealand history. Among their frequent visitors is Peter Cobb from Chicago.

Stephan develops quickly. It is soon evident that he has inherited a strange combination of parabilities from his parents. He has no telekinetic powers, but he can change his subjective time at will. This enables him to quickly learn new things, like the alphabet and his name. Stephan cannot see through objects like Maria can, but he can see in the dark and around objects using bat-like radar. The full extent of his seeing parabilities remain undiscovered for 14 years. Maria's parabilities "define" teleseeing, making it difficult to identify Stephan's unique talents.

Most amazing and unique from his parents' parabilities is Stephan's talents as an animal activator. Stephan can give orders to animals, to many at once, without speaking to them.

There are many occasions that Marcus and Maria talk about Great Barrier Island. They could not have chosen better! Had they chosen differently, Stephan's talents might have been noticed by outsiders too early.

Maria and Marcus find their life on Great Barrier Island fascinating. They are enjoying each other and Stephan as he grows and changes. They often talk about the future and their hopes for SR Inc. Perhaps they can use this company to find other paratalents. Might it be possible to form a group of paratalents on Great Barrier Island with the goal of working together for the good of mankind? In contrast to the PPU, is it possible to form a group for everyone's good and self fulfillment rather than for the political and personal gains of one or two? Marcus often dreams of a team characterized by loyalty and commitment, a team whose members protect, rather than compete with, each other.

With each day come new surprises from Stephan. Once, as they return from a dive carrying lobsters, Stephan asks them, "Why did you bring those?"

"Because we want to eat them. You like lobster too, don't you?" asks Marcus. "I do," answers Stephan. "But why don't you just call them?" He turns to face the sea, quietly looking at the water. Maria and Marcus are horrified when hundreds of lobsters crawl out of the sea toward Stephan.

"Stephan, we don't need that many!" shouts Maria. "Please send them back where they came from!" Stephan is disappointed, but he can hear that Maria is not joking. Maria and Marcus look at each other. Stephan could be the best fisherman ever. He could simply call the fish and they would swim into his net!

A few weeks later Stephan surprises them again, this time by saving 50 whales intent on beaching themselves. He reroutes them back out to the sea. Maria and Marcus watch with amazement. Maria whispers, "Suppose Stephan had the same power over humans, wouldn't that be horrifying?!" Again, the full power of Stephan's parabilities with animals remains underestimated. Only years later do they realize that Stephan also has a shared emathy, which becomes crucially important...

Stephan becomes an expert in horseback riding. When he rides with just Maria and Marcus watching, he is allowed to occasionally ride bareback. However, when riding in front of outsiders, Marcus insists he wear all the necessary equipment, bridles, saddles, stirrups, etc. Marcus talks with Stephan at length to convince him to use all the equipment. If he does not wear the equipment he will call attention to his himself and his powers, creating suspicion. This is difficult for Stephan to understand.

Like any young boy, Stephan gets himself into trouble. However, because of his parabilities, his mistakes are more than the usual tree climbing falls. Instead, Stephan puts himself into harm's way in much more creative ways, like the gull incident. One day while playing in the water, Stephan gets caught in a fishing net. He orders 200 seagulls to pick up the ends of the net

and to carry him through the air along the beach. The birds strain hard, but they manage to lift Stephan. When Maria sees this, she freezes. She calls out for Marcus, who runs to her when he hears the panic in her voice.

The gulls start dying of exertion and fall to the ground dead. Stephan's whole plan starts to fall apart, endangering Stephan. Marcus grabs Stephan and the net with his T-powers and makes sure they fall to the ground gently.

When Stephan sees his angry dad dashing towards him on the beach, he tells the seagulls to fly away. Only when he tells the birds to leave does he see the dead ones on the beach. He is shocked and says to Marcus, "Dad, I'm sorry. I didn't want to kill those birds. I'll have to be more careful next time."

Stephan's curiosity about his powers makes it difficult for Maria and Marcus to hide those powers from their staff and friends. However, Marcus and Maria feel that they must do so until Stephan is old enough to understand what he is doing. They tell him repeatedly about keeping his powers within the family. But Stephan is still young. He is curious and free spirited. Reluctantly they let their staff go, forcing Maria to lighten up on her studies and spend more time with Stephan.

Shortly after celebrating Stephan's third birthday, Maria takes a step back and looks anew at her son. Since she has been spending so much time with him, she realizes something that she might have missed otherwise. Stephan might be three years old according to the calendar, but he is much older than three. Stephan's ability to change his time means that he has learnt as much as a four or even five year old, even though he is only three. He also physically looks older than three because, like Marcus, he ages faster when he shifts his subjective time into high gear.

The advantage of his early maturity is that they can start talking with Stephan about the possibilities and the problems of having parabilities. Stephan does not understand completely, but he does realize the main point. He knows that he must keep his special talents a secret, just like his mom and dad do all the time.

Maria and Marcus are surprised, but relieved, that Stephan seems to understand. They can rehire desperately needed staff to help them run the estate. They also consider hiring a private teacher for Stephan. There are no kindergartens near their property and even if there were, Stephan would not be eligible since he is only three years old. However, because he is more like a five year old than a three year old, they prefer he begin kindergarten. They must keep him challenged.

One day Maria and Marcus ask Stephan if he would like to have a brother or a sister. They are relieved when Stephan responds with an enthusiastic "Yes!" Maria is - as planned - pregnant again...

12 Back on Hochtör

Summer 2022

Fifteen years have passed. Stephan, Maria and Marcus' first son, has just woken up to a crisp, clear day. It is Stephan's eighteenth birthday.

Like his father, Stephan likes hiking and exploring. As he is preparing his breakfast, he decides he will spend the day exploring a different part of the Great Barrier Island. He will meet up with friends later to celebrate his birthday. He shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath. He can already smell the fresh air of unexplored territory. As he is packing his car with filled water bottles, walking shoes and other gear, he is unaware of all that is transpiring across the world....

Alina is not in a good mood.

"What's wrong?" asks her mother Andrea.

"Chris and I were supposed to climb the Hochtör this weekend," says Alina. "I was looking forward to it all week. And look - the weather's perfect for climbing - clear, sunny, cool." Alina looks down at her breakfast. "He just called and said he won't have time this weekend, maybe we can go next weekend."

When Andrea hears the word "Hochtör" she looks over at her daughter. "Which route were you going to take?"

"We were going to go from the Enns River valley to the Haindlkar hut," explains Alina. "From there we were going to take the harder trail to the Hess hut, but we were first going to detour to the Hochtör peak." Alina knows the route by heart. She has traced the route with her finger many times that week as she studied her climbing map and planned their hike. "We were going to stay overnight in the Hess hut and then take the waterfall track down to the valley the next day," continues Alina.

"That's a beautiful route!" exclaims Andrea. "Were you going to climb the West face?"

"No, I think that'd be too hard for us," explains Alina. "From the map, it looks like we'd pick up the route between the Haindlkar hut and the Hess hut and from the ridge to the top of Hochtör. That stretch is supposed to be hard, but not *too* hard - not like the West face. Then the trail down to the Hess hut is easier and well marked."

Andrea smiles. She tells Alina that almost twenty years earlier she climbed the Hochtör from the West face. She recounts that while the climb was hard, requiring belays and ropes, that was not the dangerous part of the trek. What was dangerous was a boulder that had come loose and had almost killed her! It was a miracle that it did not hit her. "Who was leading," asks Alina. "You or daddy?"

"Neither," answers Andrea. "I was in a similar situation that you're in today. Your father, my then boyfriend, didn't have time to go on the climb. If I remember it right, he was cramming for one of his last exams. So, I went with a good friend and climbing partner of ours, Marcus. The weather was great, just like today. And Marcus was an experienced climber - he'd done the route before - so he led. Somehow we lost contact shortly after we did that climb." Andrea pauses, then continues. "Then I married Tony and you arrived soon after. Your dad and I didn't go on many mountain climbs after he finished school."

Andrea pauses and looks out the window. "I miss climbing. We got too busy. Then there was the accident." Andrea stops talking. A mixture of emotions jostle for attention—Marcus, the climbing, the deadly car accident of Tony, the mountains, Alina as a baby—she looks past the cars and houses. She suddenly wants to climb. She wants to feel and breathe the crisp mountain air.

Alina breaks into her mother's silence. She had not known that her mother liked climbing as much as she did. True, they had climbed together as a family, but that was rare. And Alina and her mother had not climbed since the car accident and Tony's death.

"Mom, why don't we go tomorrow - together?" asks Alina. Andrea is completely surprised by the proposal but feels her heart leap. She sees that Alina is just as surprised when she agrees. It has been more than four years since they climbed together as a family, the three of them.

Although Andrea has not climbed since their last family hike, she feels confident that she can do it. She does gymnastics regularly. She cycles and plays tennis, and she is often mistaken for being much younger than her 40 years. She has even been mistaken as being Alina's sister.

They could not have asked for a more perfect Saturday morning. They easily reach the Haindlkar hut. Their only disappointment is the large number of mountaineers who are also out enjoying the good weather. Alina and Andrea hope that most of the hikers will choose the easier Gseng trail to Johnsbach, rather than the more difficult trail to Hess hut that they are taking.

To keep ahead of the other climbers and to avoid falling rocks loosened by them, Andrea and Alina decide to go on without a break. When they reach the well known show stopper - the gap in the trail - they both leap over without hesitation. They hike on a bit further then stop momentarily and smile at each other. They look back and watch the group behind them. The group has stopped at the gap. There appears to be an animated discussion among the group about the gap in the trail. They look back and forth from the gap to the trail behind them, trying to decide whether to go on or go back.

Although the sun is hot, the air is cool. Andrea feels invigorated and strides out. They reach the pass between Haindlkar and Hess huts, which is at about 5600 feet, in almost record time. Alina finds it a challenge to keep up with her mom. At this point they turn off the well-worn trail. They have about 1500 feet of moderately difficult rock left to climb. Andrea is surprised to see that in many of the shadowy nooks, the rock is shiny with ice. Although it is early summer, the near record winter snowfalls have not fully melted. Both climbers slow their pace, realizing the climb is going to be trickier than expected. However, taking it carefully, they find that they only have to rope up in a few spots.

As they approach the steepest part, they are in complete shadow. The rock face above them is in sunlight, but the lower part is icy and slippery. Some of the small rocks give way as they step on them. They decide to rope up just to be on the safe side, and they begin belaying each other.

Suddenly there is a loud rumbling above them. When Andrea looks upward she sees a terrifying sight - an avalanche of rocks - at least 150 feet across rushing toward them. The sun has thawed the ice and frost above them and the rocks have come loose. They cannot get out of the path of the rocks quickly enough.

Andrea, about 6 feet above Alina, instinctively presses her face against the rock face. She feels paralyzed as she thinks 'Is the Hochtör my fate? First the boulder years ago and now this! We're going to be buried alive by an avalanche of stones!' In desperation she turns her head and looks down at Alina. She has not pressed herself against the rock face! Alina is looking up at the rocks with a strange expression on her face.

"Alina, press yourself against the rock!" shouts Andrea.

Alina must not hear Andrea above the noise because she keeps staring upward at the rocks, as if she does not understand what's happening. Andrea feels helpless. She turns her head and presses her body against the cold rock face, digging her fingertips into the icy crevices. She sees rocks, some the size of heads, pass to her right. She feels the rush of air as rocks and stones pass over her left hand and her face. She shuts her eyes waiting for the full impact of the avalanche to hit them.

When she opens her eyes, she sees only dust in the air. It is quiet, almost peaceful. She is alive. She looks quickly below her and to the left where she last saw Alina. Alina has collapsed, hanging limp in the rope. Andrea quickly makes her way toward Alina, slipping on loose rocks as she scrambles toward her daughter.

"I'm okay Mom. I'm just very tired," says Alina in a small voice. Andrea pulls her thermos out from her backpack and shakes as she tries to open it.

Andrea watches closely as Alina drinks the tea. She sees Alina literally regaining life with each sip.

As Alina is drinking, Andrea feels as if she is outside herself, watching the scene from above - the two of them - the avalanche - their certain death - their dust covered reunion - Alina drinking the tea. "How did we survive that?" mumbles Andrea. "It's a miracle." As she speaks, she feels a resounding *déjà vu*. Almost twenty years earlier...

Andrea looks directly at her mother and says, "No, it wasn't a miracle. I did it. I deflected the rocks. I've known for a few weeks now that I have strong telekinetic powers."

Alina pauses and feels a deep, slow breath escape her. She feels relieved. She has felt wary, distracted the last few weeks and burdened. "I'm afraid that someone will find out about me," says Alina. "And I've been playing with my powers, so I knew that I'd be able to divert the avalanche. I heard you shout, but I had to concentrate on the avalanche - to divert it. That's why I didn't press myself against the rock face."

Andrea is looking at Alina. Alina's words are washing over her. Only slowly, in the silent moments that follow, does Andrea fully understand what Alina is saying, and what she is not saying - what she cannot yet know. "Marcus! Twenty years ago - the West face - the boulder - the bounce. It wasn't a miracle, it was Marcus!" says Andrea. She now sees the events of the past with a clarity she had sought for years, but which stayed just outside her reach.

Andrea is starting to fit together Marcus' unusual behavior during their lovemaking. The stories she had heard about him after their climb. She had not known what to think, or whom to believe. She had often wondered if the stories could be true. And the trout incident, when they had walked through the canyon, she remembered how the trout had flipped above the water in a very peculiar way. Marcus had done it! It was Marcus, the man she had admired and loved and yet had never revealed the biggest secret of her life. She had not told Marcus or Tony or Alina. She had convinced herself over the years that she could not have told Marcus, not after he turned so taciturn after their afternoon of lovemaking on the mountainside. Perhaps she was not the only one with a secret. Had he wondered whether to let her in on his secret, his telekinetic powers?

A hot wave of regret sweeps through Andrea. When they were in Vienna, she was going to tell him about her pregnancy. Marcus had wanted to propose marriage and to tell her about his strange powers. She is sure of this now but had misinterpreted it then. She feels sick. And, Marcus had saved that man who was choking on a bone. Why now? Why does this all become clear now? It is too late.

Andrea's face burns and she feels a lump rise in her throat. 'Marcus, I *did* love you. I was so wrong. And it's all too late. I've been so blind!' she thinks as she leans against the hard, cold rock, trying to steady herself.

A movement by Alina loosens some rocks and sends them tumbling downward. Andrea snaps back from her thoughts to the rock face of Hochtor mountain. She looks at her daughter Alina. She must get Alina up the rest of the mountain, and then she must tell her. It is time. Andrea must tell her daughter the story of her climb with Marcus almost twenty years ago. But unlike this morning, this time she will include the beautiful afternoon they spent together and their swim in the cold water of the lake and their run down the mountain.

Alina must know that she is Marcus' daughter.

There has been nothing good about Tony's untimely, tragic death. But this - this story - Andrea knows this story is something Tony should not have heard, not ever. Tony always thought that Alina was his daughter. He loved her much more deeply than he showed. And Alina was still more precious to him when he found out that he could not father children after his illness.

Alina is watching her mother closely. She thinks that her mother is thinking about what she has just told her about her strange telekinetic powers. Her mother's silence worries her. 'Why doesn't she say something? What is she thinking about me?' wonders Alina. Andrea takes hold of Alina's arm lovingly but firmly. "Everything is fine Alina. Come on. Let's finish our climb. There's a nice place to rest, near the peak. We can sit down. You still look tired. And I have something important to tell you."

When they reach the top, Andrea finds the spot, almost exactly as she remembers from twenty years before. She had rested there with Marcus, both of them shaken from their close call with the boulder.

Andrea begins talking. Alina can see that it is difficult for her mother to talk to her, initially. However, within minutes, Andrea's eyes begin to widen and light up. She is soon excitedly recounting the day she spent hiking with Marcus almost 20 years earlier.

Alina has never seen her mother so animated. Andrea includes so many details in her description of the day's climb with Marcus that it seems to Alina it was only yesterday. This is a side to her mother that she has never seen. Alina knows that her mother loved her father all those years they were together. But there was obviously something very special between her mother and Marcus. And Marcus is her biological father - a telekinetic, like her.

After some time, Andrea looks at her daughter, the first time since beginning her story. Alina begins to cry and laugh and talk all at the same

time. Andrea searches Alina's face trying to read her reaction. Is she upset? Is she angry? Is she happy?

"Mom, you have no idea what this means to me." Alina's relief is spread across her broad smile. "I'm not a monster! I've inherited my powers from my biological father! I thought I was a freak. I thought everyone would hate me, and be afraid of me, and persecute me. I thought I'd never be able to tell anyone."

Alina no longer feels tired. "I feel like I can run the rest of the way of this trip. And when I am done, I'm going to shout 'I'm not a freak!' 'I'm not a mutant!'"

In that instant Andrea glimpses faintly what it must have been like for Marcus. She sees the relief in Alina. Unlike Alina, Marcus must have given himself away. Someone must have considered him a threat - a danger. "They must have killed him because they were afraid of him," says Andrea flatly.

Alina looks quickly at her mother. "Mom, how long was the time between when Marcus saved you from the boulder and you heard he was killed?"

Andrea thinks back. "Three..no..five..about five months."

A smile spreads across Alina's face. "Five months?! If Marcus had five months to explore his powers - to practice them - I'm sure there's no power in the world that would have been able to kill him."

Alina grabs her mother's hand as she continues. "That means he's still alive."

Andrea cannot believe it. She catches her breath. Can Marcus be alive? "He's alive? Is it possible?" Alina nods confidently. "Yes, I'm sure of it."

Andrea is reeling. After all these years, after she was convinced he was dead, after she had so often "talked" to him in her mind - can he really be alive?

Slowly Andrea says, "Then.... we must try to find him." Alina sees her mother's intense emotion and assures her softly, "We'll find him."

Alina uses her telekinetic power to have a rock swallow light on her mother's hand. Andrea smiles.

"Come on. I think I know how to find him," says Alina. Then, as if speaking to herself, she continues, "Marcus - my father - with the same powers!"

"Come on. Let's finish our climb," says Andrea, caught up in Alina's certainty. "Yes," answers Alina. "But first you have to let the little bird fly off your hand Mom."

They both laugh as the bird flits off, then darts among the rocks.

On Great Barrier Island, Marcus suddenly wakes. 'It must be well past midnight,' he thinks. He shuts his eyes and tries to recreate the images in the

dream he just woke from. The dream was about a bivouac bag in the Austrian mountains. He feels an odd, but strong connection between his dream and what the future has in store for him.

Information on Books in the XPERTS Collection

All books are available in German from Freya Pub.Co., see www.freya.at and can be ordered via all good bookstores, but most easily via www.iicm.edu/Xperts . All English versions can be ordered through www.booklocker.com . However, due to the high shipping costs, international customers outside the US and within the European Union can order “The Paradoppelganger” and “The Paranet” at lower cost through www.iicm.edu/Xperts . Within the US, Booklocker is the best source. Outside the US readers are encouraged to either neglect the high postage ☺ or to buy the e-book versions from www.booklocker.com : No delay, no postage, lower price, and you just download the file, and print it out locally.

Here is a summary of the books in the Xperts Series currently or soon available. The series is growing rapidly. All books, where no author is mentioned I have written myself. For the others I have written a ‘script’ and edited the resulting book. If you have any questions, suggestions, or are interested in becoming one of the authors of a book in the Xperts Series, contact me at hmaurer@iicm.edu . If you want to find out more about me than you ever cared to read, consult www.iicm.edu/maurer . I will answer all emails (nothing worse than being ignored) except if I am really down ☺ .

Note that although there is a thread through the books (some persons appear in each book) the novels are completely self-contained and can be read independently of each other in any order. Those marked bold are available as of 2004. I have arranged the book in more or less chronological order (according when they take place), so this might be an obvious order to read them. But, feel free to start with anyone that tickles you!

“Xperts: The Telekinetic”: In a way, this is the first book in the collection. The student of physics, Marcus, discovers that he has telekinetic and timewarping powers, and uses them to seduce girls, to make money, and to help people. He is also very much aware how dangerous this ‘parability’ can be for him. He is eventually captured by a para-military group of the European Union with dubious motives, and manages to escape only with the help of his girl friend Maria, who will be his big love for life. They flee to New Zealand to start a new existence. Marcus and Maria (and other persons) are the thread that holds the Xperts Series together....

“Xperts: The Paradoppelganger”: This is another novel involving Marcus and Maria. Their daughter Lena discovers a strange para-gifted

person. In the process of trying to make him join the group the reader visits Brazil and Europe, and is drawn into historic mysteries, extending back in history even to the Egyptian pyramids. This novel also gives a glance at what future PCs and the Net might look like... a tribute to the fact that the Editor (and author of this book) is a computer science professor. However, don't get turned off: this is a novel not a scientific book!

"Xperts: The Paracommunicator" (by Jennifer Lennon): Aroha, a young Maori woman, finds half of an ancient device in the hills near Auckland, New Zealand. Herb, also of Maori origin, independently finds the other half. Their function, and that of the mysterious black 'stones', cannot be fully understood. However, on a dangerous mission in Africa (Namibia), given to them by Marcus, it is clear that neither Aroha nor Herb would have survived without the help of the strange artifact.

"Xperts: The Parashield" (by Sam Osborne): The West-Australian Ryan finds out, as he grows up, that he can shield himself and other persons nearby, by creating through mental powers an impenetrable shield of energy. If not for his girlfriend Hannah who has some awesome 'parabilities' his enemies would eliminate him before the team of Marcus can intervene. This novel is written with a South-Western Australian background and the suspense and complexity increases as it develops.

"Xperts: E-Smog!" (by Ann Backhaus): An Australian researcher, Mandi, discovers by a fluke the dangerous side-effect of elector magnetic fields, as emitted by just about any electric device. With the background of an authentic description of the Australian West, of Malaysia and Singapore, Mandi tries to put up an impossible fight against huge international companies, and succeeds to some extent, due to Marcus' group and her brilliant negotiating skills (release planned for 2005)

"Xperts: The Parawarriors": We are in the year 2019. A nuclear war between Pakistan and India seems to be unavoidable. Marcus and his team try to avoid the worst, at horrific costs. All efforts seem to be in vain. Yet, after interludes in India, Bali and La Reunion some form of normality returns, only to be disturbed (or helped?) by super-computers from an ancient civilization millions of years ago, and a strange intelligent animal "The They" that remains a mystery for a long time.

"Xperts: The Param@ils" (by Peter Lechner): This novel gives a different twist to the Xperts Series: the economy is all that matters! A story of intrigues, human emotion and some strange emails capture the attention of the readers, with Marcus' group again playing a pivotal role in solving a complex scheme. (In preparation)

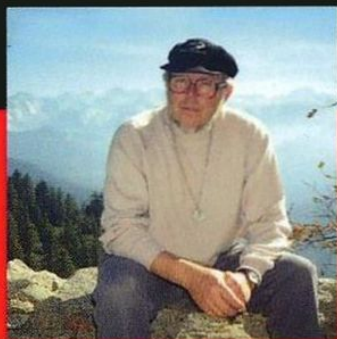
“Xperts: The Paranet”: In 2080 the then existing network of computers breaks down completely, throwing the world into total chaos. This novel shows how dependent we are going to be on computers and computer networks, and how civilization will virtually cease to exist if such a total breakdown ever happens at a stage when mankind is ‘Sufficiently networked’. Billions of people are about to die, is there any hope for them? Yes, by mounting a terrorist attack in the past!

“Xperts: Supervision”: Big brother with cameras, flying cameras, intelligent databanks and total security is catching up on us. This is a chilling novel, with a bright line of hope shown on the horizon, if we just decide to act NOW. (In preparation)

Check the Website www.iicm.edu/Xperts to stay up-to-date on all developments concerning books in the XPERTS Collection.

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***Hermann Maurer, Coordinator
of The XPERTS Collection***

Marcus, a physics student, discovers that he has strong telekinetic powers during a climb in the mountains. As if he had invisible, extendable, strong hands, he can manipulate objects as small as a roulette ball to things as big as a motorcycle. That he can also touch people makes him dangerous for all who are not his friends. A surprising by-product: he also finds it almost too easy to seduce women. However, as much as he tries to keep his talents hidden, two groups find out and try to force him to cooperate with them. He has a powerful ally, the girl Maria with 'paraseeing powers' but whether and how they will be able to survive is unclear... A novel full of suspense about parapsychological phenomena that are both a gift and a danger, interwoven like an oriental carpet with beautiful scenes from Europe, the US and New Zealand.

"Some people do not believe that thoughts can move the world. Well, they will be surprised by this book. With the precision of a scientist and the talent of novelist Maurer puts the readers under his spell with this novel about telekinesis. When finished with this this book readers will be craving for more."

(Dr. Heinz Greuling, WDR-TV Cologne, Germany;
physicist and science journalist)

"Exciting and dangerous actions in many interesting locations. People with parabilities can do more than ordinary persons, yet it is comforting to know that they have emotions and emotional problems like we do." (Peter Lechner, Vienna)

