

XPERTS



The Paradoppelganger

Hermann Maurer

Translated from the German by
Wolfgang Wendligner and Douglas Balog

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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 Paradoppelganger"

This is one of the novels in the XPERTS Collection, a collection of novels I am coordinating. I am also author of this particular book, "The Paradoppelganger." 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 this interwoven with often detailed descriptions of interesting places from all over this world, be it USA, Canada, the Arctic, Europe, 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. The German version of this particular novel already appeared in 2003 and has become rather successful.

I want to cordially thank my friends for their continuing support, the Austrian publisher Freya and the US Publisher Booklocker for excellent cooperation, and my US friend and 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 the support and inputs of Peter Lechner, my colleagues from the chemistry department Dr. Bauer and Dr. Marsch for their help concerning Siltatravin acid: much what I have added is fiction, and I apologize to them and the readers for this. Wolf Rauch has added important ideas, and I am grateful for my colleagues in New Zealand for helping me with some geographical details: I have to particularly mention Jennifer Lennon, John Hosking, Bruce Hutton and John Grundy. Lydia Gruenzweig offered many interesting comments, and my daughter Lisa was quite a harsh critic. Guenter

Schreier is responsible that much more is now correct than it was. I am also indebted to Britta Orgovanyi-Hansein and Johann Guenther for hints and suggestions for improvements. I have to thank Siegrid Hirsch and Wolf Ruzicka for their continuing support in publishing matters!

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, 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 Lena

New Zealand, February 2011

Lena is only three years old when she discovers she will never be like other kids.

Marcus leads his three-year-old daughter by the hand from their big house on Great Barrier Island to the beach. It's one of those warm, cloudless February days so rare on the little, unmolested island just off the coast from Auckland. They leave the winter garden and pass the whirlpool that empties beside the natural waterfall and thus creates a second one. This is Lena's favorite spot. The two waterfalls meet and she can enjoy warm or cold showers. She jerks her hand free from her father's and indulges in the pleasures of the water. Marcus laughs. He enjoys the sight of his daughter playing in the water only wearing her linen shoes.

All the inhabitants and guests of the house love this spot. Originally, it wasn't planned like this. It just turned out to be the logical solution to direct the overflow of the whirlpool into the natural waterfall. When people started to scream for more warm water they decided to let it flow ceaselessly. Heated only by solar collectors, the spring water flows through the Whirlpool and out the overflow.

"Come on, Lena, let's go and pick some rock oysters to eat," calls Marcus to his daughter. Cautiously, they climb down the last bit of the steep, rocky path until they reach the sandy beach. They head for the cliffs on the northern side of the bay that house several caves. That's where rock oysters and green-lipped common mussels can be found. Marcus uses a Swiss army knife to separate the oysters from the rock. He takes a homegrown lemon and squeezes a few drops on it. Lena and Marcus enjoy slurping the small, delicate crustaceans from their shells. When Lena has had enough they move on and fill up a bucket with the big green-lipped mussels. While Lena helps her father, she is already looking forward to the bouillabaisse that he'll cook for her. She loves the combination of mussels, fish, crawfish, and colorful vegetables.

They return to the sand beach and Lena sits down in a hollow among the dunes. "Bury me in the sand, daddy!" she demands and giggles as Marcus begins covering her feet with sand. Marcus is happy; finally he has a Sunday off, a whole day just for his family. He knows that his wife, Maria, is still helping their six-year-old son get through his homework. Later, she will come down with some snacks for lunch. What a beautiful afternoon it will be! Lena enjoys having her father all to herself again. Suddenly, she cocks her head to one side, and asks, "Daddy, why do only a few people glow?"

Marcus is astounded. He can't believe what he has heard. What does she mean? Is it really possible that...? "Lena, who glows and who doesn't?" But Lena seems already to have forgotten about her statement, distracted by a seagull flying nearby.

When Marcus repeats his question, she looks at him quizzically: "Well, you, mommy, Stephan... You all glow. Other people, gramma and grampa, Inge and Rolf, and Mr. Gardner, they don't glow."

Marcus is fascinated. Since Lena's birth he and Maria have observed her. They have never been sure if she possessed parabilities like the rest of the family. Now, all of a sudden, it seems that Lena has parapsychic potential. This particular parability nearly cost Marcus his life years ago: Klaus Baumgartner, a parascout for the PPU¹, recognized Marcus' telekinetic skills and unwittingly exposed Marcus to danger. Back then, it took all his tricks to save his life. If Lena is a parascout too, she will also be able to detect parabilities. It's hard for Marcus to digest that. "Does anyone else glow?"

Lena wants more sand over her feet before she'll answer. "Barry glows. He glows a lot!"

Marcus can't believe it. "Barry? The guy who owns that little travel agency in Auckland? A parascout? Him?" He tries to get more out of Lena but she's not interested any more. When Maria and Stephan arrive with the lunch basket, the conversation is over for good.

¹ PPU is the Para Psychological Unit of the EU that hunted Marcus, see "XPERTS: The Telekinetic".

Right away, Maria notices that something is up with Marcus. After lunch, when Stephan is busy amusing Lena by attracting fish with his paranimality², Marcus can tell Maria the big news.

Maria is only a little surprised: "I noticed that Lena analyses every new person she meets. They usually disappoint her. But the first time we met Barry she was fascinated by him." One more time, Marcus becomes aware of the fact that Maria is a better observer than he is and that this has nothing to do with Maria's paraseeing³ skills.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Barry had some kind of strong parability," Maria continues. "Not sure, though. I was wondering if you noticed that too. But apparently your telekinetic skills are stronger than your common sense. You know, I have always wondered if paraskills diminish other abilities."

These ideas surprise Marcus: "Well, what kind of weaknesses do you think we have?"

After a moment of consideration, Maria answers. "Stephan and I have, in a way, the same problem. They tested our hearing skills and there was no problem, remember? But we both rely on our paraseeing skills so much that we sometimes just don't listen anymore. Like when I listen to something on the HENCI⁴, it just goes in one ear and out the other. You use your telekinetic skills so much that your hands and fingers have become a little clumsy."

That makes Marcus think, "She's right there. But why haven't I noticed it?"

Maria interrupts his thoughts. "What do you think Lena's parability might mean for us?"

² Stephan is an animal activator. He can tell animals what to do without having to talk to them. In addition, he is able to look around corners and to influence his "subjective time." This means that he can think and act faster than other people.

³ Maria is able to use her eyes like anyone else but she can also use them like binoculars or a microscope. She can also look through solid objects like walls, rocks or people.

⁴ A HENCI (Hinc Et Nunc Communication Interface) is a combination of mobile phone, computer and internet browser. Radio and telephone information services have been obsolete for years....

“Well... first we have to find out if she’s really a parascout. I’m pretty sure she is, though. Second, her parability will allow us to find more people like us. And third, it will probably help us to answer the question of why some people have parabilities and others don’t. In any case, I’ll start to observe Barry tomorrow. We have to find out what the story is. Can he be trusted? Would he make a useful partner for us? And if yes, would it be wise to invite him over and offer cooperation? Maybe we’ll finally manage to form a substantial group of people with parabilities. That would give us more security and new perspectives. It would be so interesting to analyze the pasts of other paras and find out what made them so.”

Maria nods thoughtfully. How often they have discussed that! How happy it would make them to form such a group. They would be able to help so much more effectively than they have in the past. They would also be able to defend their own interests if someone tried to take advantage of them and their skills. On the other hand, people with parabilities tend to hide them. They are afraid to lose their lives or their ways of life, as happened to Klaus Baumgartner and the other members of the PPU. They disappeared after ruthless politicians threatened their lives.⁵ Will it ever be possible to get rid of these primeval but logical fears, or even to convince former “enemies” of SR Inc.’s⁶ good intentions? In her opinion, Marcus is too optimistic about it. But since she also knows that there will only be a solution if they keep believing in one, she doesn’t concern him with her doubts.

It’s one of those afternoons that they’ll never be able to forget. New Zealand at its best! The fine sand of the bay surrounded by rocky cliffs grown over with moss, ferns and bushes bear comparison with any south sea scene. Now that they’re in bloom, the red-blossomed Pohukaka trees seem like New Zealand’s natural Christmas gift to her denizens.

Maria is still overwhelmed by their beauty. She is also overwhelmed by the happiness that she and her family have. She is

⁵ See “Xperts: The Telekinetic”.

⁶ SR Inc., stands for Salvage and Rescue, Incorporated. This corporation first specialized in rescue operations. Later, its computer division developed the HENCI that became a great financial success.

still in love with Marcus, who is youthful even on the threshold of his thirtieth birthday. Both their children are cute as buttons. Even though they're rather special, they get along just fine. The fact that they own a beautiful house on a beautiful piece of land only adds to their happiness. However, there is a slight shadow hanging over them. Will their happiness be forever? Won't someone eventually find out about their parabilities, and hunt and persecute them like they did in Europe? In fact, then, it was their own fault. They founded a school for parapsychology. That was too offensive and had to give away their secret eventually. But aren't they making the same mistake again, here in Auckland? Aren't they drawing too much attention to themselves with SR Inc., their very own search and rescue service? SR Inc. has been successful so many times in so many difficult operations, even in the face of certain disaster! But after all, isn't it their moral obligation to use their powers for the benefit of those in need? Where are they to draw the line between self-preservation and service to humanity?

And what about their personnel? Can they really trust them? There is Inge and Rolf from Austria, the happily married teachers. And how about Varma and Zaidah, the caretakers? Indeed, all of them and many more members of SR Inc. were rescued three years ago during the Great Accident. Afterwards, they all swore not to give any details about parabilities away to the public.

SR Inc.'s members have a healthy respect for Maria and Marcus' abilities. In addition, they are well paid and don't know the specific details of the family. Robert, the general manager of SR Inc., is one of those rescued. He makes more money than he ever could have hoped for. He also knows about the special "techniques" that Maria and Marcus use during their rescue operations. But will loyalty, gratitude, a big paycheck, and respect be enough in the long run to keep their secret? Marcus seems to believe that. But what if one of them has one too many and spills the beans? Wouldn't the new discoveries in the field of paraphenomena change the public's stance toward parabilitists?

Nevertheless, Maria enjoys the sun on her beautiful body... and Marcus enjoys watching her. He doesn't realize that Maria's happiness is streaked with worry. He lovingly strokes her hair. She almost stops him because she's a little angry.

“Oh Marcus,” she thinks, “you’re so sweet but why can’t you put yourself in my position; why don’t you notice that I’m worried?”

Suddenly, they are interrupted by footsteps coming from above. They look up and see Inge and Rolf running down toward them. That’s quite unusual as the employees usually respect their private sphere. In spite of the friendship among the staff, this part of the beach is usually taboo for coworkers unless they are invited or in the case of an emergency. The riddle is solved quickly. Inge and Rolf tell them that Robert has called. A severe gas explosion in Auckland has leveled a house and their help would be more than welcome.

Marcus and Maria would both love to stay where they are but jump up immediately. Despite his haste, Marcus notices that Inge is only wearing a thin blouse and Rolf only trousers. Apparently, it wasn’t only the call from Robert that fired them up! Maria notices that too but she also notices that Marcus looks at Inge with more interest than is appropriate in a business situation. Before long she notices something else: Rolf’s chiseled jaw, his sparkling eyes, wide shoulders, strong arms, and shaved chest. “This must be the ‘seven year itch,’” she thinks, not without a bit of uneasiness. But now it’s time to save some lives.

“A plane will arrive in a minute and take you to Auckland,” adds Rolf. Apparently they have taken the decision without even asking their superiors. They hug their kids goodbye and leave them in the care of Inge and Rolf. The children show no signs of protest. Maria and Marcus approach the Moller 600⁷ that has just landed. Stephan envies his parents as they enter the helicopter. When will he be able to use his parabilities for the first time? How much he would like to impress his family. Little does he know that this will soon be necessary...

Half an hour later, Maria and Marcus are sitting in their special armored car and driving down Harbour Street in Auckland. As they approach the leveled house, they are in constant telephone contact with the rescue teams. Several TV reports have made their rescue vehicle well known in and around Auckland. Some people even begin to applaud when they see it. High hopes rest upon them and

⁷ The Moller 600, a combination of helicopter and automobile, is a result of the continued development of the Moller 400 (see www.moller.com).

make them very, very visible. Maybe too visible? They have often let reporters into their vehicle to explain the electronic devices. Most of those have only been installed to disguise their parabilities. Only insiders know what really goes on in the vehicle, or at least they hope so.

Again this proves to be naive. Once their arrival was known of in Wellington, the order was given to send two people to the site of the accident to supervise Maria and Marcus and to give a detailed report about everything going on. Marian and Marcus have no idea that Ken Palaviccini and Dick Enthwistle, members of the secret service, are more than just spectators or worried relatives.

When Maria and Marcus arrive at the leveled house, they activate their sonar, radar and infrared devices. These will later help them to define their priorities. They hermetically seal the vehicle so they can work undisturbed. Fortunately, this has become accepted as one of their trademarks. Their work can now begin. It's easy for Maria to look through all obstacles. Only very dark rooms can sometimes be a problem. Marcus is able to reach through almost every material with his telekinetic pseudoarms. When they embrace, Maria and Marcus can combine their parabilities. They discovered that a number of years ago. However, the usefulness of this practice is limited and it is usually better to get an initial overview individually. As usual, they start with a superficial survey of the situation. The basement is so dark that even Maria can't see anything. That's why she moves on to the first floor right away.

Marcus rakes the basement with his pseudoarms. In one of the rooms, he finds something that could be, that feels like, a human body. With one pseudohand he stabs into the thigh and uses his other pseudohands to check the rest of the body for some kind of reaction. There is none. This man must be dead or unconscious. He enters the man's position into the plan of the building, then looks at Maria questioningly.

Maria says, "O.K., two people are locked in the first floor. One of them is a man. He's inside a room that seems to be solid. There's enough oxygen in there, but no way out. He's not in immediate danger and can be freed without our help. But the other person is buried. Her arms are pinned down and she has hardly any air left. Looks like a job for you, Marcus."

Maria and Marcus embrace. That way, Marcus can see the trapped woman. A tiny hole allows some light to break the darkness; otherwise Maria would never have noticed a thing. It would be easy for Marcus to help by making the hole bigger and helping her get out with his pseudohands. But if he did that, he would give away his secret. He has to proceed in a much more complicated way: he uses all his power to move the entire room (to the shock of the trapped woman who thinks it's all over now). He manages to free her from all the mortar and stone and widens the hole to an extent that would enable her to climb through it. If she's no longer capable of doing that, at least she's able to breathe and move around a little. Similarly, Maria and Marcus rake the whole building and give a detailed report on possible survivors to the rescue teams.

Their work is finished for today. SR Inc. has again accomplished the unbelievable. At least that's what the two secret service agents write into their report.

Despite their success, Maria and Marcus have mixed feelings. They saved ten lives, or at least enabled others to do so, but their success is too suspicious to be accepted without hesitation. On many previous occasions, it would've been possible to save more people with less effort if they hadn't needed to hide their parabilities. Is it going to be like this forever?

Maria thinks out loud, "It would be great if we could just give people a pill that would make them forget about their immediate past. That would allow us to help people so much more effectively than we do already."

Marcus agrees: "That would be great. We should start doing research in that field. It's still our biggest fear that someone could find out about us. Or...shall we let them find out?"

"You know that's impossible. The whole world would be against us. Don't you remember?"⁸

Their Moller 600 takes them back to their house on Great Barrier Island. The Moller is one of the only ones in New Zealand. Only in emergencies and special situations is permission granted for the aircraft to be bought. There has been a lot of argument about the Moller. It can start and land vertically and can land in even the most

⁸ See "Xperts: 'The Telekinetic'".

remote places. It is able to fly close to the ground and doesn't use a lot of kerosene. But some of its advantages are also the reason why its use has been limited to such an extent.⁹ People have good reason to fear that all their personal space will be invaded. Others are afraid that the thrill of wildlife experience would be gone if thousands of Mollers were buzzing around like mosquitoes. A big outdoors enthusiast himself, Marcus sympathizes with these arguments.

Anyway, their flight from Auckland Harbor to their house is always an adventure, especially in the beautiful early evening light. They pass over Rangitoto Island, a volcano that appeared out of the ocean only a few hundred years ago and has become a symbol of Auckland. After passing more small islands in the Hauraki Gulf, they fly over Waiheke, bigger and more densely populated than the rest. Between here and Whangaparapara, the first outpost on Great Barrier Island, there is only open water, and a lot of it. What follows is wild forest, gorgeous creeks, ponds, and clearings to the other side of the island. The shadows grow longer as the sun sets.

Even on a long summer day like this, dusk eventually falls as Maria and Marcus land near their house. Their children welcome them in their pajamas, eager to tell them about the adventures of the afternoon. "We rode biiiiiiiiig fishes!" Lena boasts. Stephan frowns at her. He told her explicitly not to tell that to their parents. He knows that his father doesn't like him to use his parabilities on animals while other people, like Inge and Rolf, are present. Of course, they know about his animalactivator skills but they are not supposed to know all the details. Stephan doesn't understand that and neither does Lena, of course.

Even though they are starving, Maria and Marcus have to tell a good night story first. Then they can indulge in the mild curry Zaidah cooked a couple hours before. It's still delicious as curry gets better and better the longer you let it sit.

⁹ The first Moller had four adjustable engines. Once in the air it can fly several hundred km/h by leveling the engines. It only uses about the same amount of fuel as a car. In 1993, the first model was tested by flying legend Gordon Vette.

After the meal, Maria and Marcus step in the whirlpool near the waterfall for a while, then, warmed up, they walk down to the small dock by the bay below. Marcus puts his hand into the water then withdraws it quickly in surprise. The water is glowing!

“Maria, we have marine phosphorescence!” Before she can say anything, Marcus jumps into the water. Drops sparkle on his skin, looking like a shell made of blue light. Every move he makes produces a shock wave which then produces an unreal wave of light. Even though Maria has already experienced the phenomenon from a yacht, she’s still amazed by it. There’s nothing like it in Europe, so Europeans usually don’t believe in it until they experience it. No description in any encyclopedia can even come close to the real thing.

Every little movement in the water leads to a beautiful but spooky glow. The sea becomes a mixture of water and blue light. Every little drop has the quality of a glowworm. Maria glides into the water. It feels cool, as usual, but this time her movements are followed by a glimmering wake. Marcus climbs onto the dock. He wants to see Maria’s beautiful body bathed in the luminescence. Maria knows this look. She knows that Marcus is all voyeurism and lust. She enjoys that and gives him a bit of a mermaid show. Marcus dips his arms in the water, offering them to her. Maria accepts the offer and Marcus lifts her up, supporting her with his telekinetic strength. He lays her on her back, cradling her in his pseudohands to make the dock softer for what’s about to happen next.

“Yes Marcus, tie me up!” Maria whispers hoarsely. Even though they have no rope, handcuffs or chains, Marcus is more than willing to comply with her wishes. Two pseudohands bind her wrists to the dock. Two more force her legs apart. Maria moans in surprise. Marcus starts to kiss her all over. Maria loves that. “What would Marcus’ lust be without his desire to kiss me,” she thinks, only half conscious of the world around her. Marcus mounts her and sinks into her. They move in a slow rhythm. When the movement intensifies, she opens her eyes and sees the beloved, flushed face of her husband. “Maria,” he moans, “it’s so good with you.” They cling to each other as though it were the first time.

Marcus relaxes on top of his wife, stroking her lovingly. Maria enjoys watching him and the Southern Cross in the starry night.

Suddenly, she spots a shooting star. Her wish comes without thinking: "Let this happiness never end!" she thinks, sure she was the only one who saw the shooting star.

Marcus slowly lifts himself from her, "You know what, Maria? I just saw the reflection of a shooting star in your eyes. Wait a minute, I'll be right back."

Marcus rushes up to the terrace to get a bottle of Gisborne Chardonnay, two glasses and two blankets. Then he covers Maria lovingly with one blanket and hangs the other around his shoulders. He pours the wine into the glasses. Leaning against each other, they remain in silence and both have the same unspoken wish which is soon fulfilled in the clear night: another shooting star tears the firmament. They hug with the same thought on their minds: "What a beautiful day this has been!"

On the way back to the house, they become aware of how much this day would probably change their lives. They found out that their daughter Lena is a parascout and that Barry, the owner of the travel agency, has some strong sort of parability, too. What kind of complications will this bring? They cannot be sure.

The first veils of fog rise, starting to block the stars in the sky.

2 Intermezzo in Wellington

December 2007 - A little more than three years earlier than the last chapter.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand enters the Beehive, as the parliament building in Wellington is popularly known. The Beehive, situated near the center of Wellington, acquired its nickname from its round and uniform architecture rather than from the industriousness of its workforce.

Just as the PM is beginning her daily routine, her assistant enters the room and informs her of the “Great Accident,” as it will be called later in the media. The horror of the situation will become clear only a few hours later as military units send back the first detailed reports. They talk of hundreds of casualties. Realistically speaking, there should be no chance for survivors.

One of the many organizations to offer help is SR Inc. of Auckland. Even though SR Inc. has so far only been involved in minor rescue operations, the situation demands that the government accept any kind of help and SR Inc. becomes a part of the general rescue plan. The combined efforts of all the services involved will be a huge success. Against all odds, eighty-three people will be saved.

The people of New Zealand, the government and the PM breathe a sigh of relief. However, the contrast between the initial reports and the outcome make the PM think: “How were all the military advisors wrong? Why did they assume that there would be no survivors? How were eighty-three people saved?”

The report is more than vague; it is so vague that the PM orders a detailed investigation. The results are astounding. A little organization called SR Inc. seems to have been involved in every successful rescue operation, yet the media never mentioned SR Inc. as an important factor. It is as though they allowed other organizations to take the credit due them. Similarly, SR Inc.’s web page speaks only modestly of their operations, without trying to impress potential customers.

Much earlier than Maria and Marcus realized, they attract

unwanted attention in Wellington. The PM orders an investigation on the history of SR Inc. and the lives of its owners.

The results of the enquiry make her wonder even more. Three years ago Maria and Marcus appeared in Auckland, seemingly out of the blue. According to their documents, they are citizens of NZ. Marcus immigrated from Europe when he was eighteen and immediately applied for citizenship. However, the immigration office is not able to locate his file. This is annoying but not surprising: the mismanagement in the immigration office has long been a thorn in the side of the PM; she will have to do something about that eventually. Marcus married Maria a few years later in Europe, automatically giving her NZ citizenship.

Before Maria and Marcus settled down in Auckland and the nearby Great Barrier Island, they had apparently lived in Wellington. The databank of Wellington's national museum even shows that Marcus has been a member of the association of friends of De Papa Tongarewa, the large museum in the harbor, for five years. Hardly anyone in Wellington seems to remember them though. The move to Auckland seems to have been motivated by some kind of inheritance, but again no details are available. The PM decides to keep an eye on SR Inc., more out of personal than professional curiosity. She hands the matter over to one of her assistants and resumes her routine work.

Months later she hears about a large fire in Hamilton, 100 miles south of Auckland. Even national TV reports on the heroic actions of SR Inc. and the PM is suddenly reminded of the mysterious organization. She immediately asks her assistant if anything important regarding SR Inc. has arisen in the meantime. What she hears is so striking that she is angry at not being given this information earlier.

In the meantime, not only has SR Inc. been active almost twenty times, but they have also attracted local attention by remedying seemingly impossible problems. The organization has been constantly developing and improving their own emergency vehicle. The vehicle's advanced technology seems to provide enormous help in the group's recovery and rescue operations. This would certainly necessitate a vast department for electronics, mechatronics and computer technology within the organization. Especially surprising

is the fact that many of SR Inc.'s employees and some of the staff living with Maria and Marcus on Great Barrier Island were rescued during the "Great Accident."

While the PM is still pondering the reasons for this, her assistant continues: "The people at SR Inc. are a sworn team, completely loyal to the owners. We tried to find out from the survivors what role Maria and Marcus played there, but they just fed us bits and pieces. For some reason they don't want to talk about it. SR Inc. is growing and growing, but apparently, not so much through the income from their rescue operations, but because they have managed to improve the standard HENCI (a combination of mobile phone and computer) to such an extent that this "e-helper"¹⁰ has become a worldwide sensation. The company and its owners seem to have unlimited financial reserves. The owners' manor on Great Barrier Island could rather be called a settlement. As far as we know, they have the most modern and expensive facilities around."

"Could it be that SR Inc.'s secrecy and wealth are somehow connected to our policy of allowing hemp cultivation on the island?"

"No. We checked that. There is absolutely no connection."

"Who the hell's in charge of monitoring SR Inc. over there?" asks the PM impatiently.

"Two secret service agents. I know them personally. Their names are Ken and Dick. They work there on and off."

The PM pauses for a moment then continues, "That's not enough. Have them put together a supervisory group. I want them to monitor every action of SR Inc. and their owners. And I want a report on my desk every month."

Those monthly reports would document an uninterrupted series of achievements in the success story of SR Inc. Both their rescue operations and the continuing success with the e-Helper and other electronic devices are astounding. Month after month the PM reads with surprise about this group that seems to selflessly risk their lives to help others. She can't believe that there is nothing else behind it, but she's willing to accept this for a while. When Marcus applies for permission to purchase a Moller 600, supported by the expert

¹⁰ The name e-Helper is a trademark. Similar devices are often referred to as WEX (walking experts).

opinion of flying legend Gordon Vette, she makes sure that Marcus gets it. In addition, she advises Auckland's responsible commission to approve applications he submits whenever at all possible. Even the military will soon become more and more jealous of SR Inc.'s capabilities.

In the field of salvage and rescue operations, SR Inc. seems to have a technology that may well be exportable. "Why don't they export it then", thinks the PM. Finally, also partly out of curiosity, she informs Business Minister Patrick Fisher of the SR Inc. situation and orders him to have the responsible deputy contact Marcus. For Maria and Marcus, the message is clear: SR Inc. technology is important for New Zealand's economy. Therefore, SR Inc. can be sure to be strongly supported, financially and otherwise, in their marketing efforts abroad.

Maria and Marcus think about it for a long time. The truth is that the rescue vehicles are not really that beneficial without Maria and Marcus' parabilities. This cannot be revealed, though. In truth, their research department is mostly concerned with completely different issues such as the development of new variations of mobile computers and especially the discovery of new parapsychic phenomena. But this information must remain confidential.

On the other hand, they don't want to arouse suspicion. That five-year-old Stephan and two year old Lena do not attend public school will eventually raise some eyebrows anyway. They decide at last to accept the federal financial assistance that they don't actually need. They declare, however, that they will continue to develop the products by themselves and will later start to export salvage and rescue products in large quantities.

Without knowing it, Maria and Marcus are constantly under surveillance. Every variation from normalcy is immediately noted and subsequently reported. This continually affects their private life.

Marcus' best friend Mike, a Mathematics professor at Auckland University, is telling Marcus yet again about an excursion he's always dreamed about. His idea is to fly to the source of the Beansburn River¹¹ with a helicopter, from there climb the nearby

¹¹ The Beansburn is one of the wild tributaries of the Dart River, the latter easily reachable from Queenstown, the tourist center of the South Island.

pass, scale the towering peak above, then, finally, descend following the broadening Beansburn until it reaches the Dart River. There, he would meet a jet boat for a short ride back to Queenstown.

Marcus is fascinated: "Sounds great Mike. Let's do it! I'm sure Maria would like to come along too. Lena and Stephan are old enough to stay with Inge and Rolf for a week."

"Unfortunately, my friend," Mike says with a laugh, "it can't be done. The headwaters of the Beansburn are in a national park. Helicopters are allowed only in emergencies and you'd never get permission for your Moller either."

But Marcus won't give up. He writes an application to the Department of Conservation for special permission to land a helicopter in the national park. He never suspects that his letter will be read by the secret service, and then forwarded to the PM. Here, the PM sees a chance to combine business with pleasure. She has long held a standing invitation to fly along the borders of the national park. Now she will be able to kill two birds with one stone. Perhaps during an ostensive inspection of the park, she will be able to learn something about Marcus and Maria that her agents have not yet discovered. And who knows? Perhaps Marcus' intentions are not merely those of an outdoors enthusiast. You never know with this SR Inc. In any case, a good personal relationship with Marcus and Maria can never hurt.

Thus Marcus receives the news with surprise that they are invited to make the trip in a government helicopter that will let them out at the source of the Beansburn during the course of a routine inspection flight. The flight will depart in a few days from Queenstown, the tourist center on the south island.

Mike, a real Kiwi¹², organizes all the necessities. They will soon find out that a tent is not among the gear. Their backpacks would be too cumbersome with all the food, climbing equipment, cooking kit, clothes and sleeping bags. Marcus and Maria find it hard to imagine

¹² The term Kiwi originally meant one of three things in New Zealand: a local, the national bird, or the fruit. Nowadays, New Zealanders no longer call the fruit kiwi, but zespri.

that it is possible to spend the night in the mountains only in a sleeping bag covered by a thin sheet of plastic. But Mike is unconcerned. It might be a little chilly, but the sleeping bags are good and it never gets really cold in early fall.

On a gray Saturday morning, Mike, Maria and Marcus fly from Auckland to Queenstown. There, they board an eight seat military helicopter. The weather is good but a dark wall of clouds hanging over the mountains worries them a bit. While they are discussing if a mountain tour in such weather is possible or advisable, they are interrupted by the arrival of the PM herself.

She has to laugh when she sees their astonished faces. "A little surprised? You wouldn't have been able to take this trip if I hadn't planned on taking it already. So I guess you'll just have to put up with me."

Marcus and the PM are deeply engaged in conversation throughout the flight. The PM wants to know everything about SR Inc.'s rescue methods, but she's also interested in the details of his private life. Marcus answers her questions, but cautiously. He knows that what he says has to conform to those parts of his life that are already public knowledge. No one can know that he and Maria had to flee Europe. Maria herself doesn't say much. She is busy observing the PM and the focused attention the PM gives to the conversation with Marcus. Later, she will tell Marcus that she suspects the PM of knowing more about them than they would like.

Mike is busy talking to the pilot, keeping track of their flight and the landscape below. He asks the pilot to fly above the Beansburn in order to see the route they will be taking in a couple of days. He doesn't always like what he sees. They will have to climb around several waterfalls. The weather also begins to worry him a little, though he would never admit that. Raindrops beat against the windows and gusts of wind buffet the helicopter. Visibility gets worse and worse and the flight becomes more and more disquieting. The passengers grasp handholds and their faces grow pale. The pilot asks the PM if she wants him to turn around.

"I don't think my stomach will be able to keep up with this turbulence," she answers, "but if you three still want to climb that saddle, we'll let you out as we planned and then head back."

The wind stiffens, the rain now mixing with snow. After a hard

landing, the three disembark into a mean snowstorm. Now, they and all their gear stand in a foot of fresh snow.

“You sure you still want to try and get up there? Last chance to turn around!” shouts the captain.

Mike hesitates. He knows they will survive but it will be no walk in the park, so to speak. Does he really want to get Maria and Marcus into that?

Before he can give an answer to the pilot, Maria and Marcus answer for him. “We’ll stay here. We’ll manage. Have a safe flight back and thanks for the lift.”

Mike is speechless, as are the pilot and the PM. How can they be so confident? How can they be so certain that nothing will happen? The PM is reminded of their calm assuredness in their rescue missions. Are they just used to difficult situations or are there other reasons, even unknown powers?

A few days later the PM will rethink those thoughts. Without knowing it for certain, she has learned a lot about Maria and Marcus. Little does she know how close she came to the truth about “hidden powers.”

The Pilot now has no time to lose. The wind is strong enough to rock the helicopter. Mike, Maria and Marcus watch as the helicopter ascends unsteadily into the gray haze of cold rain and snow. Will they regret having stayed? But Mike quickly takes the lead. “Did you see that big boulder on the way in? That’s where we have to go first. It’ll shield us from this wind. Then we can discuss how we’ll continue.”

The snow makes it impossible to see more than an arm’s length ahead and their eyes burn in the sharp wind. Every step sinks into the wet snow and they find it hard to get a sure footing on the uneven ground beneath. They are a couple of hundred meters above the tree line and lumps of sod and tufts of brushwood lie hidden underneath the snow. Mike leads them with the assuredness of a sleepwalker. Maria and Marcus don’t understand how he knows the right path. But Maria nods knowingly to Marcus. She knows that Mike is on the right trail because her parabilities allow her to see through the falling snow. She also spots the boulder long before Mike proudly manages to lead them there.

"That's it for now," he says, as they stand together, comparatively comfortable and protected for now from the weather by the overhanging rock. Others wouldn't know how to go on in such a situation, but not Mike! He has already decided on the next logical move. "First let's have a cup of tea and we'll wait until the snowstorm's over." He takes the Thermos out of his backpack and pours a steaming cup of tea. "According to the weather forecast the snow should stop soon. There's already too much snow on the ground for this season anyway."

"And... what if it doesn't stop?" asks Maria.

"Well then... we'll have to spend two nights standing up and leaning against each other," answers Mike dryly. Then he realizes that he has worried them and continues, "We'll have to abandon the original plan to climb the peak. That would be far too dangerous right now with this snow. According to the map, if we walk downhill to the trees, we should be able to find a dry spot in a crevice or under another overhang. We have to find shelter now, snowstorm or not. And we'll manage, even if we can't see much. We still have lots of daylight, so for now let's stay here until the snow and wind slow down. Put on all the clothes you have so you don't freeze where you're standing."

Mike starts telling stories about his other adventures, about a mountain tour he once took with his ex-girlfriend Jennifer. Apparently, they got thoroughly soaked and because of the darkness could go no further. Only the insides of their sleeping bags remained dry. First, they undressed and got into their separate sleeping bags, but it didn't take long until she was begging to squeeze into his. "That turned out to be very cozy, and let me tell you, interesting too. So you two are not going to be cold tonight."

One hour later it's still snowing as hard as before but the wind has let up. "It's time to go," says Mike taking the lead again. He breaks the snow with every step, creating a trail and making the trek easier for Maria and Marcus behind him.

"Each of us should take the lead for a little while," Marcus suggests after a while. Mike tries to protest but Marcus insists they take turns. He knows that Mike is stronger than him but he also knows that it would be best for all of them if Maria took the lead. Thanks to her parabilities, she is the only one who can see properly

under these circumstances. Once she has led them to the rocks it will be up to him to find the perfect spot with his pseudohands.

Maria notices a couple of dead tree trunks and takes the lead. She soon recognizes the rocks that Mike was talking about. With Mike's knowledge, Marcus' pseudohands and Maria's paraeyes, they easily find a safe spot. In a wind-protected place under another large overhanging rock, they find a dry spot. It's almost a cave. They'll spend the night here.

Maria asks, "Do you think we'll be able to find wood here, Mike? I thought I saw some dead trees over there... a fire certainly would be nice."

Mike is skeptical. "We can try, but don't go too far away and always keep track of your direction."

"I'll go with you, Mike. I'll show you where I thought I saw the trees."

Marcus is sure that if there is wood, Maria will find it and Mike will be able to cut it with his hatchet and carry it back. Marcus sits down on his rolled up sleeping bag and starts probing the area with his pseudohands. He is surprised to find a few low trees that have been able to grow in the lee of two rocks. He manages to break a couple of branches off with his pseudohands and makes a small woodpile next to him without even moving.

When Mike and Maria come back fifteen minutes later, he enjoys Mike's unbelieving expression and Maria's knowing look: "Where the hell did you find that wood?" Mike wants to know.

"Well... here and there," says Marcus secretively.

The wood, however, doesn't live up to its promise. It is so wet that it smokes more than it burns and smudge and fumes quickly fill their small cave. They start coughing, their eyes burn and they finally decide to kill the fire. Maria's feet hurt. Marcus takes her shoes off to find that her feet are ice cold. He massages them, puts them underneath his sweater and finally convinces Maria to put on all her clothes and get into her sleeping bag. By the light of a torch, Mike cooks soup and "astronaut food" on his gas stove. It warms them up and in this situation almost seems like gourmet. Then, Mike and Marcus get into their sleeping bags, and, all lying together closely, they cover themselves with the plastic sheet. The night is pitch black and ice cold. Marcus muses over Mike's story and considers

sneaking in the other bag with Maria but the mere thought of leaving his sleeping bag and entering the cold, and then maybe not finding enough space, keeps him from acting. None of them sleeps well.

Marcus awakes with an urgent need. 'Too much tea', he thinks. Only because he doesn't want to wet his bag, he gets out and relieves himself in the snow just outside the cave. The cold on his body is torture. Subconsciously, he realizes that the snow has stopped and has become hard.

Suddenly, there is a sound like terrible thunder. The Earth seems to shake. The others awake but since the thunder has stopped and it is still dark, they all go back to sleep.

It remains dark, but it's getting warmer. It's stuffy in the cave now. Mike wakes up Marcus. "We've got a problem. Remember that thunder? That was probably a minor earthquake. In any case, something started an avalanche and I think we're trapped!"

Marcus is suddenly wide-awake. By the light of the torches, they see the whole mess: there is hard packed snow all around them. Neither light nor air can get through.

Maria is awake now too. "Morning boys. Three meters." That's the weirdest way to say good morning that Mike has ever heard, but Marcus understands. Maria has managed to look through the snow wall and ascertain its depth.

Marcus has to face a problem: it would be easy to use his telekinetic- powers to set them free, but do they really want to confront their friend with the fact that they are monsters - humans with parabilities? And, if they tell him now, would he understand why they had kept it a secret so long? No, it will have to remain a secret. But how will they get out?

Marcus goes through the wall with his pseudo hands and starts to dig a hole from the outside. Maria hears the digging noises, interprets them correctly, and starts griping loudly at Mike, blaming him for their predicament in order to cover the sound of the digging. One part of the wall soon starts looking lighter. Maria tries to explain: "Look! The avalanche isn't the same depth everywhere," she exclaims, and throws herself against the lighter spot in the wall while Marcus helps her with his T-powers. Maria breaks the wall and almost falls out the other side.

They all clamber out to find that the weather has changed completely. It's still cold, but sunny now. Kaiserwetter! The air is clear and extremely beautiful, exposing a gloriously bright blue sky and mountains covered in fresh snow. The craggy rock faces gleam in the splendor of the morning. Thick woods and the little creek, which will become the mighty Beansburn, lie below them.

The night was so cold and the wet snow has frozen so hard that it doesn't even crack when they step on it. The growing strength of the sun feels good. Again Mike takes the lead. "We should leave now while we can still walk on the snow. Once we start breaking in again, we'll stop for breakfast. We have to be at the Dart River in three days. That won't be easy and depends on two factors: first, how far down the valley it snowed, and second, how hard we hike."

They pack quickly. However, Mike takes the time to look at the results of the avalanche from outside the cave. There's a lot he doesn't understand. Why does it look as if somebody has dug from the outside? How did Maria break through that thick snow? Something is wrong here but he'll have to contemplate that later.

What a beautiful day after all! With great weather and no wind, they move on quickly, the sun getting so strong that they remove one piece of clothing after the other. When they finally start breaking in, the snow is not so deep anymore. Mike finds a dry spot underneath a tree and declares it a café. He celebrates breakfast: muesli, ham, eggs, surprisingly good instant coffee, cheese, sausage, and acceptable bread.

The walk continues, beautiful as a dream. There are no clouds in the blue sky. Soon they reach the end of the snow and follow the widening Beansburn. They walk through the thick rainforest, which is sprinkled with fern trees. They pass a few waterfalls and Mike always seems to know the best way around. More and more often they have to cross the river, which is getting a bit tricky. In typical Kiwi manner, with their boots on so as to assure a good grip on the river's bottom, they cross three abreast, the one most upstream breaking the current for the other two, and the former able to brace against his companions.

Where a crossing is impossible, they have to make long detours

through almost impenetrable forest. But NZ jungle is good jungle if you know a few basic rules. For example, don't be scared by the wetas. These beautiful up to eight centimeters long insects will land on your head or arm. But you can't just brush them off. If you do that, they'll dig into you and cause serious injury. If you try to force them off, they will break and green blood, which looks like part of a science fiction nightmare, oozes out.

You should also know about "Spaniard grass" and its poisonous effects. If you come in contact with it too often, its effects can be fatal. The Spaniards had to learn this lesson the hard way. Surrounded by the Maori, they tried to escape through a field of the plant and died pitiful deaths. Closer to the sea, there are annoying mosquitoes and sand flees. But, all in all, New Zealand is a peaceful country and so are its inhabitants.

In the late afternoon, Mike, Maria and Marcus reach the floor of a wide valley, a perfect place to spend the night. The grass is one meter high, trees stand here and there, and waterfalls come down from the mountains on both sides. The Beansburn has become a mighty animal by now. It gushes down in rapids and meanders through the valley. They make camp next to a large tree, its branches spread wide above them. They use the dry grass to start a bonfire and secure the plastic sheet to form a shelter in case of rain. They also manage to catch some fish.

Mike, who thinks he knows all the tricks, is surprised at Maria's and Marcus' success. But with their parabilities it is easy, as they have tried a few times before.

With the crackling campfire, the gurgling river and the clear sky and the Southern Cross above, the evening turns out to be one of the best moments they have ever had in New Zealand. For a long time they talk about serious and light topics. Now Mike knows for sure: his two companions are very special. For Maria and Marcus, Mike is simply Mike and as such embodies all the good qualities of New Zealand. They'll never be able to forget him. But one question remains: does Mike have parabilities too? It often seems so, especially when it comes to his path finding abilities. How useful it would be to have a parasy like Baumgartner! It will take them another year to find out that they have a parasy within their own

family. Lena, their two-year-old daughter will turn out to have this and other parabilities.

Mike, Maria and Marcus keep following the Beansburn as well as they can. They allow themselves to take additional detours to breathtaking waterfalls. The weather is unusually warm and allows them to go skinny-dipping from time to time. Mike enjoys watching Maria au naturel. He envies Marcus a little but always remains a true gentleman. None of the many pictures he takes during the trip will show Maria's naked body. He leaves Maria and Marcus alone in their moments of passion.

While Mike, Maria and Marcus near the meeting place by the Dart River, the PM is having a meeting with Dirkman, the Head of the EU Commission in Wellington. From the first moment, she didn't like Dirkman, but he insisted on visiting NZ. From the very start of the meeting, he makes sure to point out that the EU would be interested in welcoming NZ to the Eurozone. He is also careful to imply that NZ is so unimportant that it would make much more of a difference to NZ than to the EU.

(After 2010 only three real currencies remain: the US Dollar, the Euro and the Yen. After England, Switzerland and Norway, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Algeria, Argentina, and finally India have adopted the Euro. China's de facto decision for the Yen finally established three huge unshakable currency areas.)

The PM finds it hard to really feel comfortable with the EU representative. Even many glasses of Hawks Bay Chardonnay followed by first-class eiswein can't change that. Using unsettling language, Dirkman warns the PM of potentially para-talented people. He tells her that the commission has already been confronted with such people. One highly skilled telekinet in particular, whose name he claims to have forgotten, seems to have given them a lot of trouble. Supposedly, this man died in a plane crash but one cannot be sure. He tells her that he will send her the fingerprints of all suspected parabilitists. The EU has been building a big para-research center (PPU), supported especially by the French and they seem to be making a lot of progress there. He tells the PM that should she ever need help, there would be the possibility of cooperation.

The PM thinks about Maria and Marcus. Is that what they are?

Parabilitists? She decides to find out about that and to send the results to the EU commissioner.

When Mike, Maria and Marcus reach the Dart River after those amazing days, a jet boat is waiting for them. It feels good to take the first hot bath in days in a Queenstown hotel. Afterwards, they congratulate each other in a first class restaurant. What they don't notice is somebody changing their wine glasses, and not out of courtesy, but for their fingerprints.

Two days later the PM knows for sure. Marcus is the "dead" telekinetic the European Commissioner is looking for. In addition, Maria is a paraseer (whatever that means). The PM thinks about this for hours. SR Inc., led by Maria and Marcus, has only done good for NZ. She can't believe the horror stories that the EU president told. On the contrary, she understands one more detail about Maria and Marcus' situation: it's impossible to get out into the open with those parabilities because you would be hunted like a monster. She decides to continue observing SR Inc. but in her letter to Dirkman she writes: "Fingerprints do not correspond to any known person in NZ."

Without knowing it, SR Inc., and Maria and Marcus, now have one more ally: the Prime Minister of NZ. She's the only one who knows about them because she never releases any of the information from her enquiries to her colleagues in the government. It will be quite a challenge to make use of that knowledge and its political potential.

3 Barry

February 2011

It's the day after the discovery of Lena's parability. The family is enjoying a pleasant breakfast in the winter garden. Yesterday's beautiful weather has turned into more typical weather for Great Barrier Island: a gray sky with some blue spaces in it. It's very windy today. Some low rags of fog race by above them. Big breakers roll in to the beach. Maria and Marcus congratulate each other for having built the winter garden. It allows them to be inside and still have a great view of the coast.

"What are your plans," asks Maria.

"I'm going to Auckland to meet with Barry. Remember the trip to Tonga we planned a couple of years ago? I'll use it as an excuse to get a bit of insight into him."

Maria nods. "Be careful! If he realizes what's going on, we may end up with another person who knows too much."

When Marcus enters Barry's little travel agency in the early afternoon, Barry gets up and congratulates Marcus on the huge success of the rescue operation. "Good work yesterday, mate! How did you manage to find all the people in there? Is it really that car that does it?"

"I guess you could say that, but there's also a certain amount of intuition that adds to the technique. As a man of science, I really shouldn't believe in that stuff, right? All that supernatural stuff you hear about, that's all just gibberish, isn't it?"

"Well, I wouldn't go that far. There're so many amazing things going on out there, things that you just can't explain."

"Have you personally experienced anything like this," Marcus asks.

Barry hesitates then to his relief another customer comes in. Marcus knows that he won't get any further on that topic today. He asks for some material on Tonga and Barry suggests the following: "There's a little beach resort in Vava'u in the northern island group. An Austrian built it actually. I believe he was the Austrian Consul in

Auckland. Now it belongs to a German, Dieter Eyck, and his Tongan wife. The resort is small and nice, great food, really good scuba diving. You should definitely check it out.” Marcus will consider that. He thanks Barry and leaves.

From the travel agency, Marcus goes to the SR Inc. offices to talk to Robert, the manager. “Robert, I need someone I can trust 100%. He would have to observe someone for me. Whatever this person finds out, and however spectacular this may be, he would only be allowed to give the information to me and only me.”

Robert would like to have further details, but he realizes that Marcus doesn’t want to tell him more. “Well, how about Paul Warren? He can be trusted, plus, he was rescued in the Great Accident. For some reason, you didn’t let me fire him a year ago.”

Marcus remembers, ‘Yes, that was when he had to go to court because of that incident in a bar. Paul saved that guy from getting beaten up, but he hurt some people in the process.’ Marcus has never held this behavior against him.

Robert interrupts Marcus’ thoughts by calling Paul and telling him to come over.

When Paul arrives, Marcus asks him to watch Barry and his shop very carefully but very discretely. He also tells him to expect some surprises and to keep quiet about whatever he sees. Paul is to call Marcus immediately if anything extraordinary happens.

Before he can go back to Great Barrier Island, Marcus has a few more things to take care of. He buys some musical tickets for the Aotea Center, picks up a couple of books for Maria at the university library, and meets Aroha for coffee. Aroha is a young woman full of riddles he met years ago shortly after the death of her boyfriend. She was desperate back then and Marcus was able to help ease her a little.

Just when he is about to go back, his mobile phone starts to ring. Very much to his surprise, it’s Paul. “I don’t really know what to think of all this, but something happened. That’s why I called you right away.”

Paul sounds irritated. Marcus asks him, “Are you near Barry’s office?”

“You could say that,” says Paul with a strange giggle in his voice.

“O.K., lets meet in the Bronze Goat on Ponsonby Road in fifteen minutes.”

“Sounds good,” Paul replies.

Marcus calls Maria to tell her that he will be late. He asks Aroha to forgive him and invites her over to his house on Great Barrier Island. “Promise that you’ll come. The next time you miss an invitation, I’ll really be angry with you.”

“I’ll make it eventually,” she answers.

They hug goodbye and Aroha follows Marcus with her eyes when he leaves. She plays with the medallion around her neck, an old whittling she calls the “Mindcaller.” She would never leave the house without it. Aroha really likes Marcus but something about him is strange; for some reason it has something to do with the Mindcaller.

The Bronze Goat is packed as usual. It takes them a while to find a quiet spot. Both the bouillabaisse and the white wine are delicious.

“Well, out with it!” Marcus insists.

Paul thinks a moment. “It was around 3 p.m. and I was watching the travel agency from the bar across the street. I had this script in front of me. That made me look like a student and gave me a good reason to sit there for a long time. I tipped the waitress and she knew that I wanted my peace. At first nothing happened, then this gorgeous Chinese girl entered the travel agency. She must have been in there for at least thirty minutes so I decided to have a look. The door was open but the front room was empty. There’s a door leading to another room. I tried to look inside. It’s a tiny little room. No windows, a sink in the corner and a huge bed. And there they were, Barry and the girl, stark naked! Well, she still had her high heels on. Of course, they were doing it. They were completely into it. There were some interesting positions, and they have nice bodies. I’ve seen shaved women before, but a shaved man? Nope.”

Marcus interrupts, “Paul I understand this turned you on, but did you really call me to tell me that?”

Paul laughs. “Just wait a minute, let me finish. I couldn’t help watching. Those guys were insatiable. After a while, I decided to go back into the bar. It took a little while for her to come out. All of a sudden, the waitress seemed to be interested in me. She probably thought I was some kind of detective. She told me that all kinds of

different girls walk in and out of there. They usually disappear for an hour or so and then come out a bit disheveled. And you won't believe this: the longer she talked, the more interested she got and I was still horny from watching them go at it on the bed. So, one thing led to another and I'm meeting her at ten." He smiles and lifts his hands to keep Marcus from interrupting him again.

"So to keep a long story short, the first thing I found out about Barry: he's apparently really into women. But second, and more importantly, Barry locked the door of the shop at 6 p.m. from the inside. Understand? From the inside. And he never came out. It got darker and darker but nobody turned on the lights in there. Doesn't he ever get hungry? So I decided to go there again. Must've been around 7:30 or so. I rang the doorbell, I knocked, no reaction. Funny, I thought. It was really easy to get in there. There's nothing there to steal besides something in the safe maybe. Unless you really care for travel brochures."

"You broke in?" Marcus is stunned.

"Well, let's say I walked through the door because I was worried about Barry. Could have been possible that, you know, he overdid it or something. But that's not what happened. He was simply not there anymore. And that's why I called you. I was standing in the middle of the empty office and then you asked me if I was near it. That was kind of funny. Don't you agree? It's really strange; what happened to him? He locked himself in from the inside and there's no other way out of that shack. And I swear to God, he never left through the front door. He must've evaporated. Or do you have an explanation for that?"

Marcus looks at his watch. "No, I don't have any explanation for that. I'll have to think about it. Thank you. I'll definitely need your help again, all right? And now go meet your waitress. And make sure to give her a good time. But I warn you, don't say a word to anyone."

"All right, you don't believe me, do you?"

Marcus shrugs his shoulders. "Would you believe me if I told you that?"

"You're right. It would make me think too."

Back on Great Barrier Island, Marcus gives Maria the news. It doesn't take long and they agree on three possible explanations for what happened. First and most likely, Paul didn't see Barry leave the shop. He was a bit distracted by the waitress. Second, it's possible that there is another exit, maybe some kind of a secret exit. Third, Barry has some sort of parability, as Lena suggested. Is it possible that he can walk through walls? After all, Marcus can reach through walls. Can Barry make himself invisible? Does he use some kind of hypnosis to make people do things? Can he make himself incredibly small and leave through small openings? There are many possibilities, one more incredible than the other, and what do they really know about parapsychological phenomena?

Through SR Inc., it's easy for Marcus to install a small camera aimed at Barry's travel agency. They decide to watch Barry for seventy-two hours straight. The camera takes one shot per second; that way, seventy-two hours can be watched in three. Three days later, Maria and Marcus are eager to watch the video. Nothing much happened on the first day; Barry comes and goes. In the evening, he locks the shop and drives away. Day two is so unbelievable that they have to rewind the tape several times before they can believe what they are seeing. There is no doubt: Barry, who locked the office the night before from the outside, is all of a sudden back inside the next morning and unlocks it from the inside. Otherwise, the day is spectacular in a different way. Two girls visit Barry and spend more time with him than a regular customer would. At the end of the day, he again locks the shop from the inside. On the third day, he comes in from the outside again. That's the day when Maria and Lena are also visible on the video as they show up in the travel agency, using the Tonga excuse again.

They see how Maria buys a travel guide. She wants to pay with a 100 dollar note, hoping that Barry wouldn't be able to change it. As a matter of fact, he can't. He leaves the shop to get some change. That leaves Maria some time to look at the front and back rooms. She tells Lena to shout, "Mama, can we go now?" if Barry comes back early. Lena enjoys the little game. In the end, the visit brings results in two further pieces of evidence: a second exit does not exist, unless it's very well hidden, and, Lena is sure, Barry glows. He

glows a lot. The rest of the video is not very interesting, partly due to the fact that there are no further sexual encounters.

Maria is puzzled. "Somehow, I have the strange feeling that Barry has some kind of double. It was his double in the office on the second day. This "doppelganger" is apparently able to walk through walls or something like that, and he seems to be very interested in the ladies, unlike the normal Barry.

They're not sure if this doppelganger idea will lead to anything. With everything that has happened so far, it would definitely make sense though.

To get some further insight Marcus invites Barry over to Great Barrier Island the coming Sunday. He is surprised to hear that Maria is not too happy about that. "Do you have something against Barry," asks Marcus

"No, but as long as we don't know what it is that he can do, I find him a bit spooky."

Barry insists on coming with his own car, taking the ferry to Whangaparapara, and driving the rest of the way. "I've never been there. I'll enjoy the two hours on the boat and then I'll have the chance to cross the island and get to know it," he explains.

Lena is excited. Barry is coming! She even paints a Paua shell as a welcome gift for Barry. Marcus wonders about Lena's affection for Barry. Maria has an explanation for that: "I think we'll have to be careful. So far, Lena has only had positive experiences with parabilistis. Everyone has been nice and friendly with her. That's why she must think that everyone who glows is also a friend. She doesn't know yet that there are also evil paras out there. But we know that they exist. And we also know that we don't know where Barry belongs in this. That's why I'm not too crazy about Barry coming over here.

Barry is in a good mood when he arrives in the late morning with the car they have already seen in the video. Maria and Marcus give him a warm welcome. Lena is excited too and runs toward him to give him her gift but suddenly she stops dead and stares at Barry.

"Go on Lena, give Barry your present." Encourages Maria.

But Lena is still unsure.

"Don't be scared, Lena. It's just our friend Barry."

Finally, Lena comes closer and gives Barry the painted shell. All this must seem very strange to Barry. Lena takes Marcus' hand and pulls him aside. When she's sure that no one else can hear, she whispers, "Daddy, this is Barry, but something's wrong. He isn't glowing today."

Marcus takes the first opportunity to tell Maria what Lena said. Maria knows what he's thinking: doppelganger?

Like every visitor before him, the house and grounds impress Barry. He is a nice guy to have around. He is a good listener, asks interesting questions, and has a dry sense of humor. At first Lena watches him with a bit of mistrust, but his jokes and the little gifts he keeps "finding" in his pockets win her trust little by little. This guy must've been all over the world! He knows how to tell stories and adds in a little melancholy once in a while. When they ask him if he has a girlfriend, he dodges the question. "You know, there're so many young women out there and I'm attracted to so many of them, and I hope vice versa, that it's really hard to pick the right one. I know. I'm already thirty-five years old and it's about time to make up my mind. But there are reasons that I'd rather not get into that keep me from getting too attached. He notices that Maria and Marcus get a bit too interested and stops there. They know that it doesn't make sense to press him further.

The weather is fine so they decide to climb Hirakimata, the "highest" mountain on the island at 2,038 ft low.

It's one of the most beautiful hikes on the island. They start on the gravel road on the eastern side of the island, then cross a gorge on a wooden pathway until they reach a slowly rising grassy slope sprinkled with Kauri trees. Later they enter a thick rainforest. The paths are clear but always wet. Maria and Marcus give a little lecture about the types of animals found here. When they mention the kiore, the Polynesian rat, three of the little marsupials come out of the brush and sit down right in front of them before running away at the last moment. When they describe the Tui,¹³ two of them burst out of the brush and lead them for a short part of their walk. Again when

¹³ The Tui is a typical NZ bird with black feathers, a white collar, and a very characteristic song.

they talk about the Pukeko,¹⁴ several of those fellas appear from the woods.

Barry can't believe these "coincidences." Lena, Maria and Marcus know that Stephan and his animal activator skills lie behind them. Marcus knows that he should slow Stephan down. He uses one of his pseudohands to give him a light, but firm, smack on the butt. Stephan understands what that was for. He gives Marcus a reproachful look: 'They always spoil my fun'.

When they reach the steeper part of the way, they come across a swampy meadow. In the middle grows a Manuka¹⁵ tree, now in full bloom. Barry wants to break off a branch and plunges into the swamp. Several people have been hurt sinking into the swamp. Before Marcus can warn him, he realizes that Barry hardly sinks in at all. He can't believe his eyes. It's as if Barry has the weight of a child. He tries to divert Stephan and Lena's attention away from Barry. It wouldn't be good, and might be dangerous to confront them with a strange phenomenon like that. Maria has also noticed that something strange is going on.

The rest of the trip is not extraordinary. They walk and the children play. Mt. Hobson, as it's known in English, offers a great view of the island. It's a bit disappointing, though, that a wooden platform and fences have been built instead of leaving the wilderness unspoiled.

Back at the house the kids continue their games. The adults sit down to talk. Marcus wants to know for sure now. "There's something I have to tell you Barry. We're a group of people who are very open to and interested in supernatural phenomena. So I'll just ask you straight. How about you? You must be open minded too since you seem to have supernatural skills yourself." They can feel the tension building in Barry.

Marcus continues, "When you got us that branch out of the swamp, thanks by the way, you sunk in like you only weigh twenty

¹⁴ The Pukeko is a dark bird with a red beak and forehead, and white feathers on the underside of its tail. It is the size of a chicken and can run very fast but also flies well.

¹⁵ The Manuka tree is also called the "tea tree." It has little white and pinkish flowers. Even though a tree, it looks more like a bush.

kg. People have died doing just what you did. But you just walked around in there almost weightlessly. Please explain to us how you did that. In return, we can tell you some of the things we can do.

Barry is stunned. "You already know too much. I can't let anyone know those things. I'm no threat to anyone, but if the world finds out about it, they will treat me like a monster. That's why I don't have a fiancée yet, you understand?"

"Barry, we do understand. We know about those things. Please don't consider us enemies. We're of the same ilk..."

Barry interrupts him, "I think I should leave now."

There's no stopping Barry. Before he goes, he turns around one more time. "Thanks for the beautiful day. I'll need to think about all this for a while. I believe you are my friends, but how about the rest of the world?" Then he is off.

"There's a storm coming," Marcus shouts after him, "Drive to Port Fitzroy in case there is no ferry! There's a big cargo ship that'll take you to Auckland no matter what the weather is." Maria and Marcus watch him go. They shrug and go back inside. They turn the radio on to get the latest news about the weather situation.

It's getting worse and worse. There's heavy rain all over the island, the wind has turned into a storm, and there are no ferries, of course. Trees are falling, and driving on the roads has become extremely dangerous. Commercial traffic has been stopped completely.

Maria looks at Marcus, "I think you should go after Barry. You could still reach him in time and keep him from going to Port Fitzroy because that wouldn't make sense. Make him come back here and spend the night."

Marcus agrees and leaves in the four-wheel drive, which is strong enough to face the complications of the storm. Nevertheless, the drive becomes an adventure: wild creeks flow down the dirt road, and trees fall here and there. Marcus knows that they could block the road or even damage his car. Even though it's still afternoon, it's already as dark as late evening. He drives quickly but safely.

After driving around a long curve, he sees a horror scene: a huge tree has fallen on Barry's car. There is smoke everywhere. Marcus drives as close as possible, jumps out of the car and runs to Barry's car. It is almost flat. No one could have survived. When he gets a

look through the broken window Marcus can't see anything: no body, no blood, no Barry, and only Lena's Paua shell on the rider's seat. Where the hell is Barry? The doors are so deformed that he cannot open them. Did Barry manage to jump out in time? But the doors are still locked. So that's not possible. Where is he?

The smell of gasoline and smoke brings Marcus back to reality. He has just enough time to jump back a little before the wreck bursts into flames. The storm has become dramatic. Marcus' brain works like crazy. Where can he be? Was he really able to escape? He has to be sure.

It only takes a couple of minutes and Marcus is drenched to the bone. Trees keep falling down around him. The wind almost throws him down but he won't give up until he knows whether Barry is alive or not.

When he's back at the house, two glasses of white wine help him to relax. Barry must either have left his car to find shelter or somehow managed to disappear like he did in his travel agency.

On the next day the storm abates. Maria and Marcus use every connection they have to find out what happened to Barry. No result. Barry has certainly not left the island, but didn't spend the night either.

If only Marcus had asked Paul to observe Barry's office in Auckland, he would've saved himself a lot of trouble. However, the camera filmed Barry entering his office on Monday morning at the normal time. There is absolutely no rational explanation how he could've gotten there.

When Maria and Marcus hear about that later, they are finally sure that they are confronted with an unknown phenomenon: Barry must either have one or more doppelgangers, which don't glow and weigh very little or Barry has parabilities that allow him to teleport¹⁶. This is very unlikely and would neither explain the not glowing nor the not sinking.

Maria and Marcus get more and more interested. They decide to observe both Barry's office and his apartment. Maria is to take a

¹⁶ Teleportation: the ability to change locations by sheer will.

position at the bar across the street from the travel agency. Marcus will watch the apartment.

They start the following day, Tuesday. Marcus uses his pseudohands to rake through Barry's apartment until he finds him asleep in his bed. For hours Barry doesn't move. He seems to be comatose or dead. Marcus is a little worried and starts to touch Barry's chest with his pseudohands. He can feel regular breathing and a regular heartbeat. However, he doesn't check Barry's temperature. If he did that, he would notice it was forty degrees. That would probably have helped him solve the puzzle much earlier. Marcus has no reason to worry about Barry, sleeping like a baby when other people are already having lunch.

Meanwhile, Maria sees Barry enter his office from the outside and observes him taking care of some business inside (remember, she can see through walls). At noon (while the "Barry at home" still sleeps) a petit young Indian girl with a package enters Barry's office. Maria is not surprised at first but she's eager to see the further development. Barry welcomes the girl in a very familiar manner. Apparently this is not the first time she's delivered food to him. She is obviously very happy that Barry greets her with more than just a kiss on the cheek. They get into a dialogue during which Barry repeatedly makes her laugh. She has a seductive look on her face. Barry keeps touching her here and there trying to convince her of something. After a while, Maria knows that Barry was trying to invite her to lunch somewhere near the travel agency.

'It's a shame that I can see but not hear everything,' she thinks. Her parabilities are limited to the visual sphere. Nevertheless, she can comprehend what's going on: Barry manages to convince the girl to go out with him. He tells her that he has wanted to spend time with her for weeks and that there's nothing wrong with that. On the other hand, the girl admits that she has had similar thoughts about Barry. Maria sees the girl take her mobile and call what Maria thinks can only be her boss. She probably tells him about some kind of an emergency. At the same time, they take the food and leave, probably to Barry's apartment. Now it's getting exciting; there's another Barry sleeping in Barry's bed. She thinks, 'A Ménage à trois with two Barrys?'

Maria is a bit disappointed when Barry and his friend go in a different direction than to his house at first. The girl unlocks the door of a house about two down from the travel agency. 'So they're going to her place,' Maria thinks. From the size and the furniture, the girl probably lives there with her parents. The girl sets the table. They sit down and start eating. The whole thing is getting more and more intimate. Barry keeps bending over and kissing her on her cheek, trying to get a look inside her wide-necked blouse. She plays the shy one and tries to cover the neckline with her hands. She looks at Barry reproachfully but wouldn't even think of buttoning the blouse up. There is heavy flirting going on. Maria watches them from a park bench. First she's amused by it; later, a little bit of sadness and envy mix in: wasn't it like that between her and Marcus about seven years ago? And even though they still get along fine and the sex is still good, they have somehow lost that kind of excitement. But that's what always happens in a marriage. If you're lucky, you grow together over the years and share the best moments of your life. That should be enough, shouldn't it? But still, she misses the excitement of the early days when everything was so lively, thrilling, and rosy. 'The chase is better than the kill,' she thinks. 'If only this thrill could go on forever.'

She concentrates on Barry and Rita again. Their mating ritual continues. Maria feels a bit of a contact high and her lust awakes. They use Indian flatbread to wrap up the other food and feed each other the scrumptious morsels. In doing so, Barry once spills a little bit of sauce on Rita's blouse. Maria is not sure if he did that on purpose or not. Rita is angry for a moment but then she takes off her blouse and Barry is more than happy to help her with it. They go over to the sink to wash the spot out but then change their minds. Barry is now right behind her. Rita just stands there with her smooth coffee brown body and only thin straps of her white bra over her perfect back. Having already taken her sandals off, she is left wearing only a short, light miniskirt. Rita looks sensational and Barry doesn't hesitate...he hugs her from behind, kisses her neck and caresses her face. Rita sighs, "Barry, wonderful Barry." But he closes her mouth with his. Then he starts to open her bra and pull her miniskirt down. Rita lovingly runs her fingers through his hair. Barry gets down on his knees in front of Rita who's only wearing her

slip. The slip must go too. Barry rolls it down her thighs and Rita steps out of it. Barry gets up again and starts to kiss her heatedly. Rita hugs him, returns his kisses, and for minutes their mouths only separate for breathing.

Rita pushes Barry back, takes his shirt off, goes down on her knees, pulls his trousers down, and starts to give him a lust lecture. Barry is beginning to lose control. Suddenly, Rita throws herself on the sofa, full of expectations, her legs apart with one leg over the arm of the sofa. Maria is very excited too. Barry takes a step toward Rita and is ready to enter her. Rita can't help smiling as Barry goes down on his knees again and buries his face between her open thighs at the place where her coffee skin suddenly turns pink.

Rita squirms in ecstasy. She repeatedly takes Barry's head to push it tighter against her loins. She moans with lust. Suddenly Barry pulls his head back and lifts himself just enough to glide on top of her. He lifts her hips and they both are lost in a world of desire.

Maria is rotating inside. It's been a long time since she last used her parabilities to indulge herself in other people's pleasures, but this time there's no need to feel guilty. She and Marcus have agreed on this procedure. And who could've known that...? She knows that tonight she will welcome Marcus when he comes out of the shower. She also knows what she has just seen will be a great inspiration.

Barry and Rita are still kissing and hugging. Suddenly, Rita jumps up. She rushes to the window and starts gesticulating madly. Someone's coming. It's probably her parents coming home early. How will Rita explain the situation? Barry remains quiet. After surprising Rita with something he says, he disappears into the next room.

For Maria the situation is getting complicated. She has to switch back and forth between the two rooms. She can see how they both get dressed in a hurry and how Rita tries to hide the remains of the lunch for two. The apartment door opens and an older man, apparently Rita's father, comes in. He is surprised to see Rita at home. He wants to enter the room where Barry is. Rita tries to stop him. But after a slight delay, her father opens the door to the other room and Rita follows him inside. Nothing happens. The room seems to be empty. Rita notices that Barry is neither under the bed

nor in the armoire. The window is open but they are on the second floor and she knows that there's no way down. This guy must've disappeared.

Maria is angry with herself. She let herself get carried away and neglected to keep a closer eye on Barry. This would've been the chance to finally discover how he manages to disappear.

At this moment her mobile rings. It takes her a while to come back to her senses. It's Marcus. "Hi Maria. Barry just woke up. I think he's getting ready for the office. How's your Barry?"

"My Barry' disappeared into nowhere a couple of minutes ago. Man, the things I have to tell you! Let's stop the observation for now. There's nothing to observe here anymore."

Marcus agrees, "Yes, I'll call Inge to tell her to bring Lena over here. That way, we'll know if my Barry is the one that glows. Then we can stop the observation. Let's meet by the Moller in about an hour and fly back home, O.K.?"

"That's alright with me. There's only one little thing I have to take care of. See you later, darling."

Lena arrives in time to see Marcus' Barry leave the house. She is certain that this Barry glows. He is not the one who was on Great Barrier Island.

Until late at night, Maria and Marcus try to analyze the whole Barry story. It's still something of a riddle to them. After today, they are certain that there are at least two Barrys. One of them is a para. But for some reason, it's the other one who keeps disappearing, who doesn't sink into soft ground, etc. How does all this fit together? Maria tells Marcus every detail about Barry and Rita and while she talks, they start to touch and stroke each other. More and more they enjoy their bodies and forget about Barry. That may be one of the reasons why they overlook one important detail that could've helped them to solve the puzzle. Maria and Marcus also talk a lot about Lena's parability. Is she the same type of parascout as Klaus Baumgartner was back in the early days in Brussels? They'll have to do certain tests with Lena in SR Inc.'s research department. When they get the results a couple of days later, they find them hard to believe. Lena is a parascout. She is also

a bit of an empath (she can detect strong feelings within others at a short distance). In addition, she probably has other parabilities that are presently not known of.

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4 Para research

End of February 2011

Barry's parabilities remain a riddle. Marcus keeps him under observation. He decides to confront him one more time unless there are any new developments.

Marcus spends more time in the SR Inc. offices now. Even though they are repeatedly called in emergency situations, Maria and Marcus decide not to be present unless it's absolutely necessary. They tell SR Inc.'s manager Robert to call them in such cases.

For years Marcus has been busy in the research department with the most intriguing questions of parapsychology:

Problem 1: Why are some people paraskilled while the majority isn't? Are the reasons genetic, developmental, or a combination of the two? If such a skill is genetically inherited, will it be possible to manipulate the gene pool of some people and create new parabilitists? In addition, if it's really in the genes, then isn't it really those without parabilities who lack something?

Problem 2: How can you approach questions like that? Does it make sense to analyze those parabilities in the most detailed way in order to find similarities? In that case, it would be important to collect as many different kinds of parabilities as possible as a basis for research. All the parabilitists that used to work for the PPU in Brussels have disappeared, and have yet to be found. The news about Lena's parascout skills opens new doors. After all, she's also been able to identify Barry as a parabilitist. On the other hand, it's exactly Barry's case that shows how scared parabilitists are about being recognized as such.

Problem 3: How would it be possible to find parabilitists without parascouts? The answer probably lies in statistics, in knowledge management, and in "data mining." It would be necessary to take individual events that are not usually noticed and to construct a pattern for them. Large information sources like the Internet seem to be ideal hunting grounds. Marcus has good reason to fear that a

systematic analysis of the media reports on SR Inc. would be so suspicious that they would be put under scrutiny and possibly identified.

Problem 4: Why is it impossible to make parabilities visible? Why are there people like Lena (or one time PPU Chief Baumgartner) who can identify parabilitists, but no technical method that works in the same way? Marcus, for example, is a telekinetic and has pseudohands. Those are transparent but when he dips them into a colored fluid, they become visible by creating hollow spaces in the water. Why can't technical devices detect those pseudohands or other parabilities?

Problem 5: Why is it possible that parabilities can go beyond the basic laws of physics? Once, Marcus lifted heavy objects while standing on a scale but it failed to register any more weight. If there is a connection between spirit and matter, between human soul and animal brain (as with an animalactivator like Stephan) then why is it that this cannot be measured? Unlike gravitation, which you can measure but not interrupt, a parability cannot be measured but can be interrupted with lead and other substances. As far as known today, this is however true neither for Maria's paraseeing nor for Stephan's animalactivator skills. Generally, this leads to another and more important problem:

Problem 6: Which parabilities can be blocked, and is there a way to protect one's self from them? Is it possible to keep parabilitists from using their powers? If yes, how? Wouldn't it be much easier for society to accept parabilitists if there was some kind of protection against them? And what if there were strong parabilities that could be used against others? How is one to proceed?

Problem 7: How many and what kind of parabilities exist in the world right now? Are there more or fewer than in the past? Have there been periods in world history when parabilitists were seen as gods or, the other way around, hunted like criminals? Wouldn't it make sense to analyze world history in this way? Wouldn't it be a good start to begin with those "wonders" that most religions are

based on? Were witches really misunderstood and actually “innocent” people or were some of them really parabilistists?

Problem 8: How can parabilistists be integrated into society in a way that allows them to live life in peace? How can they use their skills for society’s benefit without society being afraid of them? It still seems necessary to hide parabilities; otherwise, society feels threatened and reacts accordingly. As long as this is the case, it will probably be necessary to develop methods that can lead to a partial loss of memory. For example, when SR Inc. saves people’s lives with the help of parabilities, they do it very discretely in order not to be detected. This makes rescues very difficult or sometimes impossible. Wouldn’t it make sense to use the full range of capabilities, and then make sure that the people rescued do not remember anything?

Problem 9: What kind of parabilities are imaginable? This spectrum could be so huge that an overview is virtually impossible. For example, there are skills like telepathy and telekinesis, which probably exist in many different forms; there are paraseeing skills like Maria and Stephan’s; there are emotiopathes like Sandra Hill, one of the disappeared members of the PPU; there are emotioactivators like Jan De Keep from the PPU, animalactivators like Stephan, and parascouts like Klaus Baumgartner and Lena. Science fiction and fantasy literature offer many additional parabilities. Characters like Superman, Spiderman, Superwoman, Batman, mutants from literature and film, and humans in old legends and fairy tales have unbelievable skills like invisibility and clairvoyance. There are also skills which so far have found little attention in literature: shrinking and enlarging objects, the ability to switch between subjective and objective time, and borderline situations of self-control and being controlled by others, as in hypnosis.

Marcus knows that a list of these potential abilities is a waste of time. Anything is possible. But of one thing he is absolutely sure: even though there may be parabilities that would allow one to look back into the past, parabilities which would allow one to influence the past would lead to paradoxes that cannot be overcome unless you believe in the existence of several parallel universes. Marcus

certainly doesn't believe in that. Parabilities that would allow one to look into the future are also unbelievable to Marcus. Not only would such a parability allow one to always know the lottery numbers and the development of the stock market, it would also lead to an inhibition and limitation of freewill because certain incidents would definitely be about to happen. As a philosophical constructivist, Marcus cannot accept such notions.

Problem 10: Are there paraskills that can be simulated in a technical way?

SR Inc.'s Research Department is mostly concerned with Problems one, three, eight and ten. The latter is mostly dealt with by a subdivision of the Information Technology Group. Later on, Marcus will regret not having taken Problem six (how you can protect yourself from parabilitists?) more seriously...

Marcus can't forget his last meeting with Aroha. As usual, they got along really well. She's the offspring of a mixed marriage between a Maori and a "Pakeha"¹⁷. On one hand Aroha is a scientist, and on the other she has, just like Marcus, experienced things that are beyond science.

Very much to his frustration, the research results do not come in as expected, so he invites Aroha over to Great Barrier Island. Both Maria and Marcus want to find out if it would be wise to let Aroha in on their secret. Maybe she would like to help them with Barry's case. They are happy to hear that Aroha (for the first time) accepts their invitation. She promises to be their guest for the coming weekend.

On a cloudy day, Marcus picks her up from the ferry. They drive through the poor harbor village. Marcus loves this place but new visitors usually experience a mix of contempt and pity. Aroha is not like that. She states that she feels whole and at home here. That touches Marcus. They make a detour to a little hut. For more than sixty years, a woman has been living there. She was one of the first settlers on Great Barrier Island and for decades made her living with a couple of chickens, a vegetable garden and whatever the sea

¹⁷ Pakeha is the Maori term for European.

provides. She is now eighty-five years old and is leaning on the porch when Marcus and Aroha arrive.

“Are you ready to accept visitors, Henriette?” calls Marcus from the car.

She nods. “Come right over here and tell me why you’re coming with a woman who’s not your wife.” Marcus laughs inside. He thinks, ‘What a strange name Henriette is for the old woman.’

Without a big hello, they enter her hut. They shake hands and look each other in the eye. Then they sit down after having moved her knitting from here and a bowl of cat food from there. The night rain has cooled everything down. A fire crackles in the stove, keeping it warm and cozy inside. There is no electricity or running water. Marcus watches Aroha and how she watches Henriette. It’s not necessary to talk a lot. Henriette looks at her as though Aroha were a long lost daughter. After a while, the old woman offers them sweet tea with a shot of something in it. Marcus feels homesick for a second; this reminds him of Austrian Jagatee¹⁸.

Henriette understands everything. It’s as if she can read their thoughts. “Marcus, stop thinking about your old home, it’s too far away. You and Maria, you are now both one of us. You belong on this island. You know that. Aroha will become a part of you. She understands me and she understands you too. She carries something old, something worthy. She carries it with reverence and pride.” As usual, Marcus is deeply impressed by Henriette. Aroha is baffled. How can this woman know about her Mindcaller, the thing that she always wears around her neck but is now hidden underneath her sweater?

There is little conversation in the hut, and no talk is necessary. They are three humans on the same mysterious level. Marcus feels guilty when he decides to bring Lena over next time to find out if Henriette ‘glows’, too.

When Aroha and Marcus leave, they have no idea how long they have stayed there. When they say goodbye, Henriette grins at Marcus almost with a sign of reproachfulness: “You’re always welcome here, Marcus, you know that. Stop by more often. You’re

¹⁸ Jagatee consists of a large amount of schnapps mixed in with some tea.

too ambitious. You know too much and you want too much too. Aroha, darling, you're a new friend for me. Come back soon."

With much on their minds, Aroha and Marcus drive to the house. Maria is waiting for them. Her instincts tell her about Aroha. She is a new friend and lets her into her heart. She knows that Aroha likes Marcus a lot. But she will never become a problem.

Stephan and Lena join them for lunch. When Lena meets Aroha, her reaction is intense. She welcomes her but is later withdrawn. Marcus wonders if her behavior has anything to do with the Barry situation. He takes Lena for a walk. Almost immediately, Lena explains that something about Aroha "glows," but not Aroha herself. It's this thing she wears around her neck.

Marcus is astonished that both Henriette and Lena were able to feel the Mindcaller. Is this one of the unidentifiable skills that Lena's test results indicated?

For the whole day everyone gets along just fine. They end up in the whirlpool. They are all naked except for the Mindcaller around Aroha's neck. She never seems to take it off. Maria wants to know more about the amulet. After hesitating and getting a nod from Marcus, Aroha tells them the short version of the strange story of the Mindcaller. She makes sure to tell them that it is only one half of the original sculpture. According to her grandmother, one day she will meet a man who will have the rest of it. They all consider it a great honor to be entrusted with this information. Aroha doesn't normally talk about the Mindcaller.

Cautiously, Maria and Marcus probe for information about the powers of the amulet. A bit insecure, Aroha answers: "It can create some sort of telepathic connection with certain types of people. It works between my grandmother and me for example. Sometimes, when I'm with people I like, it gives us the feeling we can look into the past, even to be in a completely different place. Sometimes, it's almost like you can then move around and explore that place."

Marcus is surprised. "Some sort of time travel?"

"No," Answers Aroha. "It's more like a suggestion that seems completely real. It's as if the Mindcaller has saved information about a time and a place it has experienced. Sometimes it wants to

pass this on. All this happens spontaneously. I can't control or activate the Mindcaller."

"Maybe that's because you don't have the other part?" Maria throws in. Aroha looks up in astonishment. That had never crossed her mind.

They keep talking about the Mindcaller and other unusual parapsychological phenomena, and are open about the subject as never before. Without giving details away, Maria and Marcus mention that every member of their family possesses some kind of unusual capability. Aroha listens eagerly. She asks questions sometimes, but never tries to force out information. She knows that she will become part of this group and that they will tell her more as time goes on. She's interested, but not nosy. She knows from her own experience how important discretion is in these matters.

After they all step out of the whirlpool, Lena wants to hold the Mindcaller. Aroha takes it off and puts it around Lena's neck.

With the Mindcaller around her neck, Lena's facial expressions change dramatically. Her young face turns serious and wrinkled and for just a second she looks like a very old woman. Shocked, Aroha grabs the amulet and takes it quickly off Lena's neck. She's so hectic about it that she drops it. It falls down on the stone patio. With the amulet off her neck again, Lena immediately looks young again.

Maria is worried. "Lena, what did you see when you had it around your neck?"

"Mommy, this thing is strange. I saw an old woman. She asked about her granddaughter."

Aroha looks at Lena surprised. "You saw my grandmother. You even turned into my grandmother. Actually, that face we saw for a second, that was my grandmother's face." Aroha picks up the Mindcaller. She notices that a little piece has broken off.

She shows it to Marcus. "I have to find that little piece."

They all search hard for it. It seems to be gone. After a while, Aroha stops the search. "The feeling of the Mindcaller is still the same. I guess that little piece is not that important."

They jump into the cool ocean, then take a hot shower and end up sitting down for coffee in the winter garden. Stephan has

disappeared. A couple of minutes later, he's back with the lost piece of the Mindcaller.

Maria says, "What the hell? How did you find that? Didn't we all look really hard?"

"Well, I found it in a place where no normal person would've been able to find it," Stephan replies, not without some pride. When Marcus notices Aroha's questioning look, he explains, "Little Stevie there has, well, quite unusual eyes." He doesn't want to say more and gives Stephan a look to tell him that he can say as much as he wants. But Stephan prefers to keep his secret.

When Stephan wants to give the piece back to Aroha, Marcus intervenes. "You mind if I keep that for a while, Aroha? I'd like to have our research department look at it." Aroha hesitates. She's not sure if something "holy" from all the way back should be examined with methods of modern technology. She's afraid that something could be lost or destroyed. She goes deep into herself but when she doesn't feel a warning she finally agrees.

When they say goodbye that evening, they all know that Aroha is now one of them. Maria says, "Aroha, you know that from now on you're as welcome in this house as a sister. You can come here any time and you're always welcome to stay, whether we're here or not. It'll always be good to see you."

Aroha thanks them. She is moved by their generosity. They separate full of joy. It's strange somehow. She knows she has found new friends today. She also feels that the intuitive connection she has always felt with Marcus has become deeper and now extends through his whole family.

Long into the evening, Maria and Marcus discuss why they were able to talk so freely with Aroha without holding anything back. They know they were right in doing so. They also think about Lena's statement: how Aroha hardly glows without the Mindcaller, but how she glows intensively when she wears it around her neck. According to Lena, it didn't glow at all when it was lying on the ground. That makes one thing clear: as they noticed by Lena's reaction, there must be some sort of symbiosis between the amulet and Aroha and

between it and other people. Marcus can't wait to get the test results from the research department.

Accidentally, Marcus receives two unusual reports at once: one about the Mindcaller and one about Barry.

From its basic substance, the Mindcaller is a semi-precious stone originating from volcanic areas and only found at great depths under the Earth. One of NZ's many volcanic eruptions is likely to have brought it to the surface. It must have been worked into an amulet thousands of years ago, long before the Maoris settled in NZ. The chemical analysis is even more surprising: the Mindcaller contains a high proportion of Silatraviate, a very rare chemical compound. It's a salt of Silatravine acid, which so far has barely been analyzed.

Marcus continues reading the report, which is full of special terminology:

"Sila" indicates that silicon atoms have replaced carbon atoms inside the travin. Silatraviate is one variety of the silatranes related to travertines. Silatrane is an unsystematic indication for derivatives of 2,8,9-Trioxa-5-aza-1-silabicyclo[3,3,3]. They have a wide range of toxic qualities in connection with silicon substitutes. Aryl derivatives (R1=Aryl) have an LD50 of 0.1 to 10 mg.kg-1 and are twice as poisonous as strychnine or prosic acid. 4-Chlorophenyl-Silatrane is used as rat poison. Ethoxy-Silatran, which is not poisonous, is used as a hair-restorer. Silitranes can be produced from Trialkoxysilans and Triethanolamin. The qualities of other variations have not been analyzed yet. Travertine, sometimes called Kalktuff, is usually extracted from cold springs. Füchtbauer calls it "Sinterkalk." Travertine is often used as a synonym. However, it originates in warm springs, lakes, ponds and swamps from volcanic groundwater.

What follows are detailed references, and, finally, a summary that Marcus can understand: Silatraviate is rare and quite unresearched. There are indications that it can have unusual effects on humans. It can only be found in places where volcanic eruptions or hot springs have come to the surface. Organic creatures find it difficult to break it down. The digestive systems of some creatures will reject it, while others accumulate it.

The report closes asking dryly if further information is necessary.

Marcus shows the report to Maria. They look at each other for a long time. "We're thinking the same thing." Maria finally says, "It's likely that silatraviate is behind the Mindcaller's unusual qualities. It may even be the reason for all of our parabilities. We have to find out about that."

Marcus nods. Without hesitation, he calls the research department and tells them to concentrate entirely on the matter. The emphasis lies on five important factors:

- (1) Where in the world can Silatraviate be found?
- (2) What kind of creatures accumulate silatraviate?
- (3) Can silatraviate be produced synthetically?
- (4) What kinds of effects does silatraviate have on humans?
- (5) Are there any historic reports or folklore in connection with silatraviate?

Maria and Marcus both feel that further knowledge about silatraviate could become the breakthrough in researching supernatural phenomena. It's not very likely though, and new developments almost cause them to forget about the matter.

It hits them right away when they read the report about Barry. His life seems to have been very regular over the past few years. Some details about his past are very surprising though.

Barry was born in Rotorua on the North Island. This place is commonly called New Zealand's Yellowstone because of the geysers that make it famous. He grew up in a simple family under normal conditions. He first worked as a lifeguard at one of the pools of this tourist town. That explains his muscular body which helped him collect all the "experiences" with young women.

It doesn't explain, though, how Barry was able to turn into a super detective ten years ago. Apparently, he solved the case of the biggest bank robbery in New Zealand's history, which made him a multimillionaire overnight. The report is rather vague in that matter. Apparently, even though they knew the numbers of the banknotes and details about the other valuables stolen, they were not able to solve the case at first. However, those valuables never appeared until the insurance company offered a huge reward. Several groups were suspected. However, it remains a riddle how Barry was able to infiltrate the right group, obtain evidence, and hand it over to the

police. Afterwards, it was easy for them to organize a raid and catch the criminals with the loot in hand. Most interesting is that Barry's name has not been added to the official documents. Thus, the police got all the credit and officially the reward was donated to charity. Apparently, Barry insisted on this arrangement in order to be safe from revenge.

He started his travel agency in Auckland and has since lived a modest life. Only occasionally has he left the country under a false name with his officially forged passport. These trips were far from modest though. He threw money around and partied like a rock star.

The rest of the report is not very spectacular. It explains how difficult it was to get the above information. Maria and Marcus know this information was included to justify the huge costs of the report. In fact, they had to bribe many people to get the information; that's where most of the money went. At first, the authorities only wanted to give them the official version of the case but little by little, Barry came into the picture.

For Maria and Marcus, the report adds up to what they already know; they can now understand his sophisticated manner that doesn't quite correspond to his routine as a travel agent. They know that Barry and his doppelganger must have used parabilities to solve the robbery case, and is one more reason why he didn't want to talk about it the other day.

Marcus smells success. "Tomorrow morning I'll confront him with what we know now. He'll have to tell us the truth then. He won't risk the possibility that we'll give away what we know."

When Marcus enters the travel agency the next morning, Barry welcomes him in his usual friendly way. Barry turns pale when Marcus confronts him with what they know.

"Don't be scared, Barry," Marcus calms him. "We'll keep it a secret. We're a group of "freaks" like you. We only want to expand. This is necessary to protect ourselves from unwanted factors of the environment. You tell us about your parabilities and we'll tell you about ours. Then let's work together and help each other wherever we can."

It takes Barry a while to get over the shock. "Marcus, I don't really doubt your intentions. It's not that I've never wanted to find

people like myself, just give me some time to think. Take my word for it. I'll be back here at ten a.m. tomorrow and then we'll talk."

After a while, Marcus accepts his offer. "All right then. But keep your word." Barry repeats his promise. When Marcus bids him farewell, he misses a smirk on Barry's face.

Marcus feels fairly sure about the whole thing. He orders especially intense surveillance, just in case Barry decides to make tracks.

Maria is not convinced. "Do you really think he'll be there tomorrow?"

"Yes, I think he'll keep his promise."

5 Barry on the Run

February/March 2011

Marcus makes sure to be a couple minutes late. He doesn't want to seem too interested. Barry welcomes him. He serves Marcus coffee and is eager to hear what he has to say. Marcus remains silent.

After a while Barry gives in and starts to talk. "So you know that it was me who solved that robbery, right?"

"Right."

"You also know what that meant to me?"

"I think so. It was a lot of money, that's for certain. Apart from your luxury travels that you made with those attractive female companions, you must still have most of it." Barry shrugs nervously. "Second, I know that you got yourself into danger. If the criminals knew that you were behind the whole thing, you'd probably be dead by now. But I say again, don't be scared. Our research department was extremely discrete. By the way, I have to complement you. It was an accident that led us to your trail. You're completely safe. Whatever we decide on today, there will be no blackmail. We will only use our knowledge to convince you to become one of us."

"Who is 'us'?"

"Us," Marcus laughs, "is actually just me and my wife Maria. You know her. Our kids will also soon become part of the picture. They have special parabilities, as we call them, too. There's another young woman in Auckland who's about to join us as well, and a couple of people in Europe that we're after."

"So what's your plan?"

"We have used tricks like yours to make a lot of money, but in fact we want to use our abilities to the betterment of humanity. Naturally, we would also like to live in peace. All this success that we've had with SR Inc., how do you think we accomplished that?"

Barry nods.

Marcus continues, "There're only two possibilities for a minority like us: either you hide so well that you can't be found, which means hiding better than you have, or your group is so strong that you can face any kind of adversity. That's what we're driving at. I want a

group that works for humanity. That people can accept as such. That's tough, eh? So it's either that or a group that's so powerful that they will simply have to accept it."

Barry is fascinated. He has never thought about this second possibility. Here, all of a sudden, is a group that he sympathizes with and wants to win him over to accomplish that possibility. He knows he could help them but there is another thing that fascinates him even more. "Did you just say that you used tricks like mine? Do you know how I did it?"

"Not exactly," Marcus admits, "but it's obvious that you have some kind of a double that can disappear or something.

Barry finds it hard now not to burst out laughing. 'So that's how they put it all together,' he thinks. "Marcus, before we continue, I promise that no one will ever know about this conversation. But I'll have to rely on you guys too. The things I've done and the things I'll do must never leave your group, whether we cooperate or not."

"I give you my word, Barry."

"Thanks Marcus. I trust you. Your group seems to be more idealistic than I have ever been. Here's something I wrote for you. Have a look at it, then you'll understand more. But now, excuse me for a minute."

Barry disappears into the back room. Marcus opens the envelope and reads:

Dear Marcus,

I'm not sure what we talked about before you read this. Whatever it was, please keep your promise and I'll keep mine. I'm pretty sure that you have the plan to get me into one of your operations. I have no doubts about your "noble" intentions. However, I believe you are playing a dangerous game. I don't want to have anything to do with that. My present way of life is too good to risk. I love (many) women and I love my freedom. I don't want to risk that. That's why I cannot subordinate myself to your goals. I'm sorry that I was only able to help you with your travel plans but I don't want to help you with anything else. I have to remain self-sufficient. You probably look down on me now and won't be able to understand me. In that case, I'm sorry. My decision cannot be

changed, though. All the best for the future, but we'll never meet again. Say hello to Maria and the kids.

In admiration, Barry

P.S. Wish me luck as I wish you luck. We're a tiny minority and we need luck to live a good life. Some of our ancestors were burned at the stake; never forget that.

The longer he reads the more Marcus gets scared. He rushes into the back room and is not surprised to find it empty. Barry has not broken his promise. He kept his appointment at 10 a.m. They talked, but he decided not to cooperate; he (or his doppelganger) has just disappeared. He knows that Barry's apartment has been observed as well. He's pretty sure though that this was useless.

He is right about that. For the whole evening and night, Barry was in his apartment. No one has left it. Whoever it was that Marcus has just spoken to, the facts are the apartment is either empty and Barry has left without being seen, or whoever Marcus was just talking to was not really Barry. When they break down the door two days later, they find Barry's apartment empty. Well, this is no surprise anymore. Both Barry and his doppelganger seem to have evaporated. None of the people who have left New Zealand legally in the last two days used either of Barry's passports.

Barry clearly won that round. Will they ever meet again? Intuition tells Marcus that they will. And he's looking forward to it. Barry is no enemy; he's one of them. He just doesn't know it yet.

For Barry, the situation is a little different. When Marcus confronted him with all the facts about the robbery case, Barry knew that he had to escape right away. He used his doppelganger (a definition he finds rather amusing) to fool both Marcus and the observers watching his apartment. The real Barry had long been in an airplane heading for Rio. He took his first class seat at 9:45 sharp. Very much to the surprise of the flight crew, he lowered his seat, telling them that he didn't feel well. He asked for a blanket and immediately fell into a deep sleep. Barry woke up forty-five minutes later. He seemed to be fresh and relaxed and was in a good enough mood to engage in some heavy flirting with Victoria, one of the

flight attendants. He even managed to convince her to spend the evening following their arrival with him.

Still inside the airplane, Barry reserves a beautiful apartment in the Meridian Hotel. He knows it from earlier trips. Situated in the Leme district, the hotel is close enough to the beach to see the ocean from the apartments without being bothered by the noisy morning market. The beach in Leme is not overpopulated with tourists. On one side it is bordered by the slopes of the Pao de Azucar, on the other by the Copacabana. Despite its international reputation, the water at the Copacabana is so polluted that it has lost its attractiveness. When you walk down the beach from Leme toward the Copacabana, there are lots of Brazilian beauties in string tangas and bikinis. The real hip zone doesn't start until you have walked around the military zone at Forte Copacabana and Ipanema's little beach called Arpocador. There's a reason why "Girl from Ipanema" was a hit long ago: the quality of the beach life is far better than the quality of the water.

From the airport, Barry goes directly to the hotel and has two Caipirinhas¹⁹ on the balcony before he goes to bed. He is looking forward to the next day and the evening with Victoria. He also wants to meet up with his buddy João, an old friend he hasn't seen in three years. Barry knows that his savings will be enough to guarantee him a very pleasant stay in Brazil, no matter what he does and where he does it.

The next day starts with breakfast. It brings back memories: sweet avocado mousse, fresh fruits, delicious berries and the strong Brazilian coffee he can't get enough of. Barry makes sure to add enough sugar not to be considered a wimp by the locals.

Fifty dollars cash is all Barry needs to buy himself some good beach clothes. He knows that it would be stupid to bring too much money or valuables because of the "friendly hold ups".²⁰ He walks

¹⁹ A typical Rio drink made from cachaca (Brazilian local rum), lime juice and a lot of brown sugar. Even though you can't taste the alcohol, two of these are about the limit, even for people who are used to drinking.

²⁰ Quite frequently, strangers walk up to you in Rio and hug you like an old friend but you can feel the tip of the knife on your belly. After you have given them all your money, they thank you and offer their best wishes in farewell.

down the beach from Leme to Ipanema. As usual, he enjoys the walk. The Pao de Azucar makes a great backdrop with the beautiful beach and the seemingly pristine water of Guanabara Bay. Beach hustlers and many very attractive bodies add to the scenery. Barry knows all the categories. After all, women are his main interest in life. On a weekday like this, only a few women would make potential short-time partners. Most of the attractive female bodies either belong to young mothers or to babysitters. Young mothers are not ideal for Barry's purposes. They are usually still in love with their husbands, have limited flexibility in terms of time, and are often scared of getting caught. All that makes it too complicated. Tempting babysitters are difficult cases too. Funny and easygoing, they usually have only one day off and hardly speak any English. In order to find nice female company, he rather hopes for teachers and women in international organizations. He laughs to himself. Deep down, he knows that everything will work out fine. Women look at him and he answers with gestures. The fact that women still find him attractive makes him proud.

In a restaurant in Ipanema he eats his first real Feijoada (Brazilian chili) in a long time. Afterwards, he invites two female German tourists over to his table. They speak a little English and are happy to make an interesting "discovery of the male kind." They are disappointed when they hear that Barry already has a date for the evening and doesn't want to make any further plans. He knows that Victoria will be in Rio for two whole days. Despite Barry's concern about their camera equipment and jewelry, the girls insist on going back to their hotel by themselves. He feels a bit responsible for them. He hurries back to his hotel, hangs the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door, and lies down on his bed. He knows the way Grete and Hannelore are taking.

This allows him to activate his "doppelganger" (he is still amused by the term), and follow the girls. It turns out he was right: "friendly robbers" hold up the girls. As though he has grown out of the ground, Barry appears behind the three robbers. He clears his throat and says in Portuguese, "Not them!"

The three men are scared shitless. There was no one there before. They run away without a word. Grete and Hannelore are still in

shock. They are very grateful, but also confused. Where had Barry come from?

"I told you this wasn't safe. I worried about you. In a city like this, you just don't show your money. People don't even stop at red lights at night. That's how dangerous it is here."

He takes them back to their hotel. He insists that they take their valuables off and put them into their handbags. He also insists on taking Hannelore's necklace off her neck. It hangs deeply in her cleavage. While he does it he purposely touches her breasts and one nipple. He is amused by Hannelore's reaction: she throws him a mysterious look to tell him that she doesn't mind his fondling. 'If it wasn't for Victoria...' he thinks.

They kiss goodbye like lovers. Both girls give him their addresses in Germany and insist that he visit them.

Back in his hotel room, Barry thinks about throwing their addresses away. He decides to keep Hannelore's address but throws Grete's address away.

Victoria lives up to her name. When he sees her arrive on the roof terrace of the Orthon Palace restaurant, the evening wind toying with her mane of blonde hair, he is happy to have spent some time on his own appearance. The city slowly changes into an ocean of lights. The peak of the Pao de Azucar is lit like a star in the sky. Only the Corcovado, the huge statue of Jesus, shines brighter. The tables with the guests are bathed with the mild light of bamboo tiki torches. Barry wears a white smoking jacket over a silk shirt with a wine red ascot in place of a bow tie. His self-confident face fits Victoria's proud posture.

What a combination, Barry thinks to himself. She wears a long black evening dress, which gives her slim figure away and displays her perfectly tanned skin from her shoulders to where they meet her breasts. Her shoes are really fresh: high heels with holes in their sides. Victoria knows how to use makeup. As a flight attendant at work, she had that "professional stewardess" look. Today she looks seductive but still natural. They both enjoy the evening. They talk about their likes and dislikes, their childhoods and their goals. The more they talk, the more they move closer, both literally and figuratively. Barry, who stopped counting his women at number

fifty, knows that something is emerging here that he doesn't really want. He can't get too close to a "normal" person. His doppelganger would be in the way. But something happens that night as both their language and hands touch and intertwine. Their environment finally recedes behind their strong feelings. They don't notice that the other people in the restaurant keep looking at them. They admire and envy them.

All of a sudden, a familiar voice interrupts them, "Won't you at least introduce me, your best friend in Rio?"

Barry looks up confused. He is speechless for a second. Is that really João? Barry jumps up, and embraces his old friend and then his wife, Angela. "You must sit down and join us," Barry insists.

"No, not today. We've been keeping our eye on you. The two of you are perfect the way you are," João answers. "We're on our way out anyway. But be informed, you owe me something for not calling me right away after you arrived in Rio. How long have you been here? Ahhh, whatever. We'll expect the two of you at 8 p.m. tomorrow at our house. No excuses."

Barry throws a glance at Victoria. She returns a questioning glance. "We'd love to come, and, João, I only arrived yesterday and Victoria's only here for two days. That's why I didn't call you right away."

"It wasn't nice of you, but shall we forgive them, honey?" João doesn't wait for a response from his wife. "Anyway, we'll see you two tomorrow."

When they are alone again, Barry talks about João. He's one of the biggest art dealers in Brazil. Another João, João Portinari, son of Brazil's most famous twentieth century artist, introduced them.

Victoria is even more confused than Barry after the evening. It's true, he was a particularly nice and interesting passenger and this is not the first time she has dated a "customer." Two-day layovers can be so boring. Once you know all the sights, you want to get to know the environment and the people, but there is never enough time for that. In addition, people often see flight attendants with a strange mix of adoration and shyness. She has heard sentences like "I'm sure she has a boyfriend in every city" too often. That's why she usually spends those layovers with other flight attendants. That is ok, but not very exciting. And now here is Barry! They get along

just fine. It's not he who has too much respect for her, but vice versa. He just told her nonchalantly that it was time to go back to his hotel, as though it were simply understood. To decline is out of the question.

Victoria likes Barry's suite. Everything is so simple: more talking and getting to know each other without fetishes or acrobatics. She wants to spend the night in her own bed. She doesn't want her colleagues to know. Barry takes her back in a taxi. He insists on coming with her because he wants to be sure that she gets home safely.

Victoria has no idea what Barry has planned for the next day. He told her to be ready at nine and to have hiking boots and swimwear ready. 'What a combination,' she thinks.

The next day they head for Petrópolis. The city was founded by Swiss and German immigrants in 1845. It was named after Brazilian Emperor Peter II who had his summer residence built there. It's not as hot there as in Rio and can be easily reached by highway.

They drive in a rental car from Rio along a winding highway. They go through woods of poinsettias. What an adventure! When they enter the 250,000 strong city they are surprised by its beauty. Instead of lunch they have a second breakfast in the Grand Hotel, which is situated on a lake. The city is spread out among narrow valleys divided by steep rocky cliffs. This gives it the atmosphere of a collection of several nostalgic small villages.

After the second breakfast they find it hard to leave the picturesque spot. The growing heat of the sun drives them off the terrace. They get into the car and continue to drive up the Serra dos Orgãos. After a while, Barry stops. "This is where we will hike up," he says, pointing to the 1200-meter high rocky peak. 'I'll never get up there,' Victoria thinks. It's thirty degrees and it'll take hours.'

Barry reads her mind, "Trust me."

They first walk uphill through a shadowy valley. The path gets steeper and steeper. It remains easy to hike but the sun starts to burn down on them. When Victoria makes a comment, Barry starts to laugh and nods to a place below them on their right. When Victoria

looks down, she can see a blue, glass-clear lake. "Time to cool off," Barry says. They're all by themselves. It hasn't really been necessary to bring bathing suits. The water feels great.

Victoria floats on her back. She looks up and their goal seems so much closer now. How come all of Rio isn't here, she thinks while Barry lovingly kisses and caresses her.

"Personally, I never understood why people prefer the Ipanema beach when they can have this," says Barry reading her mind again, "but I'm glad it's this way and we'd better not tell anyone."

"Do we have to go on?" asks Victoria, "It's so beautiful here."

"We'll come back here, and then we'll stay as long as we want. But I have another surprise for you further up, so dry off and put your bikini on and let's hit the trail again."

Cooled off, they continue the hike uphill. The path leads around the peak and offers a great view. Almost on top, a rock protrudes over the path. The little creek that feeds the lake falls down over the rock. It's a natural shower, which reflects a series of rainbows. Barry takes his shoes off. He puts his equipment down and steps under the water. Victoria follows him. They embrace and kiss under the waterfall. Barefoot, they run up the last sandy meters to the peak. What a great view. They can see parts of Petropolis and the sea behind it. In the other direction they can see thick forests, steep rocks and gorges. What's most surprising, though, is the hole, which is not even one meter below the peak. That's where all the water comes from. This seems to defy the laws of gravity.

On the way back, they take a long break at the lake. They behave like teenagers in love as they go back down and drive back to Rio. Even though they have to face heavy traffic on the way into the city, they have enough time to prepare for their evening with João and Angela. On their way to their house, situated in one of the most beautiful parts of the city, they also drive through very poor neighborhoods. The contrast is shocking. Walls topped by barbed wire surround João's villa. Security guards with machine guns guard the gates.

When they finally arrive at the villa, they realize that they have been invited to a large party and not the dinner they expected. The villa is living area, museum and personal gallery. Only a few of the

pieces are for sale. The party goes on both inside and outside. Servants run to and fro carrying hors d'oeuvres to the interesting mix of guests. Victoria envies Barry. He'll be able to walk in and out of here whenever he wants, and she has to leave Rio tomorrow.

One of the main topics of conversation is the big unsolved heist at the headquarters of Sterns International jewelry consortium. The firm specializes in Brazilian crystal in the form of figurines and sculptures rather than just jewelry. Some of those unique pieces were also stolen in the robbery despite the fact that they are unsellable. The police have no leads as of yet. Two weeks after the robbery, the insurance company has raised the reward from one to twenty million dollars.

Barry can't help but have feelings of déjà vu. He's pretty sure that he can solve the case but that would attract a lot of attention. Even though he doesn't need the money, he feels that he should be doing something.

Victoria finds it hard not to lose sight of Barry. So many attractive women seem to be interested in him. Once he ends up alone in one of the gallery rooms with a portrait of an unusually pretty Brazilian girl before him: challenging eyes, black hair, a half-opened white blouse and beautiful naked feet. He is obviously enchanted by the image and doesn't notice someone coming up quietly behind him.

"So...you like my picture," a come-hither voice suddenly asks from behind him.

He turns quickly and there she is, the girl in the painting. For a moment Barry is speechless. He finds himself quickly and speaks with disarming familiarity. "That's one great painting, but the original is even more beautiful...and that's not just an obvious compliment. But you know about your charms. It must be a pleasure to paint or take pictures of you."

"Are you a photographer?" she asks with interest.

"I'm not a professional photographer, but I'm a pretty good amateur. I'm sure that with a subject like you I could make a great study, what ever the environment."

Julia seems amused. "If you're willing to take the risk, stop by whenever it suits you. You can take pictures of me but it will be me who develops the film, just so you don't get any ideas. If I don't like

the pictures, I will destroy the film and then it will cost you five times the normal fee. If I like them you don't have to pay anything. I'll keep the negatives and you'll get a set of pictures for private purposes only. And who knows? Maybe I'll let you take pictures but won't allow you to show them to anybody," she adds provocatively.

"Sounds interesting," Barry chokes. "If I'm in Rio long enough, I'll take you up on it."

"Don't you want to know how much I charge for a fashion shoot? I'm not cheap, you know."

Barry feels on top of the situation now. "You will like the pictures. Even if you don't, I won't have to declare bankruptcy."

Julia looks at Barry thoughtfully. She usually makes \$3000 per shoot. That could be one expensive day for this guy. Even more so because she's used to professional photographers and her standards are very high. Is he really sure that she will like the pictures or does he just not have to worry about money at all?

She wants to talk with Barry for a while longer but her boyfriend interrupts their conversation. He puts his arm around her as if he owns her and puts the other into the back pocket of her jeans. "So which do you like better, the picture or the original," he asks mockingly.

Barry assesses the young man. He's too "beautifully stylish" for a man. What a clown. Barry dislikes him at once but maybe that's because he's Julia's boyfriend. "You can't beat the original. It's three dimensional and...alive. But I know it's not for sale. The picture's for sale though and I'm going to buy it."

"Have you seen the price," asks her boyfriend.

"Of course I have," replies Barry, "It was a pleasure meeting you Julia." He turns around and leaves to find João. He wants to buy the picture before anyone else can. João doesn't want to talk business that night, but he promises to reserve the picture for Barry. "Barry! You're still the same old horny geezer! You haven't changed a bit! Always women around you, and when you can't get them, you get their picture!" he observes.

Most of the party guests haven't failed to notice that Barry is not a short time guest. Apparently, he is staying in Rio for quite a while and must have loads of cash; otherwise, he wouldn't be able to afford a suite in a Leme hotel. Some of the young women present have also

noticed that Victoria is just an escort for the evening and buzz around him. They make Victoria jealous, even though she has no right to be. Barry knows that he makes an appealing bachelor. He continues to play the gentleman though and remains well mannered, charming and reserved. Of course, he will call João in a couple of days to ask him for some of the women's phone numbers, especially Julia's. He already knows how João will react: "I knew that you would need fresh meat once Victoria was gone."

Barry takes Victoria back to her hotel. What follows is a sad goodbye in Victoria's bed. It's a shame that she has to leave the next day. They promise to keep in touch. Victoria doesn't like the fact that she only has the address of Barry's present hotel and his mobile number. Barry, on the other hand, knows that it's not certain when they'll meet again with flight plans constantly changing. He doesn't mention that Victoria's home base, Auckland, will have to stay taboo for him for quite a while.

Barry drives thoughtfully back to his hotel. The whole thing makes him think, 'Has he ever gotten along with someone so well in such a short time? No, never. But Victoria knows nothing about his parability, and she never will.'

But that's where Barry is wrong.

When Barry is finally about to fall asleep, the phone rings. It's Victoria and she's so flustered that she can hardly speak. "Barry, call the cops! They're breaking into my room...they're coming in! Barry! Barry! Bar - " Then he hears a dial tone. Someone has cut the connection, or pulled the cord from the wall. Barry lies down on his bed and concentrates on Victoria's hotel room, especially on the bathroom.

Barry's para-projection, his doppelganger, as Marcus would've said, slowly opens Victoria's bathroom door. Two men stand in Victoria's room. One of them has a knife at her throat. The other one has an even bigger knife and is rummaging through the furniture and her baggage. He has already found her money and her jewelry. Barry is shocked at the fact that the men aren't wearing masks and that they have also taken her credit cards.

He knows what comes next. "Pretty lady now tell us secret code for to credit card use! Or then we become, how you say, nasty."

It's clear what they plan to do: once they have the secret code, they let the card owner disappear for a while. That way no one can cancel the card. Someone seems to know a lot about Victoria. If Victoria disappears, the airline will think that she has disappeared with the man she spent the last two days with. They will be angry about that, but there will be no further investigation. If she's lucky, they'll let her go after her accounts have been depleted and her credit cards maxed out. But the fact that they aren't even wearing masks suggests otherwise.

He has to do something about this. Barry (or rather his para-projection) surprises the men assaulting Victoria from behind. He wrests the knife from the first man's hand and throws it out the window.

Because of the swearing of the first man, the second man looks away from his work, noticing Barry. "E puta madre! How come he in?" Victoria takes advantage of the confusion to step away from the fray.

"Go Lock yourself in the bathroom," commands Barry.

The second man jumps on top of Barry. He knifes Barry in the gut and slices upwards, opening his abdomen.

Before she can disappear into the bathroom, Victoria becomes a witness to the terrible scene. Barry howls in pain and falls to the floor. Victoria stumbles into the bathroom, puking and crying, and locks it from the inside.

Curiously enough, it's the knife attack that saves Barry in the end. He overlooked one fact about Victoria's disappearance: the airline would try to find him too. The criminals can't allow that. They would have to get rid of Barry as well. So while the fight is going on in Victoria's hotel room, two more criminals enter Barry's apartment. They find him deep asleep (in a trance, controlling his doppelganger). For the criminals, it would be easy to anaesthetize him and get him out of the hotel without leaving clues. It's important that he stays alive. They know that he must have much more money than Victoria and they want to get it before they finally kill him.

After Barry's doppelganger is stabbed, two things happen simultaneously: the injured doppelganger disappears without a trace

and Barry wakes up in his hotel. He realizes what's going on and immediately understands the criminals' plan. Very much to the criminals' surprise, Barry sinks back to the mattress and falls asleep again. It takes all his concentration to let his doppelganger appear behind them. "Over here, chicos."

The burglars turn around and see the same man who is asleep on the bed run out of the room. They follow him down the stairs. They get to the lobby to find only a couple of bored security guards. The doppelganger has disappeared. When they notice that they have aroused the interest of the guards, they quickly leave through the front door.

Barry has the doppelganger lock his door from the inside, then he materializes back in Victoria's room by the window. He surprises those intruders again. When they notice him, he takes a picture of them with Victoria's small camera.

"Guess that's it for you guys," he quips.

When they realize that the guy they first gutted and who then disappeared is now back in the room taking a snapshot for them, they lose it. They run to the door and in panic have problems unlocking it. Finally, they manage to open it and run away. The photo should be good enough to identify them later on.

Barry can now take care of Victoria. He calls to her through the damaged bathroom door, "Victoria! We're safe now, Victoria. They're gone; you can come out now."

Victoria can't believe what she hears. He should be dead! "Is that really you, Barry?"

Barry mentions a few details about the trip to Petropolis, details that only he can know. Finally, Victoria believes him. She opens the door and expects to see Barry drenched in his own blood, but there he is smiling and unharmed. Even though she doesn't understand it, she falls into his arms shuddering and weeping. Barry holds her until she slowly calms down.

Barry mixes two screwdrivers and offers one to Victoria. "Drink it, it'll make you feel better. I know how terrible and confusing this must've been for you, but it's over now and we'll have to put it behind us. Everything's O.K. now, understand?"

Barry puts his arm around Victoria. She's calming down. Her pulse is regular again and a little smile flashes over her face. "You saved my life, Barry. I just don't know how. I was almost asleep when I heard those men at the door. The only thing I could think of doing was to call you. I was so scared. It was so lucky that your number was still saved on the phone. I only had to hit redial. But then they came in. They turned on the light, ripped the phone out of the wall, threatened me with a knife and went through all my stuff. Then suddenly you were here. You just appeared behind the guy with the knife. It was just like magic. And then I saw them stab you. They gutted you! It looked so bad, so terrible! And then they tried to get into the bathroom but you were back. How did you do that?"

Barry knows that he has to tell her a lot of lies. He feels bad about that, but he can't allow her to know the truth. "When you called me in the hotel, I wasn't even there. There was only my answering machine. You were just too scared to notice it. I had already noticed those guys when I wanted to take a taxi home from your place. Something was suspicious about them. Call it intuition. So I followed them. When they broke into your room, I went after them and hid in the bathroom. It took me a while to figure out how I could use some tricks to help you."

Barry knows that this isn't really believable, especially the part about how he sneaked into the bathroom. But, well, it was still dark, so it could be possible.

Victoria wants to know more. "What do you mean by 'tricks,' Barry?"

"I'm not supposed to tell you this but I guess I'll have to. I knew this magician once, years ago. He showed me a couple things about illusionism, especially how you can make people believe that they see things disappear and reappear. Do you remember when David Copperfield made that 747 disappear some of years ago?"

Victoria nods.

"I'm no David Copperfield but I can do things like that, too, on a smaller scale of course. It takes a lot of energy. Remember when we first met on the plane and how exhausted I was? I even had to take a nap before we even started. That's because I had done a show

for a friend's birthday in Auckland. You didn't want to let me put my seat down at first, remember?"

Victoria nods again.

Barry thanks God for equipping him with such a great imagination. He hopes that it's really plausible.

"To make a long story short, with a little bit of preparation, I can make it look like I can disappear and reappear somewhere else. You must've gone through hell while I was preparing for those few minutes. Please forgive me that it took me so long."

"Barry, how can you even think of apologizing? You were wonderful! But I saw how they stabbed you, I saw it!"

Barry waves it off. "That's a simple trick. I'm sure you've seen one of those magic shows where they stick swords through people. I always knew that I could use it if I was attacked one day. The attacker will always believe that you're out of action. But it didn't work out completely this time. Not only did he attack me with a knife, but he also used his fist to hit me in, uh, a particularly sensitive area. That's why my screams sounded so realistic and that's why I fell. It took me a while before I could move. And then I slowly stood up and took your camera. When they saw me standing there taking their picture, it was just too much for them. The flash bulb did the final trick. They ran away. It was as simple as that." Barry is happy that at least one part is true.

Victoria is astonished. "You took a picture of them?"

"It's in your camera. We'll take the film out and have it developed. That'll help the police to find them. I promise not to look at the rest of your pictures. I'll send them and the negatives to you in Auckland."

Victoria laughs. "There's nothing on there you shouldn't see." She knows that there's one picture of her and a steward, just a good friend, embracing and hopes that Barry will get a bit jealous at that.

"And by the way, Victoria, I won't just send you the pictures, but a digital camera, too. I ordered it yesterday and when you get back to Auckland it will be there waiting for you. It's a shame that you still take pictures on film."

This diversion fails. Victoria refuses to change the subject. "Can you tell me how you can disappear and reappear somewhere else?"

Barry knows that he is on shaky ground here but he can't give in. "When a famous magician lets you in on one of his tricks, he makes you promise that you keep the secret safe. That's the reason why some of Houdini's escapes are still unexplainable. So I can't tell you how I did it, but I can show you one more time."

"You don't have to. I know how taxing it is. But I sure would be interested in seeing it. All this sounds so strange, so impossible."

Barry is easily convinced and prepares the "show."

"You'll have to go into the bathroom for a little while because of, you know, the preparations I was talking about. Please be fair and don't come out before I call you."

Victoria goes into the bathroom. Barry waits a little. He doesn't really need any preparations. After a while he gets up and calls Victoria's name. With an interested look on her face, she steps out of the bathroom. Barry stands straight, near the window. "Can you see me alright, Victoria? Come a little closer. Touch me if you want. Good. And now go two steps back. Don't get scared now. I'm going to disappear and then you'll find me in the bathroom."

The real Barry, still in his hotel room in Leme, projects his doppelganger into the bathroom. Victoria is baffled. She goes to the spot where Barry was standing before. Nothing. Carefully and unbelievably, she walks into the bathroom. Barry is just sitting there on edge of the bathtub smiling.

"Not bad, huh," he says. "Did you see how I did it? I hope not."

"I have no idea how you just did that. Do you know any other tricks?"

"Yeah, a couple. They're all pretty baffling until you see how they're done and then you can't believe how simple they really are."

"Can you at least show me one that you can explain to me?"

Barry has to think for a while. "Do you happen to have a piece of string? I'll show you something."

Victoria happens to have a clothesline that she always carries with her. Barry cuts it into three pieces of different lengths. He shows them to Victoria and explains that he will make them all the same length. After a couple of simple hand movements, it's done. Victoria is dumbfounded. Then Barry throws them in the air and they go back to their original lengths. After Victoria insists, he does

it one more time. She watches him closely but she can't work it out. When Barry finally shows her how he does it, she emits the usual "Aha!" and manages to do it herself right away.

Barry is relieved. The last trick finally convinced Victoria. Now she believes that everything that happened that morning was a trick too. They try to find out if anything was stolen but everything is there. In the meantime, it has already turned four. Victoria will have to be up by ten in order to make her flight.

"Will you stay here tonight, Barry?"

"Even if you wanted me to, I wouldn't leave." Barry turns the air conditioner up all the way. Victoria looks at him funny. He explains, "Tonight it's me who keeps you warm." Their naked bodies melt together under the sheets. They're so tired that they fall asleep right away, despite all the excitement.

In the morning, time is short. Barry takes Victoria to the airport. They'd like to have more time to say goodbye. "Don't forget me, Barry" is the last thing she says to him. Barry waves then mouths "I love you" through the glass door before she disappears into the departure area.

A little later, Barry can let his doppelganger disappear and finally get up from his bed in Leme. Barry takes the film from the camera and has it developed. He can pick the pictures up an hour later. Both of the burglars' faces appear clearly in the photograph. It will look good on a wanted poster.

It is clear to Barry that they should have informed the police immediately. He's happy that Victoria didn't insist on it. Now that she's gone, he won't tell them at all. It was hard enough to explain the thing with the two Barrys. What makes him think, though, is the fact that there were two robberies. It can't be a coincidence that both he and Victoria were robbed at the same time. Someone must have known that they were together and that they would make easy prey. Who could have known that? Only someone who was a guest at João's party...

Barry calls João and makes an appointment. João thinks the call is about Julia's picture and takes it with him to the meeting. He's happy to tell Barry that he can give him a twenty percent discount.

Barry accepts it and thanks him. Then he tells João about the robberies and about his conclusions: "Was there anyone at that party you don't know well or maybe someone you don't trust?"

João is a bit insulted. "You're my friend, Barry. But all the people from the party are my friends too. With this kind of bad thinking, you insult both them and me..." He stops for a moment. "Well, actually, perhaps I should be a bit more careful. My new German neighbor was there for the first time, you remember him? There was also Julia's new friend, Alfredo. Both of them I do not know very well."

Barry freezes at this: Alfredo! Alfredo knows Barry can afford Julia's painting. So he figured out that he probably has plenty of cash and therefore would make easy prey. "What does Alfredo do for a living?"

"He's just a rich kid. Daddy is a big antique dealer. He owns the store near the Ipanema market. I guess you could call Alfredo the heir or the junior boss. You know the store I'm talking about?"

Barry nods. He'll have to look into that. It seems to be the only lead he has. "Thanks for the picture and the information. I'll let you know what I find out."

"You're welcome, Barry. You're always welcome as a guest in my house. If neither Angela nor I are here, please make yourself at home. Use the bedroom, the pool, the servants, whatever you desire."

Barry isn't used to that kind of hospitality. It reminds him of something that Hannelore said. Apparently her mother, Baroness ?? (whatever her name was), also keeps an open household like that. Maybe he should visit Hannelore one day.

But there are more important things to think about now. Back to the business at hand - Barry calls the antique store and pretends to be interested in old Brazilian sculptures. It's not long before a limousine is there, waiting to pick him up. Because they think that he's a wealthy potential customer, they drive him to the back entrance instead of the front. They pass armed private security personnel. Alfredo is there to welcome Barry. He didn't expect to see Barry ever again. He is surprised and their friendly greeting is obviously only superficial.

“Alfredo! I bought Julia’s picture yesterday. It sure is something!” Barry begins, “and now, I’d like to buy a couple of nice Brazilian sculptures and some woodcuttings for my house in Auckland.”

Barry lies the moons away from Saturn. They consider him a rich but rather dull customer from New Zealand. After he buys an overpriced piece without haggling, they treat him more importantly. Alfredo shows him some more pieces but Barry can’t decide on any one of them. After a while, Alfredo loses his patience and hands Barry over to another salesman who then patiently shows him through the many other rooms with thousands of antiques and objects. Barry tips him and their relationship suddenly improves. Barry is shown rooms that are normally off-limits to customers. The salesman is worried about his customer’s indecisiveness. He’ll have to make him buy something eventually so he can get a good cut.

Barry wants to know more about the rich tradition of the antique store. He learns that it has only existed for twenty years and that many dubious legends surround the history of the place. Barry feigns attention. He is more interested in the layout of the rooms and details of security measures. Storeroom Four is especially suspicious. The salesman hesitates before he unlocks the door to let them in, claiming that the objects inside are wrapped up. They go inside anyway. It’s ground level and has no windows. There are many crates inside but only a few big woodcuttings. Barry notices that the salesman is uneasy about walking around in there. After looking around a little, Barry concludes that the other woodcuttings are better, so they leave. Finally, Barry purchases a big wooden figure. It will be a gift for João to be put in the garden. While they wrap it up, they check his credit card, serve him cafezinho, and bid him goodbye with many thanks and good wishes.

Barry promises: “I’ll be back.” He really means it, but in a different way. The limousine takes him back to the hotel and they carry his purchase up to his suite.

Barry can’t wait for the night. He knows his suspicions are kind of far-fetched, but who knows? If Alfredo and his father are really behind the attempted burglaries of Victoria and himself, then they’re not too shy to commit murder. They must be capable of just about anything. Shortly after midnight, Barry sends his doppelganger into

Storeroom Four. Barry can tell by the disturbance of the dust on the floor that a lot of things were moved around recently. Parabarry only has a small flashlight with him. He still finds it difficult to project objects along with his doppelganger.

Carefully, Parabarry opens one crate after the other. He's surprised that it doesn't take him long to find what he's looking for. After opening a simple locked hasp, Barry finds several boxes with jewelry in one of the crates. The boxes have "Stern" printed on them. One of them contains the famous diamond whale that Barry saw in the newspaper. There is no doubt: the loot from the Stern robbery lies here. Parabarry takes the diamond whale and relocks the crate. He turns the flashlight off and hides it because he can't take more than one object with him. Barry makes Parabarry come back. Then he "wakes up" with the whale in hand. He's still surprised that this is possible.

Now it's necessary to act quickly. Barry calls a reliable limousine service and tells the driver to take him to João's villa. He calls João from the limo. Luckily he is home. João can't wait for Barry's arrival. When he arrives, there is no time for hellos. "João, how good are your connections to the police?"

"Pretty good, really. I certainly pay enough for good relations. What do you want to know?"

"I just solved the Stern robbery. I know where the loot is." Barry takes out the diamond whale to prove what he has just claimed.

João is stunned. "Whoa! How did you...?"

"I can't tell you that now. Could you build a little fire under the police's ass and have a raid organized? I want them to search a building. But I can only tell them at the last minute which building it is. I promise you 100% that this will solve the Stern case. Take the diamond whale to convince your police friends. And here's a picture of the two guys who tried to rob Victoria. I'm sure they belong to the gang that pulled the Stern heist. Tell the police to pick them up and make them talk. This will get us a twenty million dollar reward. I suggest we leave all the honors to the police and split the money."

"Let's go to the police headquarters. You must come too, Barry. You have to lead them to the right place."

Barry is O.K. with that, but there is one more warning: "The owners of the place are serious characters. They have armed security

and I'm sure they've also infiltrated the police. Those in on the raid have to be trustworthy otherwise we're bound to have big problems."

"Sounds like an interesting night," João comments dryly. He takes his revolver out of his closet and offers another to Barry. Barry declines to take the weapon.

They go. For some reason that João doesn't understand, Barry insists on stopping by his hotel first. "I'll be right back," he says.

Barry enters his room, hangs the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door and locks himself inside. It's Parabarry who steps back into the car with João. Parabarry is more flexible and almost invincible. The hotel room incident has proved this once again.

The conversation between João and the police chief takes a long time. Barry isn't invited. He's afraid that the news about the raid will be leaked to Alfredo and his father. But in the end, everything is handled quickly and professionally. Eight armored cars follow the car with the police chief, João and Barry in it. Barry directs the driver to the store. They approach Ipanema, but not on the most direct route. As late as possible, he tells them the exact direction. When they are five blocks from the antique store, Barry finally puts his cards on the table: they are to surround the whole block. Everyone they find must be arrested. Two operation units will concentrate on Storeroom Four. This is where most of the loot will be found.

When João and the police chief realize who they are raiding, they pale. They shoot Barry a penetrating look. Should the operation fail, they'll be in big trouble. Barry notices their concern. "I'm absolutely sure that the loot was here at 12:30. I saw it with my own eyes. There's no way it could've disappeared in the last two hours."

"Let's hope so," says João. "Let's just hope so."

They give out the final orders. All the headlights are turned off and the vehicles are stopped shortly before they reach the building. Almost a hundred men swarm out. João and the police chief stay in the car to direct the operation from there. Parabarry excuses himself quickly and disappears around the corner, very much to the surprise of the police chief and João.

Parabarry will use his skills if something goes wrong. He materializes in Storeroom Four and hides behind a pile of crates. Through a gap between the crates he is able to watch the door. It

won't be long before the police storm inside, then he'll be able to disappear again.

Parabarry can't see any differences between now and two hours ago, but suddenly he hears strange noises coming from one side of the hall. There is not even a door there. All of a sudden, the floor opens up. Parabarry can vaguely make out stairs that apparently lead down into the basement.

A little later, twenty armed men led by Alfredo storm out. "There are police all around the building. They'll come in here and stick their noses into our business. Make sure they don't find the crates with the red markings on them," Alfredo shouts at them. "First take the other crates and block the door. Let's make it hard for them to get in. Get your asses in gear! Vamos! Vamos! Then take the important crates downstairs." They do as he orders.

Parabarry doesn't have much time left. No one seems to be in the basement at the moment. He has to take the risk and materializes in the basement. He was right. It's empty. It only has one exit, which can be reached through a long, dimly lit tunnel. At the end of it stairs lead him to a door. When Barry opens it, he stands in the middle of a shoe store.

The entrance is locked but the key is in the keyhole. Parabarry unlocks it and steps out into the street. For a second, he doesn't know where he is. Then he discovers the police chief's car parked in front of the building, now lit up for the raid. Parabarry notices that the underground tunnel is nearly two blocks long. He rushes to the chief's car.

When João tells him that they haven't found anything yet, and that they're having trouble getting into Storeroom Four, Parabarry cuts him off: "Just hold on for a second, will you? There's a basement underneath the storeroom. You can get into it from the shoe store over there. We have to send the cops in right away."

The chief is surprised, but he reacts without hesitation. A couple of minutes later, Parabarry leads thirty men into the shoe store and shows them the entrance to the tunnel. "I'll let you experts do the rest. Be careful, though, the other guys are probably armed too. And by the way, watch for the crates with the red markings. Good luck."

Quietly but quickly, the policemen enter the tunnel. Parabarry goes back to the chief's car and follows the developments from there. It's a piece of cake; Alfredo's men are so surprised that they don't resist. It doesn't take a long search to find out that most of the loot from the Stern robbery is there. Two of Alfredo's men turn out to be those that were trying to rob Victoria. They isolate them right away.

What they know so far is enough to justify the arrest of Alfredo's father. They call in people from Stern's management to identify the stolen goods. When the night is over, they will know that they have found all the loot, with one spicy exception: a jewel-embroidered slip.

The next day, the media are full of praise for the police and the whole operation. The missing piece is mentioned too, but no description is given, as was suggested by the company. A traditional house like Stern does not want to be associated with anything less than fine art and craftsmanship.

Stern hands the twenty million dollars over to the police. It is given to the anonymous informant(s), João and Barry, and they split the amount. They insist that their names not be made public.

The interrogations and investigations take a very long time. The police suspect that more people are behind the robbery and that the investigation will lead them to the solutions of other cases. The number of suspects grows bigger and bigger. Even Stern employees and police are incriminated.

Barry learns that he was suspected too. The information he provided them with was a bit too detailed for the authorities. Julia was questioned too, but the police decided she definitely had nothing to do with the heist. It finally comes out that the antique store was almost bankrupt due to bad speculating. That's why even little fish like Victoria and him became targets for them.

Barry quickly loses interest in the whole matter. Only two days after the raid, two days that were hardly enough time to recuperate, something happens that will influence his life more than he would have thought possible: during another of João's bashes, a thunderstorm rolls in. The party is moved inside from the garden.

Barry notices a sad expression on João's face as he watches the storm.

"João, what's bothering you? Aren't we safe in here?"

With a thoughtful look on his face, João turns toward Barry. "We are completely safe. But while we continue to party and to laugh, the people in the Favelas²¹ are fighting for their lives. I love this country and I love our wonderful lives, but in a situation like this, I find it hard to suppress my bad conscience. The two of us just made a fortune! Our dog had an operation today. We had no insurance for him so that cost a fortune too." João has to laugh a little. "But how can we care for our dogs and not for our poor in this splendid city?"

Of course, Barry is familiar with the situation—who isn't? But he always suppressed this knowledge. All he ever thought about was himself and his pleasure. Even now, he doesn't want to disturb his lifestyle. What difference will it make?

"You have no idea what we're talking about, Barry. Not only will this storm destroy their tin shanties, but the sheets of metal will just get blown around like crazy. People will get hurt, arms and legs severed as with an axe, and there won't be a single doctor there to help them. And you know what the media will have to say about it tomorrow? Big tree destroys rich Villa or something like that."

Barry is inspired by João's anger and despair. "All right then, let's stop partying. Let's get out there and help. We'll get a couple of ambulances together, fuck the cost, and go to the lower end of the favella just above the lake. You know which I'm talking about, don't you?"

João nods.

"I'll try to help the people in the favella and bring them to the ambulances."

"That's too dangerous, Barry. You want to risk your life?"

"My friend, I know for sure that nothing will happen to me."

The way Barry said the word "nothing" makes João think. Before he can ask him about it, Barry is already making for the door. "I'm ready to go."

²¹ The slums of Rio.

As fast as he can, Barry drives to his hotel. A couple of minutes later, Parabarry leaves it. He races through stormy gusts of wind to the favella. When he arrives there, the storm has turned into a hurricane. The rain is coming down in torrents. Parabarry runs crouching uphill to the poorest part of the neighborhood where he can get a better overview of the situation. The houses consist of boards, jerry cans, sheets of corrugated metal, palm leaves and whatever else they were able to find.

One of the huts (it barely deserves this name) below him starts to disintegrate. Parabarry materializes directly in front of it and looks inside. He can see a couple of adults sitting in the back of the enclosure, leaning against the earthen back wall, and protecting their children in their arms. They seem to be safe, but a little further up front the roof has caved in and two children between four and six are trying to protect themselves from the wood and metal pieces that come flying through the air. They stare at Parabarry as though he were a ghost.

Without hesitation, he takes the two children by their hands and puts an old blanket over their backs to protect them. He shouts to the parents and calms them with a few words in broken Portuguese. Protecting the children from the wind, he runs down toward the flashing lights of the ambulances. A sheet of metal hits him between the shoulders. Blood begins to soak his shirt. He keeps going anyway. He reaches one of the ambulances and hands the kids over to the medical personnel.

João has done a good job: there are doctors, blankets, hot food and drinks, and several large trucks, which serve as an emergency shelter. Parabarry turns around. When he's out of sight, he teleports to another dangerous location.

He is only one man against a tempest, but Parabarry's performance is breathtaking, delivering dozens of people to the shelters and to the rescue teams. His actions start a wave of charity. Complete strangers follow Parabarry's example, carrying blankets, medication, tents and tools up into the favella and bring the injured down. João is busy calling for more support on his mobile.

It turns out to be the biggest spontaneous initiative that Rio has ever seen. When the storm is finally over, the balance of damage becomes visible: many of the dwellings have been destroyed and

hundreds of people, including some of the helpers, have been injured. But still, many have been saved and only a few had to be taken to the hospital. Donations keep rolling in, very much to the surprise of the denizens of the favella who marvel at Parabarry in admiration of his efforts. Stories begin to circulate about how Parabarry appeared hundreds of times and how he helped with the selflessness of a saint. Rumors like, "they must've been triplets," make the rounds. People embrace each other; there are tears both on the side of the helpers and the inhabitants. No one understands how this was possible. Wealthy Rio citizens have personally helped in the favella they would usually never dare enter. Dirty from head to toe, Parabarry shakes hands with João. They're both happy. During the operation, João noticed several wounds on Barry's body but now he only seems to be dirty, not injured.

João looks at Parabarry questioningly, "How come you're not injured?"

Parabarry shakes his head, "Don't ask, João, just don't ask."

Barry is surprised with himself. What made him want to help other people all of a sudden? Was it just João or a bad conscience that he's been accumulating over the years of hedonism? There is another thing that baffles him: he enjoyed helping others; it gave him a new kind of satisfaction. Is giving really better than taking?

Parabarry drives back to the hotel. Barry ends the projection: as always, he lived through everything, including the pain of Parabarry's injuries. He even had to replace Parabarry with another Parabarry twice. He still doesn't quite understand this parability. Why does he feel the pain without getting hurt himself? How is it possible that Barry can "bring" certain objects back while his dirty clothes have been left behind? Is it a question of wanting? Perhaps Marcus was right. Maybe parabilitists should form groups. It's the only way to exchange information and experiences. It's the only way to share an understanding of the phenomenon.

Another aspect keeps Barry even more busy: during his short stay in Rio, he has for the first time used his paraskills to help others, the German tourists, Victoria, and all the people from last night. He hasn't ever experienced this kind of satisfaction before. He keeps thinking back to what Marcus said, that parabilitists have a duty to

use their skills for the good of others. Barry is sure about one thing: he won't use the ten million dollar reward for himself. He will use the money to help out the people in the favella. He already has an idea. He wants to convince João to help him organize it.

The media is full of reports about the spontaneous storm operation. Different charity organizations, which work with the poor in the favellas, see a surge in donations. João is presented as a role model.

João and Barry meet in João's villa. For some reason, Barry has several garbage bags filled with aluminum cans and a bucket of super glue. "There's something I want to show you, João." Barry takes out ten empty soda cans and glues them together side by side. He takes ten more cans and does the same again. Then he glues one row on top of the other. The whole thing takes him about three minutes. João has no idea what Barry is getting at.

"What we have here, João, is ideal building material. You could call it "canned brick." It only costs you a bit of glue and a couple minutes of labor. It even helps to get rid of the empty cans in the streets. The brick is very light and the air inside is a good insulator. Producing "bricks" like this can help build primitive huts, which can also have openings for doors and windows. If necessary, an opening can be closed in seconds with one of the "bricks." These huts would be much more stable than those we saw in the favella last night. If a storm destroys them, the cans flying around would be much less dangerous than sheet metal. Let's give it a try. Can you ask two of your employees to turn the cans I have with me into bricks and create a wall with a door opening in it?"

João is interested. After two of his employees have started the work out in the garden, Barry continues, "I would like to give the ten million dollar reward to an organization which provides help to the favellas. I don't really need this money and I never planned to have this much. It's not really enough to solve the problem completely but it is enough to buy the glue and to teach the people how to build the can-huts across the whole country. When other people take care of the water and sewage problem, then we may be able to really make a difference. By the way, can-bricks can also be used to support terraces and plant vegetables. You've become a hero

overnight, João. They will want you on the radio and on TV. Use your publicity to advertise the idea and to raise money for the favellas.”

João is fascinated.

While the idea has been developing, João’s employees have constructed two walls, one with a door opening, the other one with a window opening. Barry shows them how to add a pitched roof. When the servants take a hose and spray the roof with water, nothing gets through and João and Barry remain dry underneath. “I think it could work; it’s definitely worth a try.”

As Barry predicted, João is invited to several television shows, ideal opportunities to promote the cause. Barry donates his five million dollars to the housing project and João donates the same amount for water and sanitation projects. More donations keep coming in. The government decides to match the amount.

The next weeks fly by. Many volunteers offer their help. Not everything goes as planned though, and new problems are confronted daily. The mistrust of the inhabitants of the favella is one. They are afraid of being abused as part of a test project, as they see it. Even though they receive money and food, some of the locals engage in an endless string of arguments over the size of the huts and the vegetable terraces.

However, the situation is getting better and better. The pilot project is a success. The favella has become more livable and more hygienic. The official opening is celebrated with plenty of Caipirinhas’, Batidas and a giant Feijoada for everyone. The whole city celebrates the project and for the first time in his life, Barry feels that he’s done something worthwhile.

Suddenly, the worm turns. “Now we’re living in can huts, but we’re still unemployed. The do-gooders pat each other on the back inside their posh houses. They could’ve done better for us. More income tax for the rich! It’s them who make us poor. They only did this to keep us quiet. But we’ve had enough. We’ll teach them to throw us bones!”

The atmosphere gets more and more aggressive. When rallies of protesters approach Barry’s hotel, he flees to João’s villa. Police and military reestablish a quiet normalcy. Barry is deeply hurt. After all the things he did for them, is this how they thank him? Marcus was

wrong. Only think about yourself, it's the only thing that makes sense.

João is more relaxed about it. "Calm down Barry. We did what we could. I'm sure there are a lot of people out there who appreciate what we did and others who don't. I'll step into the background again but I'll keep working for social justice in this country. It's our duty to make sure that humans are not treated worse than hungry animals. We'll have to reach New Zealand standards over here. We'll have to ensure that even the poor can live in dignity. We won't be able to do better than that, so there will always be tensions."

"You're a good egg, João, but I'm out. I'm flying to Brasilia tomorrow. A good friend of mine lives there. No one else knows my face there, at least I hope not. I'll live my kind of life, only thinking about myself spiced up with the pleasures of life."

"So you'll be chasing tail again, right?" João mocks.

Barry wants to return the meanness but he restrains himself. "Well, you know, I could really do with a nice bird. I spent weeks living like a monk, dreaming about a better world."

João organizes a little goodbye party for Barry. He also calls Julia, who arrives with her latest "flame." Barry is still fascinated by her beauty but he knows he's only one of a great number of admirers. When he asks her about Alfredo, she reacts coolly. "He was very generous." She shrugs. "But he was also a real pig. I never loved him but I was surprised to hear that he was such a gangster. We never really talked. He just used me to show off. By the way, you seem to have lost your interest in photography."

"The last words on that haven't yet been written. Just wait and see. I'm still interested. I'll be back in Rio eventually."

Julia reacts with little interest.

When only a small group is left, Angela sits down with Barry. "I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciate what you did. I've known you for quite a while and I have always thought of you as a nice but superficial guy. You always seemed to be after the girls and nothing else. I'm sorry for misinterpreting your character. Your commitment to the work in the favellas proved that you're more than just a lover boy. I know how disappointed you must be now and that

makes you want to be the old Barry again. But you'll soon find yourself for good. You'll always be welcome in this house. Please come back often and, just to stroke your ego, I wouldn't have minded being in your little black book. I'm sure it would've been interesting but I know what my priorities are. Don't pretend to be surprised now. I'm not a fortune teller, but I'm sure your priorities will change sooner than you think." Angela kisses Barry on the mouth. João notices it and smiles.

He embraces Barry, "I'm glad the two of you get along. Sometimes I really worried about the distance between you two."

Barry is confused. He's ashamed because sometimes he had negative thoughts about Angela. It's really time to leave Rio. He's getting more lectures than he can handle.

When Barry arrives in Brasilia, he takes a cab to a hotel near the underground Bus station. It's easy to get out of the city from here. You're also close to the great and glorious boulevards, the residence of the Brazilian president (the Palace of the Morning Red), the government buildings, the Place of the Three Powers (Branches of Government), and just about every other sight in the city except the blue church, the university and the lake.

Barry calls his friend Carlos. They haven't heard from each other in three years but Carlos reacts as if they just saw each other yesterday. "Hello, Barry, it's so cool you're in town, have you eaten? Gina, my girlfriend, remember her? She always cooks too much."

Barry hears Carlos talking to Gina: "Can you believe it? Barry is here in Brasilia."

"Is he coming over or what? Tell him to come over!"

Then Carlos is back on the line. "This is a democratic country and it's two against one. You have to come over for dinner. But take a taxi, we'll have to celebrate, you know, heh heh."

Fortunately, Barry bought two bottles of good Chilean red wine at the airport. He buys some flowers for Gina in the lobby and then takes a taxi to the "Superquadro" where Carlos' apartment is. They welcome him heartily. Over dinner they exchange the news. It's been three years since Barry and Ulla, his Swedish girlfriend, were their guests.

"So how long are you staying this time," Carlos wants to know.

"I'm not sure. Quite a while, probably, at least for a couple of months, maybe even longer. First thing I'll do, I'll try to find a nice apartment like yours."

Carlos can't help but to laugh, "What a crazy coincidence. I'm leaving for Europe tomorrow. I'll be gone for at least two years but I still haven't rented the place out. Tell you something, you can take me to the airport tomorrow, then you can move in here. I will leave everything here for you, furniture, dishes, everything. But try to find a new renter when you move out. Gina will help you with that."

"Wait a minute...if I had arrived two days later, you would've been gone?"

Carlos nods.

"And I can really take the apartment the way it is? And Gina's not going with you?"

Carlos says slowly, "Gina moved out quite a while ago. We're still friends but we decided to live separate lives for a while. The servant's apartment is free too. My maid has already gone back home to Salvador. Find yourself someone to help you with the household. I would appreciate it if you could take care of Gina for me."

Carlos' intentions with this statement are obvious and make Gina blush.

"Aren't you sad that Carlos is leaving, Gina?"

"Yeah, a little, but we've been talking about it for quite a while. We're not in love the way we used to be. So we both decided it's better to live apart for a while. But I'm happy that you are here now. I hope our friendship will continue as it was in the old days. I'll help you to find a maid. Actually, there's this girl I know, Gabriella. You can meet up with her tomorrow and decide if you want her. By the way, Carlos wants to sell his car, you can check that out too."

Barry can't believe it. Here he is sitting with his best friends in Brazil, telling him that he can take over his life, including his girlfriend.

Carlos notices his astonishment. "Brazilians don't take things so seriously. We have the saying, 'Four things are important in life, eating, drinking, loving, and forgetting.'"

The three of them spend a long, harmonious evening together. It's just as if Carlos wasn't leaving. On the way back to his hotel, Barry gives Gina a ride back to her apartment. When she gets out, she kisses him lightly on the cheek and says, "It's great you got here now. Don't forget to come over at eleven tomorrow. I'll introduce you to Gabriela."

Barry enjoys watching her swing out of the taxi. He can see her long legs through the slit in her skirt. She shakes her long brown hair like she's in a shampoo commercial. Before she enters her apartment, she turns around one more time and gives Barry a wave.

Shortly after 11 a.m. the next day, he arrives at Gina's apartment. Four young women are there: Gina, her roommates Carola and Anna, and Gabriela. Before Gina can even praise Gabriela's capacity for the domestic arts, Barry has made up his mind. She's friendly and seems good-natured. She's an unpretentious, pretty, tender Brazilian girl with brown skin, black hair, and white teeth. She promises to take care of everything from washing to cooking and to adjust her working hours to fit his schedule. In addition to room and board, she only asks for a small stipend.

Barry tells her right away that he'll pay her more. Later, Gina reprimands him for that, "You spoil the girls that way. Don't tell anyone how much you pay her. Tell her not to tell anyone either. You'll make enemies otherwise. It's an unwritten rule that servants living in your house hardly get paid any money."

Gabriela will move into the apartment the next day, the same as Barry. Gabriela's quarters will consist of a little living/sleeping room, a tiny cooking area, and her own small bathroom, standard in Brazil. All this will be new for Barry, though. He will be taken care of, just as if Gabriela was his own un-emancipated wife, a wife he doesn't have to be true to. He knows that all this is not far from slavery, but it's a pleasant arrangement for him. It seems humorous that only catholic priests maintain similar relationships with their servants.

Barry also buys Carlos' car. It's a large, venerable veteran of the early years of alcohol²² engines. After the oil crisis of 1975, the

²² Methyl alcohol derived from cane sugar.

government launched a program to replace gasoline with renewable fuels, which took a while to catch on. After several ups and downs, Brazil is now one of the only countries where new cars are mostly "alcoholics."

In the evening, they celebrate Carlos' goodbye with a typical Brazilian potluck. Guests come and go whenever they like. They all bring something to eat or drink. Even though the music is very loud, the neighbors don't complain, in fact, they stop by. The party goes on until the early morning.

Barry takes Carlos to the airport the next day. When Carlos says goodbye, he laughs at Barry, "Let me know what's going on. I'd like to know how you get along with your various females."

It takes Barry a minute to realize that he's talking not only about Gina and Gabriela, but also about Carola, and Anna, and the many secretaries at the embassies for whom Brasilia has far too few unattached and interesting men to offer.

Life in Brasilia begins well for Barry. Gabriela lives up to his expectations. She's always in a good mood and she leaves no household work for him. She seems to enjoy her work so much that it is a pleasure for Barry to watch her. Once she has finished her work, she leaves him to his privacy unless Barry asks her to stay longer. She always works barefoot, wearing a half-buttoned blouse with and a miniskirt, which sometimes reveals a slip that matches her blouse. From the first day on, it's clear that she would do anything for Barry, just as she innocently promised at the beginning.

Barry spends the first couple of days getting used to Brasilia again. He systematically plans a longer stay. He opens a "macho" bank account that gives him access to one of the best clubs on Lago do Paranoá, Brasilia's artificial lake. After spending two evenings at the club, he has already made a couple of friends. He also gets the addresses of a good doctor and a lawyer, just in case. Several women have given him their phone numbers without his even asking. Apparently, they would like to get to know him much better. As a member of the club, his membership also allows him access to his

own private room for siestas. He knows that this could be very useful if he has to activate Parabarry.

He hasn't heard from Gina in two days so he calls her up and invites her to a picnic and swim at the headwaters of the Itiquira. She doesn't know the place and agrees to come. She suggests taking Carola and Anna along. Since he is providing transportation, she insists that she and her friends bring the food and drinks.

Next morning, the four of them leave the city and head north. The further they get from the city, the drier the landscape gets. Even though they're only in the middle of the dry season, the ground is nothing but red dust with huge termite hills. All this doesn't destroy the friendly atmosphere in the car: the girls speak good English, but occasionally switch to incomprehensible staccato Portuguese. When they do this, they giggle and glance shyly at Barry. Barry is pretty sure that they're planning to play some kind of a trick on him. He has to concentrate on the road so he doesn't miss the exit to the west like he did last time. He doesn't miss it this time and follows the bumpy track over the barren plateau to the end.

"Here we are," Barry announces proudly.

The girls can't believe it. "But there is no water!"

"Just wait and see," Barry says as he picks up the cooler. Carola and Anna carry two bags of food. Gina takes the towels, even though she still doesn't believe that there is water. After going downhill a bit, they see green bushes ahead. Behind them lies a perfectly round bowl about three meters in diameter, the source of the Itiquira.²³ An unceasing fountain of cool water comes vertically out of the ground and flows northward through several waterfalls, burrowing deeper and deeper into the plains.

Barry explains this phenomenon. He also tells them that they can't follow the river directly, but have to take a short detour to get to one of the most beautiful waterfalls and its lovely swimming hole.

"I know you all are the Brazilians and I'm not, but please trust me, there's nothing wrong with this water. It's not polluted by

²³ For years the source of the Itiquira, and the high waterfall, the Cachiero do Itiquira, further down, were well-kept secrets. Unfortunately, they have been turned into a commercial park but they're still well worth a visit.

schistosoma.²⁴ But be careful! Where the ground gets muddy there are scorpions. They can't kill you but their sting can be extremely painful. But what's really dangerous are the tree snakes further down the river, so don't walk directly underneath the trees. Just stay right behind me."

Barry's direct warnings assure that the women stay alert and watch where they step. There is no path down into the steep gorge and thick jungle at the bottom. Before it gets too scary, they reach their goal. When they emerge from the thick vegetation, they enter a movie-like scene: a lovely pond, a sandy beach and huge slabs of granite. A high waterfall roars in the background as it empties into the trough. "Unbelievable! And it took a foreigner to show us this," is the general opinion.

Carola puts her hand into the water. "Ooh! So nice and cool, and I'm already so...hot." She starts to undress and notices Barry's interest. She doesn't seem to have brought a bathing suit. "Sun lotion is all we need here." The rest, including Barry, follow her example.

When Gina starts to put lotion on Carola, Barry interrupts her. "I believe this should be my pleasure." The others watch with amusement as he massages Carola with the lotion. He pays particular attention to her breasts (especially sensitive to the sun). Her nipples harden. Then he works his way down to the triangle between her legs. (The hair is certainly not enough protection from the strong Sun). Then it's Anna and Gina's turn.

Finally the three girls take care of Barry. They're not surprised to see that he is very excited but Carola insists, "We can't let his best part get sunburned." Barry enjoys it. He has to think back to his childhood when they played games like this hidden and with a guilty conscience.

"I think it's time for the water now," Anna suggests.

They jump in and swim to the waterfall. They play in the water like children: splashing, diving, jumping, grabbing and pinching each other. They go back and forth between the space behind the waterfall which is big enough to sit in dryly.

²⁴ A water-borne parasitic worm.

When they finally come out again, they indulge in the food and drink, not without playing games again. Gina covers Carola's eyes while the others put little bits of food into her mouth. Carola has to guess what she's eating. Whenever she makes a mistake, she gets a slap on her derriere. They take turns and the whole game gets more and more exciting.

When it's time for sun lotion again, the girls get a little bit uneasy. Carola finally speaks out, "So, are you ready now?" The other girls nod and Carola explains it to Barry. "We figured that all the swimming and sun lotion with three naked girls would make you hungry for more than just food and drink. And, when I look down between your legs, we seem to have been right. So, we decided to roll the dice and find a victim for you. One of us is the lucky one. We know who, but you don't. Now it's your turn to take a guess. If you pick the right one, you may have her; the others will be allowed to watch. If you pick the wrong one...well...bad luck for you."

"Three to one odds," Barry comments. He looks at the beautiful young women, the way they lie on their towels, moving around seductively in full expectation of whatever may come. He knows who to pick in order not to insult the others. After a long smile, he says, "Gina."

Gina appears flattered but Carola interrupts, "Bad luck for you, my dear Barry, you should've picked me, now I don't have to be the victim."

After moment of silence, Barry sputters laughingly, "You girls are mean! First you make me all hot and then what? I'm going to cool off now." He jumps into the water and acts insulted for half an hour. When he comes out, he takes his towel and lies down a short distance away from the girls.

After a while, probably driven by a guilty conscience, they come over to Barry. "Don't be angry with us, those were the rules." They start massaging him lovingly. They don't stop when Barry rolls over onto his back.

They're still enjoying the day when they start to pack up a couple of hours later. Carola is in especially high spirits. She takes the lead on the way back and misses the way out of the canyon.

"Don't go on Carola," Barry warns. "The jungle is too thick down there."

"But I want to see the other waterfall," she yells back and walks on.

"Be careful, Carola," Barry screams, worried. But it's too late. Carola touches a small green snake hanging down from a branch. It bites the middle finger of her right hand. Carola screams in horror as the others run toward her.

Anna sees the snake disappear. "Those are very poisonous," she says nervously. They tie a handkerchief around Carola's upper arm to serve as a tourniquet. Anna is a nurse. She is used to emergency situations. "That won't help. If we don't get the antidote within fifteen minutes, she's dead," she whispers to Barry.

"Would a Bras Antiserum work? I think I have one in my car," Barry lies.

"That would work, of course, but how come you..."

Barry interrupts her, "O.K. The two of you stay here with Carola. Make sure she drinks a lot of water. Do whatever you can. Cross your fingers and pray that I have the antidote in my car."

Barry runs toward his car. He runs out of sight, into the thick jungle and carefully lies down. He concentrates on the hallway of the doctor he met at the club. Parabarry materializes there. He rushes into the office and screams, "Emergency!"

No one can stop him. He rushes into the examination room, interrupting a child's appointment. The doctor is outraged. Fortunately, Barry was introduced to him at the club. He tells the doctor that his wife is sitting in the car downstairs and has just been bitten by a poisonous snake, and that he needs a Bras Antiserum and a syringe immediately. The doctor doesn't hesitate. While looking for the antidote, the doctor asks how she got bit by a snake in the middle of the city. Barry ignores the question. "Thanks for your help. I'll give you all the details and the money tomorrow."

After Barry has left the office, the doctor walks to the window. Barry's car is not there. Confused but not shaken, he returns to his work with the child. Barry will have some explaining to do tomorrow.

Still in the hallway, Parabarry fills up the syringe and throws the ampoule away. He can't take both objects back with him. Parabarry

dematerializes and Barry finds himself with syringe in hand. He jumps up and runs back to the three women. "Here you go, Anna. This is all we need."

Anna is both happy and angry. Why doesn't he bring her a closed ampoule and a fresh needle like he should? She quickly inserts the needle and opens the tourniquet on Carola's upper arm, which already shows the read streaks of blood poisoning. They continue to bathe her face with cold water. Carola can only breathe with difficulty. "You'll be all right soon, Carola. We just gave you the antidote."

Carola opens her eyes and doesn't believe what she sees. "Where...did...you...get...that?" she mumbles.

Within half an hour, Carola feels good enough to walk back to the car unassisted. The four of them silently thank modern medicine for the health of their friend. On the way back, their spirits lighten up again. The incident has given them an adrenalin rush. Carola insists they have dinner somewhere.

When Barry tries to find excuses for getting them in danger, Carola interrupts him. "Stop bullshitting around. You warned us. You even screamed after me. I acted like one dumb bitch. You were great and saved my life like a magician. All of us, and me especially, owe you more than we can repay. If there's anything I can do for you, and I mean anything, you can be sure to get it."

Barry admires Carola. After a moment of silence, her Brazilian esprit is back: she's playing the "catch me if you can, just try and you can have me" game again.

When Barry is finally back in his apartment, he thinks back on the day. He'll never forget it. He gave Gabriela the day off and she went to visit her mother in Cristalina. He is just about to have a Batida Limao when the doorbell rings. Who could that be? He looks through the peephole and there she is, Gina! After thinking for a second, Barry disappears into Gabriela's room. It's Parabarry who opens the door and welcomes Gina with a mix of happiness and surprise.

"It was such a strange day," Gina tries to excuse her visit. "I just wanted to see you again and thank you."

“Thank me? Come sit down and let me get you something from the kitchen.” He comes back with a drink and a plate of appetizers for Gina. Gabriela left it in the fridge with a note saying, “in case you have guests later.”

They talk about the day, and how much fun they had. Finally, Gina comes to the point. “You know, the little sex game, that was Carola’s idea. She’s the crazy one. I know it was stupid but...well, thanks for picking me. When we rolled the dice, I hoped I would win. I would’ve enjoyed it with you. And so would’ve Carola. You know that, don’t you? But maybe it’s better without spectators.”

Barry is surprised at this open invitation. He’ll have to get used to Brazilia again. He lovingly embraces Gina. Soon, there’s no stopping them. She’s surprised when he asks her if she takes the pill. “You’re O.K.?” she asks.

“Yeah, you can trust me.” Barry knows he’s safe, and he likes the thought that she’s irresponsible enough to have unprotected sex with him. He knows he’s safe because it’s Parabarry who’s active here. Pleasure-wise, it’s the same for Barry, but with guaranteed safety.

Later, he calls a taxi for Gina. She’s surprised that he doesn’t want her to stay overnight. “Gabriela comes back early tomorrow. I don’t want her to see you here.”

“But I don’t care, why do you worry about that? You have something going on with Gabriela?”

Parabarry shakes his head and watches Gina leave astonished. Before she can get into the taxi, Barry runs out and gives her a flower. That’ll do the trick. What she doesn’t know is that the real Barry is still lying in Gabriela’s apartment and wants to end the paraprojection.

Not every day goes so easily. The next day he finds it hard to explain the missing car to the doctor. He hasn’t thought about it, and his explanation turns out to be vague and unsatisfactory.

Gina and Barry become good friends. Carlos sends his congratulations via e-mail. Gina teaches Barry about the country and its inhabitants. Barry makes a lot of friends through her. In spite of many intimate nights, they both try to remain independent. Barry

also becomes very attached to Gabriela; she thinks of Barry first, not herself.

One day, Parabarry breaks the last barriers between him and Gabriela. What a woman! What a great, wonderful woman! She is devoted but demands nothing of him. Brasilia is a paradise for interesting men. The receptions and parties at the embassies are the best hunting grounds. However, the hunter sometimes becomes the hunted.

Sometimes Barry also uses his parability to help others. Once, he manages to keep a man from jumping off a high rise. He learns about the man's problem and decides to help him out with some money without the man ever noticing it.

But Barry also lives through low points. While present at a speech of one of the only honest politicians he knows, he realizes that the man will soon be assassinated. Even though he detects the assassin, it takes him too long to initiate the paraprojection. It would've been very difficult to help without giving his secret away. It's soon too late. Barry struggles for a long time, blaming himself for not intervening in time. He feels he has somehow become an accomplice. Little by little, Barry can't help considering about Marcus' ideas again. Maybe a parabilitist shouldn't stay alone.

After weeks of joy, Barry starts to find his life boring. Spontaneously, he decides to visit João and Angela in Rio. They celebrate parties and spend quiet evenings together. When João and Angela leave Rio for a two-day meeting in Porto Allegre, Barry gives all the servants these days off and invites Julia over for a photo shoot. "Bring a couple of things to put on and take off," he tells her on the phone.

"Don't worry," Julia replies.

The shoot turns out to be a pleasure for Barry. Julia knows how to put on make up and how to behave in front of a camera. The word "shy" is not part of her vocabulary. She enjoys undressing, then getting dressed again in front of Barry. She strikes whatever pose he demands and gives a running commentary on what she does and how she does it. Even though they also shoot pictures of their touching bodies, Barry promised himself not to try to seduce her. After a

while, Julia understands the border and behaves completely professionally.

After seven hours and several thousand clicks of the shutter, they're both completely exhausted. "There's one thing I want to show you, but when we're finished," Julia says. Barry agrees.

For the first time, Julia changes in a different room. When she comes back, she is wearing a white silk bathrobe, a diamond choker and high heel sandals trimmed with lead crystals. As she slowly drops the robe, her beautiful breasts are exposed, but Barry knows them already. When the bathrobe falls completely, something new catches his eye. In addition to the choker and the sandals, she wears a tiny slip trimmed with diamonds. Barry gets dizzy for a second. The slip! It's the slip from the Stern robbery! The only piece they couldn't find. Barry is so fascinated that he leaves his finger on the shutter release, taking picture after picture.

"You know what you're wearing there?"

"You mean, the cute slip?"

"Of course I mean the slip. That's the slip from the Stern heist. You know you're wearing stolen goods, don't you? They can put you away for that."

"I don't think so," Julia replies coldly. "Alfredo gave me that as a gift. How am I supposed to know that it was stolen? They always talked about one missing piece in the newspapers. They never said it was a slip. And who could possibly think that Stern has transparent underwear in their collection? Come, have one more look. You'll never see it again." She steps closer to Barry and takes his hand. "Look how soft it feels inside, and how hard outside. I tell you it's a pleasure to wear something like this. With every movement I become aware that I'm wearing something special. I only take it off for someone I really love. Unfortunately, you're not in that circle, Barry."

Barry laughs, "You win, Julia. I know what you're wearing there. It was made by Swarovsky's of Tyrol. I've seen a couple of slips like that...also bought some. But you're right: they were always well appreciated as gifts. There is also a matching bra. You should find someone to give that to you too. Anyway, it fits you perfectly. Come on now, we're finished here. Get dressed for dinner. We

deserve something delicious.” Julia doesn’t know what to think of that.

The harshness of the conversation softens over dinner. Barry feels as if he is on stage in the presence of sexy, extravagant Julia. People keep looking at them. Obviously, some men get a kick out of being seen with a woman like that. Barry can’t help thinking that she reminds him of an elephant: she’s nice to look at but he wouldn’t like to own one.

Fortunately, Julia can’t read Barry’s thoughts. She takes the rolls of film and they bid each other goodbye like old friends. A couple of days later, Barry receives a package. It contains more than 2000 photos and a short note: “Not all the pictures came out all right, but so many of them are so fantastic that you owe me nothing. Rather it’s me who owes you something. Don’t forget to keep your promise: you can only use the pictures commercially if I give my O.K. You can show them to your friends though, if you want. I’d feel honored if you show me off, but watch out for the pictures with a red x on the back. Those are only for you and for you only.”

Barry tries to find the most suggestive pictures. None of them have a red cross on the back. It takes him a while to realize that only those photos showing the diamond slip are marked.

Barry is more than surprised when he gets a phone call from Hannelore, the German tourist he met in Rio. They talk on the phone for a long time and she manages to convince him to visit her in Germany. They don’t agree on a particular date. How often in life do coincidences play a greater role than you realize? His stay at Hannelore’s will have significant consequences.

And there is yet another pleasant surprise: one day Victoria, the flight attendant from NZ is standing at his door. She has a couple of days off and has decided to visit Barry. She soon understands that she’s only number three behind Gabriela and Gina. She accepts this and is ready to enjoy the all-beautiful Brasilia. He makes sure to show her the interesting architecture of the government buildings, mostly designed by Niemeyer, and how they fit into Brasilia’s overall design, created by Lucia Costa. Both architects put an emphasis on water. Costa was obsessed with fighting the heat of the

dry plateau by creating an artificial lake. Niemeyer took the obsession even further and made sure all government buildings stand in water or have waterfalls coming down the exterior walls.

Niemeyer also built *Palácio da Alvorada*, the seat of the presidency, located directly on the lake, the Supreme Court building with its beautiful sculptures, the cathedral with its three floating angels, and the Square of the Three Powers. He also conceptualized the traffic system, which doesn't have intersections or traffic lights but consists of one-way streets and traffic circles, which have to be entered on the left side.

Barry also shows Victoria the blue church, a square building consisting mostly of blue glass and the university with traffic running underneath it. He explains to her the idea behind the Superquadras: in order to create a friendly, village-like atmosphere, they are square-headed with parks and sport facilities inside.²⁵

They attend parties all weekend. Guests can go to sleep wherever there's a bed or hammock. On her last day, Gabriela takes them to a macumba. Suddenly, Gabriela joins in the ecstatic drumming and starts to make moves and spasms that seem impossible for a human.

They all end up dancing in Barry's apartment and finally fall into his bed like sacks of potatoes. When Victoria has to leave the next morning, they're so tired that they still can't understand exactly what happened last night.

Barry takes Victoria to the airport. Everything's normal, cool, and rational again. When they embrace each other to say goodbye, they both know they will meet again.

Many times, Gabriela has told Barry about *Cristalina*, the village where her family lives about 150 kilometers south of Brasília, and its mines. Now it's time to introduce them. Gabriela's family insists that they come to a party on their little pineapple plantation. Humans, animals and plants live here in unusual harmony. However, after many apologies, a piglet is butchered for the party. Before it gets dark, Gabriela takes Barry to a small quartz mine on her parents' property. Their relationship changes suddenly. She's the master here. She shows him magnificent quartz crystals and

²⁵ The idea only worked for half of the superquadras. For the other half, intrigue dominates instead of friendship.

hands one over the size of a fist. It contains black threads. Barry notices that the stone is special. He can feel strange power, which seems to make him and his parabilities stronger. Gabriela watches him closely.

“You’re one of them,” she says.

For a long time Barry won’t be sure what that means. “What kind of threads are these?”

“The straight ones are carbon threads. The kinky ones and the spots on the outside are silatraviate, or something like that. It seems to strengthen unusual powers. Keep this stone, Barry. It belongs to you. I knew it when I saw you for the first time.”

Barry pockets the stone. They walk back to Gabriela’s family where the piglet roasts over a fire. Many friendly faces welcome them. Now, Gabriela is his servant again and he is a person of respect. Barry feels stronger than ever before. He can feel it’s the stone. Suddenly, he knows he won’t be able to stay in Brasilia. He looks at Gabriela. She has tears in her eyes.

6 Sandra

March 2011

Sandra's life is going well in Santa Monica, California, just west of Los Angeles. She lives on 2nd Street. It's a great home for a jogger, only a couple of hundred meters away from the narrow park which lies between Ocean Avenue and the cliffs overhanging Palisades Beach. It has become her habit to go for a jog before breakfast. With the wind coming in off the ocean, she hardly notices the nearby traffic. Homeless people are everywhere. Many of them are already drunk or still drunk. When Sandra moved in, it was hard to get used to their presence. Even though she still finds it hard to accept the fact that people sleep covered in paper and old blankets while the rest of the population is so wealthy, she has become used to their presence. They are as much a part of the city as is the wooden Santa Monica Municipal Pier, the tourists, and the expensive boutiques.

She knows most of the old men patiently sitting on the pier and pretending to fish. You can't really catch anything there. Sometimes, when she has a day off, she runs down to the beach and takes a swim in the cold Pacific. She feels healthy and fit and she likes the looks she gets from men.

She likes her job. She's the head of the personnel department of a big bank and she knows her work is well appreciated. Her coworkers admire her unusually good interpersonal skills. Her bosses give her regular raises; apparently they are afraid of losing her.

Sandra knows the secret of her success: she's an empath. She can intuitively detect moods and changes of mood, feelings, anxieties, arousal, boredom, etc. Not long ago, she used this skill in a more important position. Seven years ago, she still worked for the PPU, the Para Psychological Unit of the European Union. Back then, Klaus Baumgartner was the head of the PPU. It was his job to form a group of parabilitists for "special missions." When she thinks back to those days, she can't help feeling a bit melancholy. She liked being part of high politics and international conferences. Her

parabilities were a great help to the EU and sometimes even for all of mankind. For example, she once helped to end a hijacking without bloodshed.

But the whole thing started to get out of hand. It was Klaus' job as a parascout to identify parabilitists. He finally identified Marcus, the strongest telekinet ever found. The trouble started when Klaus tried to convince Marcus to work for the PPU.

Even though she could read his feelings, Sandra always found it hard to understand Marcus, who didn't want to subordinate personal goals to political ends. When he finally refused to work with the PPU, the people behind Klaus showed their true faces. They decided to kill Marcus. When Marcus escaped, all of the people in the PPU were relieved. They had already declared him officially dead when he and his wife Maria really died in a plane crash.

The whole Marcus thing made Klaus and his coworkers realize that they and other parabilitists were seen as dangerous mutants, even monsters. They hadn't believed Marcus' warnings at first. Klaus was bound for years by a rigid contract with the EU Commission. Even though his every movement was watched, he managed to inform his coworkers of the true goals of the EU in Marcus' case.

Sandra quickly managed to acquire a new identity. Sandra Hill from England became Sandra Baker of the USA, born in Boston, now living in Los Angeles County. It took her a while to decide to use her parability to find a job. There were many options. With her ability to sense buyers' true feelings, she would've done very well in real estate, for example, but she didn't think that would've been fair. She would've made a first-class motivational coach too. Finally, she decided to start a personnel service. She was not surprised at her success. She was so good at placing mid and upper level professionals that word spread quickly about her abilities. Eventually, a bank offered to buy her business for a handsome sum, but only on the condition that she agreed to head their personnel department.

Selling her company made her financially independent. Working with and consulting for thousands of people allowed her to hone her

paraskills. Now she knows immediately when someone is lying or hiding something and can identify people's emotional strengths and weaknesses.

Despite her success, Sandra's life is not without its problems. She uses her paraskills on a daily basis, but rarely to the advantage of anyone but herself. She feels guilty about that. But she also knows how dangerous it would be to expose her secret. This was made painfully clear when her name was drawn for jury duty. She knew right away that the defendant was innocent. She also knew that one of the main witnesses was the perpetrator of the crime. The whole trial went

badly for the defendant and it took all her strength to convince the rest of the jury of his innocence. However, she was not able to implicate the true criminal. It would've been easy for her to keep a lot of innocent people off of death row. The worst thing is that there's no one to talk to about it.

Another problem is troubling her even more: even though she is a little over thirty, pretty, fit, successful, and wants a partner, she can't have a relationship. On every first date she feels every one of her date's most intimate feelings. That's more than she can handle. For example, she once felt how her date was comparing his feelings for her with his feelings for another woman, but when she asked him about it, he flat-out lied. Sandra learned not to ask questions but she never learned how to keep from getting hurt. It still hurts when a guy seems interested, but in reality he's hot for the girl in the miniskirt who just walked by. Sometimes, she gets feelings like "I'd like to spend the night with you but I'd never leave my girlfriend for you." She also notices how her dates evaluate every statement she makes and how they measure every centimeter of her body.

What makes it even worse is that they don't know about it. And when she kisses and touches someone, she can never completely let go because her partner's feelings influence her own. It's like feedback. She's happy she can only read the feelings and not the thoughts. She prays for the day she will learn how to turn her parability off.

One rainy morning she decides to go to the Santa Monica Mall instead of jogging. As usual she enters a small drug store. She is welcomed by a pretty woman about the same age as her who she has never seen before. "New here?" Sandra asks.

"Not really, I own the place. Darlene called in sick this morning so I had to jump in," she answers with a smile.

Sandra can feel her relaxed friendliness and self-esteem. "How did you come to own a great store like this? Did you do it all yourself? You must be a millionaire," jokes Sandra. To her surprise, the owner reacts with very strong feelings and Sandra gets interested. "Or...did you inherit the place?" For which she receives a simple and blunt yes. She knows it's a lie. At the same time she registers sadness, nostalgia and thankfulness. "Please excuse my nosiness. I was lucky enough to have a friend once who helped me start my business. For a second I thought that something similar might have happened to you." Sandra notices how the owner's mood changes suddenly. She notices a wave of interest.

"I don't think you're nosy. It's nice to chat a little. My name's Monika—with a 'k'." She offers her hand.

"My name's Sandra. I shop here all the time."

Monika doesn't react to this information. "I had a friend too who once helped me a lot; a remarkable guy from Austria; a gambler, though, and a bit of a magician. Unfortunately, we're not in contact anymore."

Sandra can feel her sadness and her gratefulness again. Her intuition forces her to continue: "I spent some time in Austria, Vienna to be exact. I met some really nice people there. But my best friend there, Marcus, died in a plane crash."

Sandra notices Monika's enormous excitement. She hesitates for a moment as though she can hardly speak. "You...you don't happen to mean Marcus Waller, do you?"

Sandra is overwhelmed. "Yes, I do. Are we really talking about the same person?"

Monika can't help staring at Sandra. "I'm not sure. Maybe there's more than one in Vienna. But the one I'm talking about is still alive."

Sandra knows that six years ago there was only one Marcus Waller. They must be talking about the same person. But why does

Monika insist that he's still alive? "I met Marcus seven years ago in Vienna. Were you in Vienna too?" she asks.

"No, I worked in Las Vegas back then. We got pretty lucky playing roulette. That was the real basis for this shop." It's clear now that they're talking about the same Marcus, but Monika wants to get rid of the last of her doubts. "He means a lot to me, so I kept a picture." Monika shows Sandra a picture of Marcus and her standing in a hotel lobby, both surprised by the photographer.²⁶

"What a crazy coincidence, but why do you think he's still alive? He died in a plane crash, years ago."

"I never heard about that but I'm sure he's still alive."

Monika and Sandra are deep in conversation. They don't even notice the other customers are complaining about the delay in getting served. Sandra steps back but Monika, almost panicking, motions her to come back. "Please wait; we have to talk." That's exactly what Sandra wanted to do too but customers keep coming in. They can't wait to exchange more details and decide to meet for dinner after the store closes.

For the rest of the day, Monika can't stop thinking about Sandra and Marcus. She has taken Marcus' advice and started a new life with the casino money. Many times she wanted to look for him even though the idea of a reunion had been dismissed by both of them.

It's the same with Sandra: what does Monika know about Marcus and why does she think he's still alive? If he's really alive then she'll have to find him. She has to find out how he and Maria learned to live with their parabilities. They're the only ones she can talk to because all of her former PPU colleagues have disappeared.

Sandra and Monika find it hard to get into the conversation at first. Neither wants to tell the full truth. Monika tells Sandra about her friendship with Marcus and can't help talking enthusiastically about his feelings for her. But she's not willing to give her the details about their separation. Sandra finds it hard to talk about

²⁶ This picture was taken in the lobby of Caesar's Palace before their trip to Lake Powell. It was taken by the casino Mafia in order to identify them at the tables. See "Experts: The Telekinetic".

Marcus at all because Monika doesn't seem to know about his parabilities.

Sandra tries to ease the conversation into more general themes: esoteric para and irrational phenomena, presuppositions, and special types of intuition. When she notices Monika's growing interest, she goes a step further: "Monika, please don't tell anyone, but I know that somehow I have a special sense for other people's feelings. It even scares me sometimes. My intuitions are very strong sometimes. For example, I know that what I'm telling you now appeals to you a lot. It's only a guess, but I think your intuition is also stronger than usual. Is that true?"

Monika looks baffled. "I think you're right there, Sandra. I never dared tell anyone. Sometimes my intuition tells me where somebody is and if he's well or not. It's never failed me. It happened with Marcus too. One day he came back to Las Vegas and even though he hadn't told me about it, I suddenly knew he was there. That's why I know he's still alive. Call me a nut, but I'm absolutely sure."

Sandra still has her doubts, but she feels Monika is being earnest. "How often have you experienced this type of intuition?"

"A couple of times."

Sandra sees she's lying. "You mean, very often."

"Yes." This time she doesn't lie.

Sandra realizes that she has just been introduced to a new parability, new for her at least. Monika is a paralocator. "So you can find people and tell if they're still alive or not."

"Yes, believe it or not."

"I believe you, Monika."

"You do?" Monika squints skeptically.

"Yes, I do. And you have to help me find Marcus. It's very important for me, and I believe it's important to you too, isn't it?"

Monika nods.

"So how should we start, Monika? Can you feel how far away someone is?"

"It depends on the person. It's not so difficult with Marcus. I know he's at least 3000 miles away. Theoretically, we could fly systematically to different places in the world and I would know when he is nearer or further. So we could at least come close. I

wouldn't really be able to find him, but I could get you within a couple of miles."

"You're great. I know how we'll do it."

Since Barry managed to escape, Marcus has been concentrating on SR Inc. again. He is busy continuing the pararesearch. He regularly meets up with Aroha to learn about the Mindcaller and the parabilities it augments.

Despite their hard efforts, the Mindcaller keeps its secrets. On the one hand, it enables Aroha to contact her grandmother and to communicate in an unusual one-sided way. It turns out that her grandmother is not aware of the conversations they've had through the Mindcaller. On the other hand, the Mindcaller seems to be a reservoir of old knowledge. Both aspects seem to be connected with each other. In a miraculous way, the Mindcaller memorizes nature scenes and human knowledge. However, Aroha is not able to retrieve information anytime she wants. Rather, the Mindcaller chooses the situation in which to almost impose the information on her. It's the most irrational of all the paraphenomena they've encountered so far. Maybe the missing half is really the reason for that.

Marcus' research is interrupted by bad news from Austria. His mother is sick with a stomach ulcer and has to have an operation as soon as possible. The doctors in Graz say her condition is critical. Marcus decides to break his resolution and to risk returning to Austria.

It's been six years. He now wears glasses, has grown a beard, and his hair is much shorter. If he's careful, no one will recognize him. He prefers the Singapore to the Los Angeles connection. If he didn't, Monika would've been surprised to suddenly feel him very near.

Via Singapore and Frankfurt, Marcus flies directly to Graz and goes to the hospital immediately. His mother had her operation three days ago and everything went well. She will be able to leave the hospital sooner than anyone expected. The happiness about the

reunion is thus even greater and they start making plans for another visit to New Zealand.

“Don’t you think it’s now safe enough now for the whole family to visit us here,” his father wants to know. “You don’t have to stay with us in Eisenerz. You could find yourself a nice apartment somewhere reasonably nearby. You still have that house in Tragoess, don’t you? How about Salzkammergut, that’s a really nice area. Through Gesaeuse and Ennstal, it would only take us an hour to get to Bad Mitterndorf. You always liked it there, didn’t you?”

“That sounds nice, father; I’ll talk about it with Maria.”

Marcus stays in Graz until his mother is ready to leave the hospital. Then he risks a short visit to his parents’ house in Eisenerz. It saddens him to find his hometown even poorer than it was years ago. But the Leopoldsteiner Lake is still beautiful, and he thinks back to the day he met Maria there for the first time.

Marcus spends his last days in Austria in a beautiful apartment at the Biedermeier-Dorint Hotel in Vienna. He spends the greater part of the day in the Nationalbibliothek (the national library) and tries to find out about unusual occurrences. Slowly, a vague and almost unbelievable suspicion grows inside him. But he knows that he’ll have to do more research on it. Although the library is excellent, it often takes ages to procure an old book from the archives.

He generally avoids using his parability, but once, he can’t help it. When he sees a child about to be run over by a reversing car, he uses his pseudohands to push the kid out of the way. The mother saw the tragedy coming. She can’t understand how her baby suddenly flew through the air and landed softly on the sidewalk. Marcus worries, unnecessarily, that his skills will be discovered again. The woman doesn’t even dare to tell the story to anyone. No one would believe her. From now on, she decides to do without her afternoon schnapps.

Back at his hotel Marcus starts to get dressed for the dinner with his sister and her husband. Suddenly, the phone rings. “Hello Marcus,” says a familiar voice. “It’s me, Monika, Las Vegas, remember?”

“Monika! How the hell... where are you? How did you find me? What’s up?” spouts Marcus excitedly.

Monika laughs. "I'll tell you everything. And I'll have at least one surprise for you. But I'm afraid I'll have to blackmail you. Remember how you told me about the mountains in Austria? I want you to take me on a hike, nothing too difficult. I'll be at the hotel in half an hour and then we'll leave right away. You'll be free of me tomorrow evening, but then you'll know a couple of interesting things. Now get started picking a nice little hike for us. We'll drive to the trailhead tonight. I want to spend the evening with you in the mountains."

"Monika, are you nuts? I already have plans for tonight..."

"Aww, too bad for you! I came all the way from America just for you, so whatever your plans for the evening are, you'll have to change them. But it's really up to you. You can either agree to my conditions or you'll never see me again. And you'll never hear what I have to tell you," Monika wagers.

"All right! I agree. I'll see you in the lobby in thirty minutes."

"Super! One more warning: don't make any plans for tomorrow evening, there's someone else who wants to see you too. I'll tell you more soon." Monika hangs up.

Marcus is confused. 'Good Lord', he thinks. He speeds up his subjective time so he can think about the whole thing in detail. What is he to do? Well, first he'll have to cancel dinner with his sister. She won't like that. He'll have to reschedule the dinner at Palais Schwarzenberg's winter garden to the day after tomorrow. He'll have to send her a bouquet and a note of apology.

But where should he take Monika? The easy hikes near Vienna, especially the Rax, are too crowded. The beautiful climbing routes like the Wildfahrte or the Haidsteig are too difficult. He can't risk going to the mountains near Eisenerz. Too many people know him there. Maybe they should do the Edelraute Hut first and then the Boenstein. No, that's probably a bit too rocky for them. 'I don't even have hiking boots,' he thinks. 'Maybe a bit further north, to the Puehringer Hut by way of Lake Lahngang or to the Tauplitz and the romantic Steiersee?'

But the weather situation in northern Styria is not very promising. Maybe they should do something a bit further south. The Hochhobir,

that's it! They can drive to Eisenkappel today and leave early in the morning over the spectacular path to the Eisenkappel Hut. It's only two hours from there to the peak. The last couple of hundred meters are high alpine with steep slopes to the north and northwest and a great view. Rainwear, something to drink, and good walking shoes are all they will need, not even a rucksack.

Marcus changes back to normal time, makes a couple of phone calls to cancel the dinner, reserves two rooms in a gasthaus in Eisenkappel, changes for the hike, and goes down to the lobby.

When he arrives, Monika comes in. She's wearing shorts, an airy t-shirt and a saucy straw hat that matches the straw handbag over her shoulder. Yes, he has seen her like that before. She wore almost exactly the same thing when they took their trip to Lake Powell. She must've done that intentionally. He embraces her, looks her up and down, and likes what he sees.

"You look great! But you said you wanted to go to the mountains. Do you have all you need? It'll be pretty cold tomorrow morning; do you have a rain jacket or something?"

Monika laughs, "Don't worry, I have everything I need."

They leave the city via Ungargasse and the Guertel and get on the autobahn to Carinthia. Monika doesn't ask Marcus the destination. She's too busy asking him about his private life.

Marcus interrupts her. "I'll tell you everything but first it's your turn. How did you find me and why were you looking for me in the first place?"

"Marcus, before I start, you have to promise not to tell anyone what I'm going to tell you now, O.K.?"

Marcus nods.

Monika continues carefully, "First, I want you to know that I used your money well. I bought a store in Santa Monica and have become a real businesswoman."

Marcus looks surprised. He only knows Monika as an exclusive escort girl.

"Stop looking like that! It's true! And I've thought about you a lot. And when I thought about you, I noticed that I had a special "skill". Let's call it a paraskill. I never noticed it before. I can tell if people I like are near me or not. For example, a couple of months

after we had separated, I noticed that you weren't in Europe any more, and that you were closer all of a sudden."

Marcus shrugs. 'That's probably when I took the trip to the Bahamas,' he thinks.

"By the way," Monika continues, "Remember when I warned you over the phone, you know, when I changed my voice, it was during your second Las Vegas trip. I couldn't have even known you were back, but I knew it. I knew you were back in Las Vegas."

'Well, that sounds plausible,' Marcus thinks.

"And then, about three years ago, you were very close all of a sudden. You were probably in L.A., right? Then you were a little further away for a few days and then you went back to L.A. again. And since then you have always been pretty far away."

Marcus is fascinated. It's all true. After the Great Accident he flew to Los Angeles, then to his lawyer in Las Vegas for two days, then back to Los Angeles, and then back to New Zealand.

"In the meantime, you were far, but not really far away. You were probably on vacation somewhere, maybe Hawaii?"

Marcus figures it out: that's when he went on vacation in French Polynesia!

Monica continues, "By the way, I can do this with all the people I know. I didn't want to believe it at first, but I really have this special ability. And then, out of nowhere, by complete coincidence, I met this woman a little while ago. Her name is Sandra. We discovered we both knew you. She wanted to find you at whatever cost. She's the one you'll meet tomorrow evening."

Marcus is unsettled. He wonders, 'Is she talking about Sandra Hill, the empath?' He lets her continue.

"I wanted to see you again too. But don't worry, six years is a long time, and remember, I never made any claims on you. I thought it would just be nice to see an old friend again. But Sandra, she really can't wait to see you. I don't know why. Were you two ever in love?"

"No, we only knew each other professionally."

"So it's all about her skills. You know that she can sense feelings?"

Marcus gets even more uneasy; how much does Monika know? She's not stupid. But how can she talk about paraskills in such an innocent way? He finds it hard to believe all this.

"So anyway, we decided to find you. We knew that you wouldn't call yourself Marcus Waller anymore and we knew you were hiding somewhere. So we had three possibilities: use my or her paraskill alone, or combine the two. So we did the latter. I knew you were still alive; you should've seen how happy Sandra was when I finally convinced her of that. She always talked about some plane crash that you got yourself killed in, but I could feel that you were alive, somewhere far away, but alive. It was Sandra's idea to visit your father in Eisenherz. When we landed in Vienna, I knew that you were somewhere nearby, but I was sure you weren't in Vienna."

'That must've been when I was still in Graz,' he thinks.

"Sandra asked your dad a couple of harmless questions; I didn't really understand why, and then she was all happy all of a sudden and told me that you were in a hotel in Vienna, not far from your sister's apartment. The rest was simple. You were careless enough not to change your first name."

"Do you remember the questions Sandra asked my father?"

"Yes I can. Do you want the answers too, and how she interpreted them? Her sense for other people's feelings is amazing. She started like this:

Sandra: 'We're looking for Marcus'

Father: 'Don't you know he's dead?'

Sandra's interpretation: a flat out lie.

Sandra: 'But we heard he's in Vienna to visit friends and family.'

Father: 'Absolute nonsense!'

Sandra's interpretation: 'He's visiting relatives in Vienna'

"Two questions later she was absolutely sure: You were in Vienna staying near your sister's. Not bad, huh? I made sure that I would get to meet you first. Happy now?"

Marcus is overwhelmed and very thoughtful. Monika seems to be a real parabilitist and he'll meet Sandra, who is a para for sure, tomorrow. If he could convince them to come back to Great Barrier with him, the group would be much, much stronger. If he knew that Monika and Sandra had met a nice young man named Barry in the Senator Lounge at Frankfurt airport, he would be even more excited.

Monika and Sandra could probably find him. Their group in New Zealand would soon reach the “critical mass” they are looking for. This number would allow them to reveal themselves eventually.

Monika and Marcus talk about the things that have happened over the past few years. Marcus leaves out certain aspects because he’s still not absolutely sure that he will win Monika over to the group. He also still feels physically attracted to her. He undresses her in his mind but soon blocks the image. Is she still as sexy naked as she was seven years ago? Would it be possible to live with her and Maria together on great Barrier Island? Carefully, and maybe with a bit of disappointment, Monika listens as Marcus talks about his happy marriage and his two children. He also mentions their paraskills but doesn’t describe them in detail. Monika figures that Marcus hasn’t given her all the details he knows, but now she understands why he has booked two single rooms.

The place is just outside Eisenkappel, near the Slovenian border. The red lights coming through the windows remind her of something else at first but it turns out to be a nice, quiet, country guesthouse. After a simple dinner, Monika and Marcus go to bed. They will get up at five, “mountain goat style,” as Marcus puts it.

Monika is a bit disappointed that the evening is so short, but she really enjoys their drive to the Eisenkappel Hut the next morning. She likes watching the mountain world wake up. The trail to the peak of the Hochhobir is not difficult. Marcus tells her stories about the old silver mines here (that’s how she remembers him, always knowledgeable, always spinning yarns) but they don’t just talk, they also flirt. This becomes apparent in the poem that Marcus writes in the *gipfelbuch*²⁷. The poem proves that Marcus, the experienced voyeur, somehow manages to see her naked again.

²⁷ Almost every Austrian mountain has a huge cross on its summit. At the foot of the cross you can be pretty certain to find a tin box that contains a book and a pencil. It’s an old and living tradition to sign your name and the date of your hike in the book. Some people, such as the author and translators of this book, have the habit of writing pithy verse or drawing stupid pictures in them.

Hochobir

*A long ago divided couple
Hiked straight up here from Eisenkappel
We reached the peak of Hochobir
And had a sandwich and a beer
The sun is warm the groundhogs whistle
Among the edelweiss and thistle
We also spied a female deer
And Monika just loved it here*

*Warning: if you unfold this paper, you declare that you are
eighteen years or older and that you're not offended by erotic
material. If you're not, then just don't open it and go on to the next
page.*

*On top of it she soon got naked
She makes me hot! I just can't take it
Just try to conjure up the scene
My heart beats with adrenaline
Hikers, far in other reaches
Can see her apples, pears and peaches
I'm sure they like what they can see
I'm also sure they envy me
So we got ready for some action
I thought I'd get some satisfaction
But then she spied the far intruders
And covered up her cheeks and hooters!
Thanks, Monika
Signed,*

Marcus (Styrian poet in heat)

P.S. from Monika

*Some girls, they play so hard to get
But that's not me, you wanna bet?
They all get naked on the beaches
So why not here too far to reach us
The men who've seen me in the buff
Could never, ever get enough
So Marcus, Mary, Peter, Paul*

Come on over, love me all!

Just one more remark for Marcus: first, I'm not serious about the last line, it was just necessary for rhyming, not an invitation. Second, if you lied about the tradition that a couple has to get naked on a mountaintop if the weather's all right and there's no one else around, be sure to expect revenge.

All in harmony, they drive back to Vienna. Marcus shows Monika the ruins of Castle Griffin and the nearby limestone cave. They make a quick stop in Bad Waltersdorf to use the sauna of the local spa. They arrange to have breakfast the next morning at Marcus' hotel. He wants Sandra to be there too. He'll try to convince her tonight over dinner.

It was Sandra's strange idea to meet Marcus at the Pfister, a typical Viennese *beisel*²⁸ in Simmering. Both the service and the food are great. The waiter notices that they want some privacy and leaves them alone during the meal. When it comes to the topic of parabilities, Marcus and Sandra are in agreement. She tells him about her doubts, her loneliness and that she feels that she should be doing more to help others. He tells her about his plans for a paramevement in New Zealand and about the research center. She is especially impressed by their plans to develop mechanisms that would allow parabilitists to turn their skills off and on and protect "normal" people against them. This would also allow her to have relationships that go beyond the first date. Sandra would have been even more fascinated if Marcus had mentioned Barry.

Sandra is not surprised to hear that the group in New Zealand doesn't have any financial difficulties. Marcus suggests that she joins them. Sandra soon decides to accept his offer but she tries not to show it at first. Marcus also wants to know about Monika's parabilities. He's still not sure if she only pretends to have them.

"Marcus, I had the impression that you know Monika pretty well."

Marcus gets embarrassed a bit.

²⁸ A *beisel* is a Viennese institution. It's a mix of restaurant and living room serving typical, simple Viennese cuisine. Beisels are mostly found in working class areas like Simmering.

Sandra adds, "Monika is a completely new phenomenon to me. I call it 'paralocation.' I'm sure she can locate people she knows, at least to a certain extent. I thought you were dead but she was certain you were alive. She also always knew how far away you were. But she seems to have no sense of direction in that matter. From a US perspective, New Zealand and Europe don't make a difference to her. But you should try to win her over for your group." Marcus wants to say something but Sandra stops him. "Now keep quiet. I know about your personal problems. I know your wife doesn't know about Monika and the great time you had with her. I know you love Maria but I also know that you still find Monika very attractive. You would be ready to jump her bones right away. Unfortunately, she would like to jump your bones as well. You'll have to somehow learn to live with this. Don't forget, Monika will be a very valuable asset to the group. If you can win Monika, you'll also win me. I'll be able to help you and Maria with your love triangle, and, what's even more important for me, I now believe what you told me and the others about the PPU years ago: we have to be wary of other organizations. In addition, I know that all my personal success over the last years never helped me to overcome my loneliness."

Marcus stares at Sandra. She has said it all. She has encapsulated all his feelings and put them into words. But that's not surprising; after all, she's an empath.

The champagne breakfast in the garden of Hotel Dornit-Biedermeier goes simpler than he foresaw. Marcus asks both Sandra and Monika to join their group on Great Barrier Island. At first, there are some reservations on both sides but they finally agree to accept his conditions. Sandra and Monika will both fly back to Los Angeles first to put their affairs in order. Within six weeks, they will join the group in New Zealand.

Marcus' trip to Austria has turned out to be a true success. He still feels at home in this country. His mother feels much better and he has found two new allies for his cause. It's only his relationship with Monika which troubles him a little. There is a lot he will have to discuss with Maria. After a series of short good byes to friends and family, he flies back to Auckland via Singapore. Maria and the kids meet him at the airport. They've all missed him a lot. Maria

and Marcus fall into each other's arms like young lovers. Marcus is sure that nothing will come between him and Maria. He cannot allow that.

7 Encounter in New Zealand

March 2011

Maria and Marcus have much to talk about. In addition to the general news, there are also new developments from the research department. Marcus is sure that the information he gathered in the library in Vienna will complement it. He can't wait to have his suspicion confirmed: that there have been parabilitists since the dawn of man.

He tells Maria about Sandra and that she will join the group. Maria is euphoric: "Maybe that will even help us to find other former PPU members and to win them over too."

Marcus tells her how Sandra was able to find him with Monika's help. He doesn't leave out the fact that he had an affair with Monika during his time in the States.

"It's not necessary to tell me about all your little sins, Marcus. You never talked much about your girlfriends, so why start now?" She looks at him questioningly but answers herself, "You still find her attractive, don't you?"

Marcus nods. "Yeah, I do somehow, and I'm afraid she is still a little attached to me as well. But trust me, Maria, I know where I belong. I promise to stay true to you and I swear that I always have been. I just had to tell you about her. I don't want you to get the wrong idea, especially when you hear about the trip to the Hochobir."

Marcus tells her about it, carefully omitting the scene on the summit. He's happy now that they didn't go further. Maria trusts him, but she knows that Monika's presence could lead to tensions. "Well, I'm really eager to meet this Monika, as much as I want to see Sandra again."

Maria and Marcus take Lena along when they pick up Sandra and Monika from the airport. They are curious to see if they 'glow' for Lena or not. After the long, exhausting flight, Sandra and Monika appreciate the friendly welcome. Lena's reaction proves right away that they both have strong paraskills.

"You'll have plenty of time later on to visit Auckland, so now let us show you your new home," Marcus explains as they walk to the part of the airport reserved for private flights. Flying in the Moller 600, Sandra and Monika get a first impression of the unique infrastructure of Great Barrier Island. Right away, they fall in love with the buildings, and the location with its caves, the waterfall and the beach.

From the first moment, they feel part of the family. Maria is happy that Marcus was open about Monika. It's obvious that there's still some fire left, but they both try to keep it low. Maria even understands why Marcus is attracted to her: she's charming, her German is as perfect as her English, and when she first gets naked into the whirlpool, Maria has to admit she likes what she sees.

When they have breakfast together for the first time, it finally hits Maria and Marcus that their group is now six strong, six parabilistis who will permanently live on Great Barrier Island, or so they hope. Aroha stops by later that morning and they decide to all go to Auckland together. Marcus can't wait to get the news from SR Inc. Maria will do the shopping and Aroha will show Sandra and Monika around the city.

Sandra and Monika spend the first three days like tourists: they need to get to know Great Barrier Island, Auckland and the areas around them a little better.

On the third day Maria, Marcus, Sandra and Monika sit down together to formulate plans for the future. Sandra will have two main responsibilities: she will be working with SR Inc. and she'll be needed for special operations which require her parabilities. After she has screened the personnel on Great Barrier Island and confirmed their loyalty, she will next scan the feelings of SR Inc.'s employees. This is especially important for those employees who know about the individual parabilities. Before they can tell them about Sandra and Monika's paraskills, and before they can allow them to take part in experiments, they have to make sure that everyone in the research department is trustworthy.

Monika's part is not clear at first. It's necessary that she meet all the coworkers and other important people so that she will be able to locate them in case of emergency.

Monika and Sandra's first day brings a surprise straightaway. While Sandra is having lunch with some of her coworkers in a food court, she notices a man at a table nearby. He keeps looking over at them and appears to be trying to listen to their conversation. Sandra concentrates on his feelings and realizes, to her surprise, that this man has been told to observe them. The man turns out to be Dick Entwistle, a member of the Special Supervisory Group formed by the Prime Minister of New Zealand herself.

She immediately informs Marcus about it. He is very worried: do people outside SR Inc. suspect something or is it just industrial espionage? "Sandra, would you mind having a go at this guy and try to find out who he's working for? Monika told me how you located me by reading my father's reactions."

Sandra smiles. "It's just that it will be pretty hard to approach him. He knows I work for SR Inc. so why would he answer my questions in the first place? We'll have to think of something."

When they talk about it over dinner, Monika comes up with a solution. "Describe the man to me exactly. When you have lunch at the food court again, I'll go to eat there too, but I won't sit at your table. If he's there again, I'll flirt with him until he gets interested, that shouldn't be a problem."

None of them have any doubts about that.

Monika continues to lay out her plan. "I'll get him to have coffee with me in the little café near the office, you know the one with the little booths? Sandra will be sitting in the last booth and I'll try to sit down in the one in front of her. That way he won't see you. I'll ask him a couple of questions and Sandra can read his reactions."

They all wonder how the next day will go. As expected, the man is again in the food court. Monika makes such a strong impression on the agent that it's him who engages her in a conversation. He's happy that Monika wants to go for coffee with him. Once they have sat down inside the café, Monika puts her hand on his, leans forward and gives him a flash of cleavage. Now he's willing to answer just about every question.

Sandra, sitting in the booth nearby, is overwhelmed by Dick's feelings of admiration. "Those men!" she thinks contemptuously. Her thoughts are interrupted by Monika's first question.

"You seem to be a nice guy. By the way, my name's Monika, with a 'k'."

Sandra senses: [Dick is full of happiness and hope.]

"My name's Dick. Come here often?" [That's really his name.]

"I started looking at the big bookshop in Queen Street a couple of days ago. You work around here too?"

"Yes, I work for ASB Bank. At least it's more interesting than one of those boring government jobs." [That's a lie; he works for the government.]

Sandra coughs. That's the code they agreed on.

"By the way," Monika continues, "do you get to go to Wellington a lot?"

"No, hardly ever." [He's lying; he goes to Wellington regularly.]

"Too bad. I'm making a presentation for the bookshop in Wellington. I wouldn't mind going with someone who knows the town. The Prime Minister will be there too. I've never met her, have you?"

"I'm afraid my kind of work doesn't interest the PM very much." [A multiple lie; he knows her well and she's very interested in his work.]

Sandra coughs again.

They know enough now. It was Maria who suggested steering the conversation toward the topic of the PM. Since that helicopter trip, she has suspected the PM of knowing more than they want.

"Too bad you don't know your way around Wellington, but maybe we'll meet in the food court again one day. Do you eat there a lot?"

"Yeah, sometimes." [Now he's having that hormone overdose again]

"I have to go now, Dick." Monika gives him a kiss on the cheek. He smells her perfume and looks at her breasts again. He overwhelms Sandra with another wave of lust.

Soon afterwards Maria, Marcus, Sandra and Monika sit in Marcus' office. Sandra gives them the details and Maria is impressed. "What a great team you two are! You're priceless!"

Marcus agrees. "What a piece of luck that we found you. I can't believe that Maria always suspected the PM was behind this."

Sandra knows from Marcus' feelings that it was important for him to openly state his admiration for Maria. The more she learns to interpret feelings, the more she turns into almost a clairvoyant.

"We should find out how much the PM knows about SR Inc.," Maria suggests.

"That won't be hard," Sandra replies. "Marcus, you can send your manager, what's his name, Robert, to the Prime Minister's next press conference. He'll ask a couple of questions and I'll interpret her feelings, her thoughts, really." Sandra feels the others' admiration for her. This makes her happy. Only three days later, they will be able to realize her plan.

The whole group flies to Wellington. During the Industry and Science press conference, Robert asks some questions: "How does the government plan to better support science? Wouldn't it also make sense to support research into unusual phenomena like UFOs and parapsychology?"

When Sandra and Robert meet Maria, Marcus and Monika after the conference, Sandra is completely exhausted with sweat running down her face. Maria is worried. "What's the matter, Sandra, are you sick?"

Sandra waves it off. "No, no, it's just that I've done something I've never tried before. I tried to concentrate on several people at the same time; on several Members of Parliament and others. That was a bit much for me, but it sure paid off. I couldn't believe it at first!"

They all wait silently for her to continue.

"The PM knows that Maria and Marcus have paraskills. She knows that SR Inc. is only a front. But she's the only one who knows that. Neither her colleagues nor her private secretaries know anything about us, but they were really surprised by your questions, Robert. To them, they were ridiculous. But anyway, even the group

that observes us - there must be at least two of them - doesn't know anything about paraskills."

It takes Marcus a while to digest that. Subconsciously, his individual time speeds up. After a while, he shares his thoughts with the others. They wonder how Marcus came to his conclusions so quickly. Only Maria knows how he did it. Only she knows that her husband, and her son Stephan, can influence their individual time. From Maria's feelings and Marcus' mood swings, Sandra knows that he has parabilities that they don't know about yet. This saddens her. For God's sake why can't they all play with an open hand, at least among themselves? She'll have to talk with Marcus about that.

Even Marcus' enthusiasm can't calm her down completely. "Sandra, you would make the best detective in the world. You're great!" Marcus summarizes the basic facts one more time: "The PM knows about our parabilities but doesn't interfere with our activities. That's probably because we've always used them in a positive way. Maybe she wants to have the option of using or abusing us one day. However, she has us under constant observation. All in all, sad as it may be, we're again in the same situation as they were with the PPU in Europe, it's just that they haven't tried to reign us in yet."

"We'll have to grow even stronger," Marcus finishes. "If only we could find Barry and win him over."

This is the first time Barry has been mentioned within the new group. Monika listens up. She looks at Sandra: "Didn't we meet a Barry from New Zealand in the Senator Lounge at Frankfurt Airport on the way to Vienna?" Sandra nods.

When Marcus and Maria describe Barry, they are soon sure. "That's him!" Sandra and Monika exclaim simultaneously.

They cannot believe it. "Do you have any idea where we could find him," Marcus asks, "and where was he going?"

Monika hesitates. "I think...he was going to visit some friend of his in Baden-Baden, Hanny or something I think he said her name was."

"Hannelore," Sandra corrects her.

Marcus thinks back: 'That was about two months ago. Chances are not very high that he's still in Germany. But maybe they can find this Hannelore. She would know where we can find him.' "Monika, could you locate Barry?"

Monika is not sure. "I don't exactly know him well, but there was something special about him. Let me concentrate for a second." She starts to sink into a sort of trance.

After a while she's back with them. "Barry is alive. He's not in Europe any more; he's closer than that, but still more than 5000 kilometers away. I know that for sure. Why is he so important? What's his parability?"

"We don't really know," Marcus answers, "but he's got some kind of a para-doppelganger that he can make appear and disappear. He managed to use that quite to his advantage. We nearly "captured" him but he managed to use this doppelganger to get away. We still don't know why he did that." Marcus stops to think. Sandra knows what he will say before he starts to speak. "Barry is very special. Could you, Sandra and Monika, work together again, find him, and bring him back here?"

Sandra is reluctant. "How do you want us to do that? Even if we find him...I mean...he ran away from you, didn't he? Why would he want to come back now?"

"Well, I was thinking..." Marcus answers calmly, "this Hannelore is in Baden-Baden. That's a nice town about 200 kilometers south of Frankfurt. You'd like it there. Sandra could try to find Hannelore and Monika will always know how far away Barry is. Hannelore will lead you to his current residence. That's if he isn't still in Baden-Baden."

"No he isn't." Sandra knows for sure. "He's a love 'em and leave 'em type through and through. Whoever he's with he's sick of after two months."

Marcus won't be put off so easily. "I think the two of you have a really good chance of finding Barry. And Monika, I think you've got a really good chance of getting him to come back to Auckland with you.

Now it's Monika who reacts defensively. "Marcus, you're still treating me like you treated the girls in Las Vegas. They did whatever you wanted because you had all that cash. Incidentally, this isn't fair. You know everything about the people around you, everything about Sandra and me and our parabilities, but I don't know anything about your skills. All I know is that there's something

special you can do with your thoughts. But that obviously doesn't include convincing me!"

Marcus feels suddenly tired and desperate. Yes, Monika might be right there in many respects. Maybe he still views her like he did back then. Maybe he doesn't treat her right. But the whole thing is so complex. He's still not sure if it's all right to talk openly about all their parabilities. What if they all knew that Sandra can sense their feelings? What if they knew that Maria can look through walls? What if they knew all the details about his skills? Would it still be possible to live together? If four adult parabilitists already have differences, won't it then be unrealistic to dream about a big para-community?

Marcus apologizes to Monika and Sandra. With uncertainty in his voice, he explains that complete openness could cause a lot of trouble. He agrees that this should be further discussed and that they should try to leave their emotions out of it as much as possible.

"Monika, I'm not exactly the Marcus that you got to know once. I think I've learned a lot in the meantime. Also, I don't really want to be the 'Great Leader' of a group of extremely talented people. I'm just desperately trying to create a home for all of us and to be of help to mankind."

Monika is sorry that she was so aggressive and says so. But it's Sandra who saves the situation in the end because she can feel how tired, how desperate and how honest Marcus is. "There will be so much that we'll have to discuss over the years we'll be together. But I think there's one thing we have to do now: win Barry over. You in?"

Monika nods, "Yeah, let's get him."

Sandra sits next to Monika during the return flight to Auckland. "Monika, have you noticed that Robert is completely enchanted by you? He would do just about anything to get you into bed."

Monika is surprised. Everyone knows forty year-old Robert is a loyal husband and he has always treated her very formally. But Monika realizes that it's now almost time for her to declare a sexual state of emergency. When they arrive in Auckland, she mentions to Robert off-handedly, "I just decided to stay in the city tonight. You want to join me and go to the casino... then maybe to bed?" Robert

is confused but it doesn't take much to convince him. Monika takes a single room at the Casino Hotel. She lets Robert watch her dress for the evening. He himself is still wearing the suit from the press conference. In the casino, Monika becomes her old seductive self again and Robert is spellbound.

He is just about to fall in love with Monika, who has rediscovered her old hunting instincts. She likes Robert; he's nice and relaxed. She's surprised how good it feels to have his hand on her shoulder and how nice his mouth feels on hers when they go back to the room later. Neither one knows what has come over them. When she sends him away, almost against her own will, she says, "I think your family's waiting for you." Then she says something that will have consequences much later on: "There's only one man I would do more for, much more, than you. That's Marcus."

When Robert drives home, he is still confused. How did all that just happen? Did he dream that? He can't get that last sentence out of his head. This is the first time he feels resentment rather than admiration for Marcus.

The next morning, Monika behaves as if nothing has happened. She and Sandra immediately start to prepare for their voyage. They fly to Frankfurt the next day.

Monika didn't allow Robert to have a single word with her. 'Maybe it's better that way,' he thinks. 'I should really see yesterday as a one-night stand and forget about it.' There's only one problem: he will be able to forget everything, but he won't be able to forget Monika's parting words.

Barry enjoyed his time with Hannelore. He spent the first days in Baden-Baden in the Romantik Hotel Kleine Prinz, named after the novel by Saint-Exupéry. Soon he saw no reason not to accept Hannelore's offer and moved in to her parents' villa on the outskirts of town. They had more than a dozen guest rooms there. There were constant comings and goings. He met new and interesting people every day, all of who moved about freely in the house. The evening gong signaled the only fixed appointment: the daily aristocratic dinner feast.

Hannelore turned out to be an enchanting discovery. He had completely underestimated her when he first met her in Rio. On the first evening in her parents' house, he asked her into his room for a good night kiss. When she actually slipped in, their harmless cuddling soon turned into a growing mutual familiarity and confidence. When they had real sex for the first time, it was all so simple and natural that they were both overwhelmed by it. She didn't know that it was Parabarry who slept with her. By then, this hygienic precaution went without saying for Barry.

She was good in bed and also a natural in the casinos, on horseback, or hiking in the woods. When they took a night hike to Lake Hutzenbacher, it turned out to be an adventure that Barry had not expected in the middle of the Black Forest. They arrived at the lake around midnight and immediately jumped into the muddy water, which felt warmer than the air. Still wet, they slid into their sleeping bags and for hours embraced and talked about life. The night was short. Before sunrise, Hannelore forced Barry awake with coffee and with her body.

Afterwards, they lay side by side, watching the stars vanish, listening to the morning breeze touching the trees with the birds waking up. When they walked down to the village, it took a long time before they met the first people. They dropped by Castle Eberstein, and Hannelore beat Barry at both chess and tennis. As a bridge partner, she was patient, but far better than him. She also danced too well for Barry. He nearly got a complex. She showed him the castle in Karlsruhe, the Residence of Rastatt, and the monastery in Maulbronn, at least one thing he knew a little about from Hermann Hesse's novels. They also took longer trips: to Zuerich, for example. They took a swim in the cool Limmat and finally there was one thing he could do better than Hannelore. They also had a real good time when Barry invited Hannelore and her parents to a grandiose meal at the famous Erbprinzen in Ettlingen.

A planned few days became weeks. If Hannelore hadn't needed to return to medical school in Heidelberg, they would've stayed together even longer. Barry couldn't handle Heidelberg, with its thousands of students hanging out all over the place. Morons! He suddenly felt redundant and expendable and that made him uneasy.

So they separate, both surprised at how much they have grown together and how easy it is for them to say goodbye. Before Barry leaves for Brazil, he half-heartedly invites Hannelore to visit him soon.

It takes Barry a couple of days to get used to Gabriela's silky skin and Gina's ceaseless energy again.

When Sandra and Monika arrive in Frankfurt, they rent a car and drive to Baden-Baden. They check into Hotel Therme. When you visit a city with a roman bath, you better do as the Romans. The next couple of days are a bit frustrating. Monika notices right away that Barry is not in town, and not even in Europe anymore. So they'll have to find a "Hannelore" who knows Barry. There are so many Hannelores in the phone book that they give up after a dozen or so tries. They're not going to find him that way. But if Barry had a girlfriend here, then he probably gave her flowers and took her places. They begin to ask around all the flower shops in town about a young man named Barry, a guy who bought flowers for a Hannelore who lives here. They are not successful. After also checking twenty restaurants, they give up the search.

"This makes no sense. Even with our paraskills, all we can do is confirm that Barry isn't here. Marcus could just as easily do this kind of work through a detective agency," says Sandra. "If we haven't found anything new by tomorrow, we'll call Marcus. Let him call a professional, either that or we'll use your parability and fly around the world until we know we're near him."

They celebrate this decision in the roman bath. It turns out to be a bit of a disappointment. Everything seems so regimented. How nice the hot springs on Great Barrier Island are. However, the water has a rejuvenating effect. Weeks later, they will understand why...

Afterwards they splurge on a fancy dinner at the Erbprinzen in Ettlingen, reportedly the best restaurant in the area. It really is good and the service is excellent. When the waiter asks them where they're from and Monika tells him, "New Zealand," Sandra registers the waiter's feelings of surprise. "Have you been to New Zealand," she asks.

"No," he answers, "but usually we don't have many customers from New Zealand, so it's quite a coincidence that someone from your country was here only about a week ago."

"Can you remember his name?"

"No, not really, but he was a friend of Hannelore Durbach. She and her parents called him Larry or something."

"Do the Durbachs live in Baden-Baden?"

"Yes, they have for generations. Do you know the big villa at the beginning of the street to Schwarzwald Hochstrasse?"

They aren't familiar with the villa but they'll get to know it first thing tomorrow morning. What an unexpected surprise! They had just given up the search and all of a sudden everything seems to be so simple.

In fact it is simple: simple to find out Hannelore's address through her parents and simple to locate her in Heidelberg and convince her to give them Barry's address in Brasilia. Soon afterwards, Sandra and Monika are back in an airplane.

When they arrive in Brasilia, they first take a rest. Then they take a taxi to Barry's apartment. He answers the door himself. His maid Gabriela is very curious but nevertheless soon disappears into her room. Barry is very surprised to see Sandra and Monika. He vaguely remembers them from Frankfurt airport but is pretty sure they didn't exchange addresses.

"No, we never had your address, and trust me, it wasn't very easy to find you," Monika explains, "but at least we knew that you wanted to visit someone called Hannelore in Baden-Baden. She sends her best wishes, hugs and kisses and she wants you to come and visit her in Heidelberg again. But that's not the real reason we're here: Marcus, Marcus from Auckland, sent us to ask you to come back."

Barry is too surprised to speak at first, and it takes him a while to ask them to sit down. Then he asks Gabriela to bring them coffee. Sandra tries to sense Barry's feelings: in addition to the surprise they had expected, she can sense a large portion of curiosity and a bit of disapproval.

Sandra takes over the conversation. "Barry, you know that Marcus and the rest of his family are all parabilitists; you are too and so are we. Recently, we both moved to Great Barrier Island. We know that you didn't want to become part of Marcus' group, and that

you wanted to live independently to enjoy your conquests. We also know that you have more money than you need, but you must have the same problems as Monika and me. Don't you sometimes have the feeling that you're wasting this gift, a gift that could be a help to so many people? Don't you think that's what it's all about? Or, how about the fact that you could finally share those problems that go along with paraskills? I don't know your problems but I'm sure you have some.

Sandra can feel herself winning him with her words. "Do you want to hide for the rest of your life, or would you rather live a life with people like yourself? A good satisfying and safe life knowing that you're doing some good?"

'So Marcus, or perhaps my destiny, has finally caught up with me,' thinks Barry. He knows that Sandra is right in many ways. How does she know about these problems he supposedly has, problems that he never wanted to admit to himself? "What's your paraskill, Sandra?"

"I can't read thoughts, but I can read feelings. For example, I know that what I just told you really hit you. You've been repeatedly thinking about that, since Auckland, right? What hit you the most was when I mentioned the problems that you know you have. I can feel that you haven't really dealt with those problems much. That was just a shot in the dark. But I know that all of us have problems. We even have some of them in common: the fear of being exposed, always having to weigh what's best for yourself against what's best for others, the question of how much we may support or exploit other people, and then those factors of our parabilities that we don't understand and that can only be discovered in a large research group, like the one we're building in Auckland. Every parability always also has specific problems. You will tell us yours sooner or later. You're one of us, and you will join us eventually. But let me tell you about my major problem, just so that you know what I mean. As I've already mentioned, I can sense feelings. Sounds great, doesn't it? And it really is great. But, it's not so great when I notice every single lie. When I notice what a man thinks about me just when I get attached to him or when we kiss for the first time, do you know how terrible that can be? And do you know how good it feels to be able to talk about this with somebody

and to try to find out what you can do about it and that there are even scientists who will research solutions for it.” She can sense how agitated Barry is inside. “Barry, you don’t have to make the decision now. If you want, you can show us around for the next couple of days and then you’ll either come back with us or you won’t. You’re not our prisoner but you’ll also never really be able to evade us.”

Barry is confused: “What do you mean by that?”

“Unfortunately for you, Monika is acquainted with you and she is what we call a ‘paralocator.’ She will always know where you are.”

While Sandra is saying this, she realizes for the first time that there is a way for Barry to escape: he can take Monika with him, or kill her.

For a long time, Barry just sits there. “Let’s do as you’ve suggested, Sandra. Give me three days. I’ll show you around a little. We’ll see after that.”

For Sandra, it’s a great adventure to spend time with Barry and Monika. She can feel Barry’s intense desire to seduce women but remain unattached. She is surprised when she realizes that his feelings seem to be different about Monika. There is a deep and growing attraction, but without the hunter’s instinct that he has for other women. Sandra also feels that Barry is different from other men. Soon she realizes that she’s the third wheel, and, as such, completely superfluous. “I’m going to visit some friends in Rio,” she pretends. “I’ll call you in two days to find out what we’re doing.”

It turns out to be a short phone call. “Monika and I have both decided to go back to Auckland. We’ve already found out about the flight. We’ll fly to Rio tomorrow and catch a direct connection. Try to book the same flight,” says Barry before he hangs up.” Barry’s strong ‘we’ surprises Sandra.

While Sandra calls Marcus and gives him the last developments, Barry says goodbye to Gina. There are no tears. Gina was always aware of the fact that Barry would eventually leave Brasilia again. She’ll take care of the apartment, the car, and the rest, but suggests he returns to Brazil soon.

With Gabriela it’s a different story. Tears in her eyes, she hands Barry a box wound tightly with string. “Don’t open it before you are

with your friends in New Zealand. You may need what's inside. If you need me or my parents, you know where you can find us."

Barry is moved, but he doesn't understand the part about her and her parents. He gives her an envelope with a large check in it. "Don't open it before you're with your parents, but I want to put this around your neck myself." He takes out a golden necklace with a round object suspended from it. It's a picture of Gabriela's face surrounded by diamonds. "I told them to make two, and one stays with me." Then he puts the chain tenderly around her neck and kisses her one more time. Monika watches them with no feelings of jealousy.

"Good luck to both of you," says Gabriela, "and don't forget to invite me to your wedding!"

Barry and Monika are taken aback. "...We will," Barry finally answers. "Gabriela, sometimes you seem to know more than others." Monika stares at Gabriela in disbelief.

Sandra meets Barry and Monika at the airport in Rio. The couple looks relaxed and happy. They approach her with a kind of order: "Tell us what we feel like."

Sandra smiles and dives into Monika and Barry's feelings. Then she looks at them. "You're O.K., I just don't understand what happened to you. It's almost as if you've become different people. Where did hunting Barry and flirting Monika go? For the two of you I hope that it'll stay like that."

"Every parability has its specific problems," Barry says and smiles. "And you, Sandra, you have the specific problem now of having to warn us when our feelings change."

Sandra understands that this is more than just a joke.

After their arrival in Auckland, they fly straight to Great Barrier Island. They have a quick welcome drink, then retire to their rooms to get some rest. The next day, all the adult parabilitists sit down together. Marcus tells Barry how glad he is to see him again. Barry waves him off. "Let me first explain something. I'm back, and I will help in the future when it makes sense, but Monika and I won't live here. We'll live in Auckland like Aroha, at least at first. As a new 'member of the club' I should now probably tell you what my parability is. After all, I know a little about yours and I'm sure I will soon know even more."

“Marcus, you’ve always suspected me of having some kind of doppelganger with special abilities. This is almost true, almost. In fact, I’m able to fall into a kind of trance and then I can materialize a projection of myself wherever I want. I can then see, hear, smell and feel through this projection and dissolve it whenever I want. Then I can reawaken, so to speak. I can also change the place of the projection; in fact, I dissolve the projection, wake up for a second, and send him somewhere else. But there are certain limits: I can’t do this further than 300 kilometers away and everything over ten kilometers makes the projection less dense. You can’t see it, but the projection is lighter somehow. I have to know the location where Parabarry, as I call him, materializes. I always have to hope that there is no one else there. I would scare the hell out of them otherwise. There’s one more limitation: when I materialize and dematerialize Parabarry, he can’t carry more than his clothes and maybe a couple of very small objects. I seem to be able to influence that a bit, but I’ll come back to that later on.

Barry pauses a moment before continuing. “The most unusual aspect of the projection is that I can feel every pain Parabarry feels, but I don’t get any wounds. That means you can cut a hand off of Parabarry and it hurts like hell, but when I call him back, my hand is unhurt and I can send a new and complete Parabarry back out. So actually, Parabarry is invincible and immune to every disease. So if he infects himself with a cold, or even AIDS, I can call Parabarry back and I won’t be infected. I don’t understand this and other phenomena. If I can take back little things when I end the projection, why can’t I take a virus back? My only explanation is that the only things that come back are those that I want to come back.”

“There’s another point I should be completely open about: until I met Monika, I’ve always had this sick need to love different kinds of women, again and again. So in order to be sure that I didn’t infect myself, or one of my partners, it was always Parabarry who loved them. With Monika, it’s different now.” He smiles at her.

“So that’s it for now. Are there any questions?”

“Is there a way to tell Barry from Parabarry?” Marcus asks.

“Not as far as I know, but maybe your scientists will find a way. Let me show it to you.”

Still in his chair, Barry sinks into a deep trance. Suddenly, Parabarry is standing by the window and says, "Now you are looking at a Parabarry. I can still shake Marcus' hand. I have not materialized far away, so I'm the same weight as the real Barry, whose brain I'm talking from. I can touch the real Barry - see? And I can feel that he has a high temperature. I don't know why Barry In Trance always runs a forty-degree temperature. I also don't know what would happen if his body in trance was hurt, and I don't really want to find out. I also don't know how long Barry can remain in trance. After he wakes up, Barry is usually very thirsty and very hungry, depending on how long he was under. Parabarry can eat and drink, see? He can even get drunk! But, when Barry dissolves him, Barry is completely sober and all the food is gone too. You find this hard to believe? I can understand that. I found it very hard to believe, too. There are more strange phenomena. Let me show you one more."

He takes a knife and slices across his whole upper arm with a pain-ridden face. "That's enough," says Parabarry. He disappears and Barry "wakes up." He shows them his upper arm. There is no cut.

They all mumble in amazement. Maria is the first one to find words. "I think we all understand more now. When you came to visit us for the first time, it was really Parabarry and because Great Barrier Island is more than ten kilometers from Auckland, he didn't have Barry's normal weight. That's why he didn't sink into the swamp and that's how he could escape from a wrecked car without leaving any signs." Barry nods.

"So the true Barry has the quality that Lena could feel, but Parabarry doesn't. That's why Lena was so confused, remember? And, that's why on some days no ladies stopped by your little office of lust. That's when the real Barry was there. Parabarry always had women around, right?"

"Come on! You don't have to go into those kind of details when Monika's around," Barry protests.

Marcus breaks in: "But there's one thing I still don't understand. How did you escape from Auckland? Our last talk at the travel agency - that was Parabarry, right? He wouldn't have been able to disappear otherwise."

Barry nods again.

"But we also observed the apartment with the real Barry in it. You walked in, but in the end, the apartment was empty too."

Barry laughs, "Well, that's pretty simple. I checked into a room near the airport the day before. I hung the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door and locked it from the inside. So it was a Parabarry who entered my apartment, and later on, I dematerialized him. So you were observing an empty apartment. Later, Barry spent the night in the hotel. Now comes the tricky part. The flight, which I had booked under a false name, of course, was supposed to leave at 9:55. I checked in first class, pretended to be unwell, fell into a trance, and materialized a Parabarry in the office right before you arrived there."

"The problem was that even though I had the seat belt on, the flight attendants were probably going to force me to sit up during take off and that I, Barry In Trance, would not have been able to react. That's probably the greatest weakness of my parability. But anyway, while Marcus and Parabarry were talking in the office, the airplane, with me inside, had already taken off. Since we were quickly approaching the critical distance of 300 km, the Parabarry in the travel agency was in a real hurry."

"You're a genius," Marcus says smiling. "Welcome to the club. Of course we'll accept your wish to live alone in Auckland, but we'll have to have regular meetings. I don't want to put on a show now, but please, from now on, we belong together until one of us wants out. Until then, we'll help each other and try to coordinate our directions: what kind of research shall we concentrate on? Where shall we operate? How can we find more members? How can we help humanity? How can we reach the point where we, or our children, will be able to go public? What kind of rules should we make for ourselves? Questions like these, we need to answer by meeting regularly. Do you agree?"

They all nod.

Sandra wants to discuss another point: "Barry, when we were talking in Brasilia, it was clear that you have certain problems with your parabilities too. You never told us what they are. So what's the problem?"

Barry hesitates. "Parabarry has normal feelings: he's invincible, immune to infections, can disappear at any time, and can change

location, etc. The point is, the temptation is very high to act out only as Parabarry, and only to wake the real Barry up to eat something and then to return to the projection. The problem is that my body slowly deteriorates that way. After a couple of days mostly as Parabarry, I'm completely weakened and can hardly move around anymore. I feel like a vegetable that way, so I'll have to compromise somehow. I just haven't figured out the right way yet."

They are all surprised: all the problems that can arise through parabilities!

Barry continues, "By the way, there's one more thing. My maid in Brasilia gave me a box as a goodbye present. She told me to open it only in your presence. I think I know what's in it, but let's have a look." Barry opens the box and finds several quartz crystals in it.

"What's that," Marcus asks.

Barry takes one and holds it up. "Can you see the straight black threads? That's carbon, which actually the heat and the pressure should have turned into diamond dust. There are also the twisted threads and the spots on the outside. Supposedly, they consist of an unusual chemical compound called Silatraviate."

Sandra notices Marcus' sudden excitement.

"I have the impression that these crystals enrich our parabilities," Barry adds.

Marcus takes the crystal into his hand. He concentrates on a point on the island that he normally wouldn't be able to reach with his powers. Today he can: he is able to pick up a stone with his pseudohands and hold it. When he takes the crystal out of his hand, his pseudohands immediately drop the stone.

"I think you're right, Barry. We'll have to do a detailed analysis. But now we have many reasons to celebrate."

The para-community in New Zealand is beginning to take shape.

8 Klaus Baumgartner

May 2011

Barry reopens his travel agency, but he makes sure that the people on Great Barrier Island can reach him at any time. He asks Robert and Marcus to show him all of the SR Inc. vehicles and practices with those that might be useful to him. He enjoys this and doesn't stop until he can handle them all perfectly. The fireproof e-cart is of special interest to him.

Monika and Barry move into Barry's old apartment in Auckland. They are very much in love. Barry keeps stating that he has now found the love of his life. They even talk about marriage and kids. All those who have long known Barry and Monika are surprised to see them completely changed.

For Maria and Marcus, this development comes in handy, too. Certain tensions between them can now no longer arise. At the SR Inc. office, Monika and Robert work together and assemble a list of important people, especially politicians, influential businesspeople, and their children. It will be Monika's job to meet them all and parascan them so she can locate them in the case of emergencies. There are regular meetings on Great Barrier Island but otherwise, Barry and Monika prefer to be busy with each other like any new couple in love. Suddenly, monogamous Barry has to live out his fantasies in different ways. Time and again, he comes up with the craziest ideas.

Once, for example, when Monika is taking a swim in the pool of a fitness club, he freaks out a businessman who keeps watching Monika from his deck chair, happy that no one is near her. When he's thinking about how he could start a conversation, he notices that she gasps, inhales quickly, swallows a little water and even sinks for a moment. But when she comes up again, she is smiling and next to her is another person, apparently someone who knows and likes her a lot. The businessman can't believe it. Only he and the young woman were in the whole pool area. Where did this guy come from? Is it the alcohol left over from last night? Is he going crazy? What's

going on? How could he guess that Parabarry materialized right beneath Monika, fondling her breasts?

Another time, Barry calls Monika in the office. "You alone? Lock the door! I got the hots for you. Let's do some phone sex." Monika is amused and excited: this guy and his ideas! She locks the door.

Barry wants to know what she's wearing.

"You know it's a hot day. You should've noticed in the morning that I'm only wearing light clothes, a blouse, a white soft short skirt, and a slip, of course."

"No bra?"

"No bra."

"Good," says Barry. "You have to do exactly as I tell you now. So first, unbutton your blouse completely...ready?"

"Yes," Monika answers with a bit of excitement in her voice.

"Now, take off your slip and go over to the conference table. Then bend over with your hands on the table; your nipples should be pointing to the table."

"They are," Monika sighs. "You're crazy. What if somebody hears the call? Or wants to come in?"

"Just do as you are told. Raise your skirt up to your back and spread your legs a little."

Monika obeys, her juicy ass spread, her legs apart. "And now?" she asks excitedly.

At this moment, a naked Parabarry materializes behind Monika and slowly but firmly enters her from behind. For the next couple of minutes, Monika forgets to drop the phone. All of a sudden, Parabarry has disappeared and Barry's voice comes over the phone again. "Thanks for the quickie, honey!"

Monika laughs. "Always at your service when it comes to things like that." She hears a kiss through the line, then Barry hangs up.

Sometimes Sandra envies Barry and Monika and their limitless happiness, which she can sense strongly. She's also a bit jealous about the experienced and firm relationship between Maria and Marcus.

One Sunday, Barry and Monika are with Maria, Marcus and their children on Great Barrier Island again. A phone call informs them of

an urgent emergency situation. The Fonterra Te Papa powdered milk factory in Reparora, just south of Auckland (the largest of its kind in the world) is burning. One employee is locked inside the huge underground area where the milk is stored in tanks. One entrance is blocked by fallen debris; the other is engulfed in flames. On top of that, both exits are separated by several heavy emergency doors, one of which is even locked from the inside. The employee has no key. The firefighters are at their wits' end. They estimate that the man will die from gas and milk steam before they can get to him.

After a quick discussion, Maria, Marcus, Barry and Monika take the Moller to the office. Barry stays there. From now on, it's Parabarry that sits in the Moller. The fire is still within his reach. Monika can't stay in the Moller because that wouldn't leave enough room for the robot and the e-cart. She gets into her car. I will take her about forty-five minutes to reach the site of the accident. With special permission, the others fly there.

During the flight, there is intense communication between the paragroup, the emergency units, and John, the manager of the factory. When they land, they first unload the robot and the e-cart. Those new SR Inc. developments have not been seen in public yet and they cause a lot of admiration and astonishment.

Marcus will drive the six-legged robot. He'll make it run through the fire, blow up the first door, and clear a path through the remains of the door. That will enable Parabarry to quickly pass through the fire with the e-cart. Then Parabarry will blow up the next door. In the official version, the locked door will be cut with the robot's torch.

Maria uses her paraseeing and confirms that the man is still alive, but that the poisonous gasses are troubling him more and more. Marcus rakes the building with his pseudohands. He finds out that an explosion caused the cave in. This is confirmed by the firefighters who already suspected arson. Maria and Marcus look at each other: it would all be so easy if they didn't have to hide their parabilities. Marcus could easily clear a way through the rubble, or Parabarry could materialize the key right by the man in danger. Unfortunately, it has to be more complicated.

Marcus puts on the steering glasses²⁹. His hand movements are translated into commands for the robot through a camera inside. The robot begins to walk quickly, looking almost like a giant insect. He enters the center of the fire. For a short time, it can't hurt him. He reaches the first door, attaches an explosive charge, runs back, and is cooled off by water from the firefighters' hoses. After the charge detonates, he clears a path for Parabarry and his e-cart.

"Good luck, Barry!" Maria and Marcus shout after him.

He makes it through the fire which brings the e-cart to critical temperature, however. He reaches the first locked door. He could get out now and unlock the door but the temperature outside is probably too high for that. He decides to materialize on the other, cooler side of the door, unlock it and drive the e-cart to the next door. He'll either have to cut it open, or materialize on the other side. The first solution will be the official one, but it's much faster to just materialize.

"I, my robot actually, am now standing in front of the second door. I am beginning to cut it open," Marcus lies. While the robot is cutting the door open in order to make the official version believable, Parabarry is already at the last door. When he opens it, a nearly suffocated man tumbles toward him. Barry gets him into the e-cart and makes it fireproof again. Without further hesitation, Parabarry drives out through the open doors. When they pass the cutting robot, the saved man vaguely notices that something is strange there. This will puzzle him later on. They drive through the fire until they are back outside.

All the spectators applaud when the weak but smiling man is carried into the ambulance by the medics. Barry bows as though on stage: "SR Inc. has done it again," he says, laughing. Maria and Marcus are happy to see that Barry is identifying more and more with SR Inc.

The whole operation only took fifteen minutes. While the Fire Brigade is still busy with the accident, the manager of the factory takes the para-team and the fire chief to his apartment where the manager's wife and two sons are waiting. The meeting turns into a

²⁹ From now on, he can look through the lenses of the robot's camera.

spontaneous party. They all express their admiration for SR Inc.'s work, especially at how fast it all went. The fire chief keeps asking Parabarry how it was possible to cut the door open so fast. With all the getting in and out and dealing with the locks, etc., it should've taken quite a while. The SR Inc. people must be able to perform miracles.

"No, of course we can't. But we're pretty well trained; drilled, actually. When it comes to the cutting, you'd better ask that guy over there. After all, it was Marcus who operated the robot. By the way, Marcus, I think you forgot to tell the robot to stop. He was still cutting when we drove out."

For a moment, Marcus doesn't understand what Parabarry means. Then it hits him. "You're right, I forgot about that! I only ordered it to leave the building, not to stop cutting."

This version of the story will be given later to the man saved from the disaster as an explanation for what he saw. Parabarry had a good reason to bring up the robot. He saw the surprised look on the man's face when they passed the working robot on the way out.

When the group flies back to Auckland, they all agree that it was worth interrupting their peace on Great Barrier Island. The other rescue units take SR Inc.'s equipment back to Auckland with them.

On the next day, the media give a lot of space to the fire. John, the manager of the plant is on TV. He explains, "It was arson, but the fire was only set as a diversion for the criminals' real motives. They were really after a safe. An explosive charge enabled them to get to the safe, but at the same time caused the roof to collapse. Nevertheless, they managed to steal the safe that by strange coincidence turned out to be nearly empty."

"The criminals are going to be a bit angry about that," Monika observes. "I think they might try it again."

They all hear what she says but don't take her fear seriously. If they did, it might've been possible to avert the kidnapping of John's older son two days later. They will ask for an extremely high ransom.

Marcus gets this news directly from the Prime Minister in Wellington. "Hello, this is the office of the Prime Minister. She would like to speak with Marcus Simmer."

"Speaking."

"Will you hold for a moment, please?"

"Of course." Marcus keeps the phone to his ear.

"Hello, Mr. Simmer. You may remember that I was able to help you out with that flight out of Queenstown. That's why I'm daring to call you now. Have you heard about the kidnapping yet?"

"No, who was kidnapped?"

"The son of the manager of Fontera de Papa, the factory where SR Inc. did such a fine job the day before yesterday. They've asked for quite a bit of money. John, the manager - you're acquainted with him, aren't you? - is a personal friend. But that's not why I'm calling. We have to prove to the people that New Zealand is not a haven for criminals. So we'll have to set his son free and put the kidnappers behind bars. I'm calling to ask SR Inc. for help."

"But..."

"Yes," the PM doesn't let him speak, "I know this is not really what SR Inc. does, but I know, and you can be sure that I'm the only one in the government who knows this, that your group has certain abilities which could help us immensely in this case. Be sure to count on my silence and my support. Please help us any way you can. I'll do everything to suppress suspicions about possible strange phenomena. You will receive all support possible, but please, we need your help immediately. Can I count on you?"

Maria, listening in on the conversation on another extension, looks at Marcus and nods.

Marcus answers, "You can count on us. We'll start the operation immediately. We'll first find out where the child is. As soon as we know that, we'll need a well-trained police unit at our service."

"OK. I'll give you my private number. You can reach me there any time. Good luck to you and to all of us. Thank you for your help and please keep me informed."

"Just one more thing, ma'am. We need an unlimited permission for our Moller."

"I'm sure that can be easily arranged."

Maria and Marcus look at each other. The PM hasn't really mentioned their parabilities, but it's clear that she knows about them. If they help her now, will they become dependent on her silence? No. This is an emergency situation, and routine in their business.

After a short discussion with Monika, everything is clear. She met the kidnapped child after the fire, she has parascanned him, and she will now be able to locate him. They will take the Moller and fly around until they know where they should look for the child.

The four paras start their search at the factory. "The boy is alive and he's less than 100 kilometers away," Monika reports.

"So he could even be in Auckland," Marcus observes sadly. "How can we find him in a big city like that?"

Monika calms him down. "I'm sure he's not in Auckland. I would've sensed that."

They fly to Huntly; nothing, and to Hamilton; nothing. When they leave Hamilton, head west, and reach the intersection of routes twenty-three and thirty-nine near Whatawhata, Monika gets nervous. "Warmer, it's getting warmer."

When they reach the little town of Raglan on the coast, Monika knows for sure. "The boy is here, in Raglan."

Marcus calls the PM. "We know where he is. He's in Raglan. We don't know the exact address, but we're optimistic on that front."

"Do you need any help?"

"No, the local police will do. Let me contact them myself."

The PM is torn: on the one hand, she admires SR Inc. and how they work so efficiently and well. On the other hand, for the first time, she is somewhat afraid: what could this group do if they really wanted to? Couldn't they become a real danger?

Marcus contacts the police in Raglan. He explains the situation and adds, "We need two roadblocks on Route twenty-three: one five km south of Raglan, and the other five km to the west. All cars must be stopped and checked for the kidnapped child. And make sure every boat in the Raglan Bay is checked too. We also need a large, unsuspecting vehicle in Three Streams to pick up my colleagues and me after we land. We need the car to find out exactly where the child is."

They wait a good fifteen minutes before they get the vehicle. When it finally arrives, they have to convince the driver that he can't come with them. Then they can start a detailed search. Because of Raglan's simple layout, Marcus is optimistic that it won't take them long to find the hideout. There are about eighty bungalows and

small houses situated on the beach south of Raglan. Marcus is pretty sure that the child is not in a permanent home.

They check the hotels and the motels first. Nothing. Then they slowly drive south down the coast road. Maria uses her parability to scan every house. Monika continues trying to locate the child, but without success. "I know we're really close, but that's all I can say."

Marcus' optimism is slowly vanishing. One bungalow after the other is crossed off the list. But then, with only five more to go, and not much hope left, Maria sees the boy in a living room. Two men are watching him. "There they are! And some of the rooms in the house are empty."

She makes a sketch of the layout of the rooms and gives it to Barry. Barry puts on his communication glasses³⁰ and materializes in the basement of the house. Once there, he makes a lot of noise until Maria stops him. "You made them really nervous. One of them is on his way down now. If you can jump into the kitchen, the second one won't see you. Say something and surprise him. When he turns around, lift your hand then leave the rest to Marcus."

Parabarry rematerializes in the kitchen. Cautiously, he peeks into the living room and sees the second kidnapper. His back is turned. He is facing the child.

"You're under arrest," Parabarry shouts. The kidnapper is completely shocked. He turns around and sees Parabarry standing there with his arm lifted. Before he can react, Marcus takes him out with a karate chop from his parahand. As planned, Parabarry ties him up. "Barry, lock the basement door and wait for the police to come in."

Maria and Marcus embrace so that Marcus can see through her eyes. When the other kidnapper tries to climb up the stairs, Marcus trips him and he tumbles back down, the stair breaking up into small pieces. The kidnapper can't believe it. How did that happen and how can he get out now? He keeps calling the other man for help, but gets no reply.

³⁰ The communication glasses have an inbuilt mobile phone. You can communicate through it without opening your mouth. You get the answers through the earpiece directly. It only takes thirty minutes to learn how to talk with your mouth closed.

In the meantime, Marcus informs the police. He tells them they can lift the roadblocks and send a police car to beach house number seventy-six. He also tells them that one of the kidnappers is already bound but that the other is still trapped in the basement.

Parabarry frees the boy. He has watched the whole thing and is rather baffled.

"You're O.K. now," says Parabarry. "The police will be here any minute." And they are. They are pleased to arrest the kidnappers.

Marcus calls the PM. "Everything is under control. John's son is free and unhurt. Both kidnappers are under arrest. It was a pleasure to help. One more thing, people will want to know how we were able to find them so fast. So please give all the credit to the Raglan Police Department. You could also say that the kidnappers were stupid enough to talk to their boss on their mobile and that's how they were located. By the way, the boss is being arrested right now in the Raglan hotel. I hope you're pleased with our work."

"I'm certainly pleased, and full of admiration. Thank you very much, on behalf of John, and the government."

Thank you for the kind words, but you know you're already doing us a great favor by mentioning us as little as possible."

"I understand." Thoughtfully, the PM hangs up. This Paragroup is the mightiest ally she has ever had, but probably also the most dangerous. She looks at her watch. It took them only four hours to end a kidnapping!

The paragroup enjoys a cheerful evening on Great Barrier Island. This was the first time they really operated as a team. Everyone was able to employ their parabilities to the success of the operation. As usual, Maria is a bit more realistic and a bit more thoughtful than the others. "Yes, it's great what we can do. But don't you think the PM is slowly getting a little worried about us? And should it really come down to it, our group is still too small and too weak."

"You always forget about me and Lena," Stephan complains. "If I'd also been in Raglan, I could've busted those bad guys by sending them a huge swarm of mossies!"

Marcus looks at him with admiration. "Would you also have managed to tell the mossies only to attack the gangsters and not the boy?"

"Of course I would've, daddy. Animals aren't stupid. I can point out differences to them. I can tell them when to do it too. I found out about that."

"What do you mean by that, Stephan?" Maria asks.

"For example, I can tell a school of fish to do something, but not now, but like, the next morning maybe."

"Don't be impatient, Stephan. We'll need you very, very often. You can count on it."

Stephan beams with delight.

Later, Marcus and Sandra sit together. "Sandra, as far as I remember, you and Klaus Baumgartner always got along really well, didn't you? Do you have any idea where he could have been hiding since he left Brussels?"

"I'm not sure, but he was always fascinated with Australia, especially Melbourne, so if I had to take a guess, I'd think that there's a pretty good chance that he's living there with a new name."

Marcus looks at her sternly. "Would you be willing to die for Klaus?"

Sandra gulps. What does he know or think he knows? Does he know that she's always admired Klaus, even if Klaus never noticed? It would've been easy for an empath like her to sense his feelings back then, but she had agreed on a hypnotic treatment that kept her from reading her superiors' feelings.

After taking a moment to remember all that, she asks cautiously, "Marcus, what do you mean, 'die for Klaus?'"

While Marcus explains his idea, Sandra can't help laughing: "Well, in that way, I would be willing to die for him, no problem."

Klaus Baumgartner is an early riser. He likes to sit in the kitchen of his little house and watch the Dandenongs³¹ wake up. On his way to work at a bank in the center of Melbourne, he always finds enough time to get his thoughts together and even to daydream a little. He

³¹ The Dandenongs are a national park right outside Melbourne. They have long been known for their rhododendrons, which turn the park into a spectacular sea of flowers every summer.

leads a quiet, but not lonely life. His membership in the local Kiwanis³² Club has allowed him to make many friends.

But today, like so many times before, he has to think back to the days in Brussels, and of all the ups and downs he had there. It's been almost seven years. Back then, he was the boss of the PPU, the European Union's Parapsychological Unit, a secret operations unit consisting of a handful of parabilitists. It was Klaus Baumgartner's job to further develop the PPU for the special means of Dirkmann, then head of the European Commission. Baumgartner is a "parascout," someone who is able to detect people with paraskills. When he was on vacation in Austria, he met Marcus, a young man with a strong telekinetic ability. He and his team tried to convince Marcus to join the PPU. It was a failure. Against Klaus' will, they tried to kill Marcus, who, according to Dirkmann, was too dangerous. Klaus then realized that he and the other PPU members were seen as useful but potentially dangerous outsiders. Klaus was relieved when Marcus managed to escape. He more or less suggested to his coworkers to start a new life outside the PPU.

Unfortunately, he was personally bound to an inconvenient contract and was constantly under observation. He had no choice but to stay with the PPU for a few more years. But his group soon started to dissolve. Sandra Hill, the empath, had disappeared the day after he warned her. Thoughts of Greta and Justo, both weaker parabilitists, bring back bad memories for him. He met Greta in Vienna and they had a nice but short affair. It's not so much the bad conscience that Klaus had toward his wife Erica; after all, he knew that she had cheated on him while he was in Brussels. It was more that Greta was drawing more and more away from him. They separated when Klaus returned to Brussels after hunting Marcus, without success, in Austria.

In Klaus' memory, the following months in Brussels were just like one long nightmare. His coworker, Jan de Keep, an emotioactivator, committed suicide. Apparently, he was not able to

³² Kiwanis is an international organization founded in 1915 for the promulgation of higher ideals in business, industrial and professional life (From Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary).

face the fact that he had helped to kill people like Marcus just because of the fact that they were paras. Klaus would have been willing to try to live with his wife again, but she refused. She wanted to go back to the wild days before their marriage. In addition, someone had also told her about Greta.

For a while, Klaus and Erica lived separate lives in the same house. After a while, they started to live against, rather than simply with, each other. When Erica began spending more and more time with Justo, Justo started working more and more against Klaus. It soon became clear to Klaus that it was Justo who had told Erica about Greta. Justo couldn't handle the fact that Marcus' telekinetic abilities were so much stronger than his. He felt that he was treated like an understudy. That's why Justo decided to betray Klaus. He told their superiors that Klaus had suggested that all PPU members desert.

There was an investigation and Erica put herself decidedly behind Justo, and against Klaus. Because he simply knew too much, Klaus was forced to sit out the rest of his contract. Justo was promoted to be Klaus' boss. From then on, he did every little thing he could to express his hatred for Klaus. Klaus was worried that they would even try to kill him. He knew that they had no aversion to those kinds of actions. He tried to protect himself by telling them that he had placed sensitive information with his lawyer to be released in the event of his death.

The EU gave Justo large amounts of money for pararesearch. Accidentally, Klaus found out that this research dealt with two main questions: how can you protect yourself from parabilities, and how can you increase them. Klaus realized that it was Justo's goal to become as powerful as Marcus. Secretly, Klaus hoped that Marcus and Maria would somehow interfere with Justo's plans and that he would then be able to change sides. When he heard that they had both died in a plane crash, he was deeply shocked. How could he know that Marcus' friends had leaked this misinformation so that the EU would stop searching for Marcus?

When Greta and Justo presented themselves as a couple a few days later, Klaus assumed that this was not so much a matter of love as a matter of humiliating him. First, Justo had had an affair with his ex-wife, Erika, and now, he had taken his ex-lover. Finally, Klaus

decided to leave Brussels and the PPU for good. Three years had passed since his return to Brussels and he wasn't being observed so intensely anymore. He managed to find out that they had made great advances in protection methods against parabilities. He also managed to illegally copy an important document. Then he escaped from Brussels and took a new identity: Klaus Niedly of Melbourne.

Klaus still remembers how disappointed he was when he repeatedly failed to decipher the copied document. The code was simply too complex. That was probably one of the main reasons why he decided to leave his paralife behind completely and to start a new and simple life.

For three years now, Klaus has been employed in a nice but not particularly challenging position. If he didn't have to face unwanted memories time and again, he would be almost happy.

This morning, the past gets at him more dramatically than before. As usual, he reads the morning paper. He finds a report on a terrible accident: the car of a Sandra Blake broke through a guardrail and plunged several meters into a ravine. The woman (see picture) was removed alive from the wreck, but died on the way to the hospital. Klaus feels dizzy when he sees her picture. Sandra Blake, that's really Sandra Hill, his former colleague at the PPU! He can't believe it. According to the newspaper, Sandra has lived in Melbourne for years, and he never even knew about it! He has to find out more about Sandra.

Klaus calls the newspaper. "I've just read the article about Sandra Blake's accident. I knew her once and I'd like to talk to her relatives. Could you help me somehow?"

"One moment please. I'll connect you with the journalist who wrote the article."

He is put on hold. After a little while, the banal music is interrupted by a male voice. "Carl Blythe here. You wanted to know something about Sandra Blake?"

Klaus repeats what he said before and all of a sudden the journalist is wide-awake. The newspaper took a large sum of money to print an article about an invented accident. Apparently, the unknown authors were desperately trying to find someone named Klaus. This must be him. As they had arranged, the journalist gives

Klaus the name of Sandra's "husband" and a Melbourne phone number.

After Klaus hangs up, Blythe phones Robert, Sandra's "husband." "This is Carl Blythe. Your maneuver seems to have been successful. A Klaus Niedly just called me. He wants to know more about Sandra Blake. I gave him your phone number."

"Thanks," Robert replies. "I'll call you when I know more."

Robert informs Maria, Marcus, Lena and Sandra, who are also sitting in the small, hastily rented apartment near St. Paul's Cathedral. "Your Klaus Baumgartner really seems to live in Melbourne. He took the bait. Well, at least we know that a Klaus Niedly has just called the newspaper and they gave him our number."

Before Robert can say more, the phone rings. Robert answers it. "Robert Blake."

Before he speaks, Klaus realizes that he hasn't even thought about what he should say. When did Sandra marry this guy? Does Robert Blake know about Sandra's parability? He's cautious and introduces himself as an old friend. When Robert asks how Klaus knows Sandra, he doesn't give much detail and asks if they can meet. Robert looks at Marcus, who has listened to the conversation and now knows for sure: yes, this is Klaus Baumgartner.

He nods to Robert, who eventually agrees to meet with Klaus. "All right then, when can you stop by," Robert asks and then gives Klaus the address.

"Whenever it's all right with you. I live near the Dandenongs and can come straight over. It'll take me about forty-five minutes."

All of them except Robert leave the apartment. Klaus, the parascout, would be able to sense them right away.

On his way to the city, Klaus is feverish with thought: does it make any sense to talk with Sandra's husband now that she's dead? Isn't that a bit unnecessary? But finally he knows he's doing the right thing. Sandra really deserves some attention. 'I should at least try to find something out. If necessary, I should try to help her loved ones and attend the funeral,' he thinks.

Soon afterwards, Klaus arrives at the apartment. He follows Robert into the little living room. He is surprised to find it very

Spartan, but he notices a photograph of Sandra with a black ribbon on it. Robert asks Klaus to take a seat on the sofa. Robert sits down across from him. After the formalities of introduction, Klaus wants to ask the first serious question, but Robert interrupts him, takes out a revolver and points it at a dumbfounded Klaus.

“Don’t be scared Mr. Niedly, this is only a precaution. We have a couple of surprises for you and we’re not sure how you’re going to react. Please cuff your ankle to the leg of the sofa and cuff your left hand to the table. We want you to be able to sit comfortably and to have your right hand free. Afterwards, I’ll put the revolver down and explain everything. No matter what you say, you’ll leave this room a free man. It’s necessary, however, that you first listen to a couple of things.”

Klaus hesitates. ‘Should I really handcuff myself? Isn’t that crazy? On the other hand, this guy could shoot me, but he seems to be so calm and mild mannered.’ Klaus shakes his head and cuffs himself.

“Thanks for cooperating,” Robert says, “Would you like a whiskey? I think we could both use one.”

Klaus nods. Robert pours the whiskeys and gives one to Klaus with a friendly toast.

A couple of houses down the road, Maria uses her parability to follow the scene. “Everything’s all right, Marcus,” she tells the others.

“Sandra, can you sense Baumgartner’s feelings,” Marcus asks.

“I’m afraid I can’t. I still seem to have that block from the hypnosis. But I can sense Robert’s feelings. He’s relieved that everything went so smoothly. It was good that we brought Lena.”

Marcus turns to Lena. “Lena, can you feel what the man next to Robert feels?”

“Yes daddy, he’s surprised, but he isn’t mad. He’s just...he’s nosey.”

“Good, let’s get over there,” Marcus says.

“Daddy,” Lena shouts suddenly, “the man feels funny now. He is kind of happy but he doesn’t know what’s happening.”

What Lena doesn't know is that at this moment, Robert confronts Klaus with his real name. "So it's Mr. Klaus Baumgartner, I suppose."

Klaus merely shrugs at the mention of his real name.

"I think I have some good news for you. Sandra isn't dead, and I'm not her husband. The whole article was faked just to find you."

"Sandra's alive? Is she in Melbourne? And why...?"

Robert laughs. "Be patient for a moment. Sandra will be here very soon, together with some other people you might like to see. Cheers."

Robert has one more sip of his whiskey, still keeping an eye on Klaus who suddenly sits up straight. He can now sense Sandra's para-aura. But he also senses three more auras. He knows two of them. They belong to people he thought were dead. Yes, that's Maria and Marcus. They're alive, and Sandra is with them. A wave of joy overwhelms him.

Before he enters the apartment, Marcus stops. "Klaus should have been able to sense us by now. Lena, is this man, his name is Klaus, is he glowing at all? Can you tell us what he feels now?"

"Yeah, he's glowing. He's a parab...a paralf...whatever you say. He's happy that you and mommy are coming and he's happy about Sandra too, but it's different."

Sandra is the only one who registers the last thing Lena said. Her pulse quickens.

They enter the room. For a couple of seconds, Marcus and Klaus smile at each other in disbelief. Then Marcus takes Klaus' hand. "Klaus, it's really good to see you and with this new identity, I'm pretty sure you don't work for the PPU anymore."

Klaus nods.

Maria shakes his hand. Sandra embraces him. Marcus continues, "Klaus, I hope our last agreement still stands. Let's be completely open with each other. If we don't share the same opinions, it'll be too bad, but we'll never betray each other, O.K.?"

"Yes Marcus, the agreement still stands."

They are interrupted by Lena's crying.

"What's the mater, Lena," Maria and Marcus ask her almost simultaneously.

Still crying, Lena whispers something into Maria's ear. Maria looks thoughtful. "It's all right, Lena's just overwhelmed by the feelings in this room.

"Yes, daddy, so many people are happy in here," she says, weeping.

Sandra uncuffs Klaus and gives him a short version of the last six years of her life. She also gives him some details about Maria and Marcus and their life on Great Barrier Island. Klaus also tells his story. They are all shocked by Jan de Keep's death and by Justo and Greta's betrayal. They talk for what seems like forever. Robert has discreetly left the room. Lena is growing more and more uneasy.

"We should go back to the motel," Maria finally observes. "Lena should really be in bed by now. Let's order pizza and pick up some red wine on the way back to the motel. There's so much to talk about."

For a long time they all sit together. Soon, they know that Klaus is one of them and that he's excited to hear about SR Inc., the research team, and the new parabilitists. Even though Maria and Marcus have soon decided that they will ask Klaus to join their group, Klaus anticipates their offer. "Marcus, there's not much I have to offer you. You already have a parascout in your group," he nods to Lena. "She's even a bit of an empath, but still, I would really like to be part of this. Is there something I can do at SR Inc. or help with another of your operations?"

At this, Marcus embraces him. "Klaus, it's as if I just found a long-lost brother. We're all really happy." Maria nods with a smile and Sandra seems really excited.

Klaus replies, "There are two more things you should know about. First, I'm afraid we still have to be wary of the PPU in Brussels, and second, I have a little welcome gift for you. I hope it will help us. It's the PPU report on the standing of their pararesearch. It should be mostly about the protection against and the strengthening of parabilities. But it's in code. If we can decipher the code, then we'll at least know what the PPU knew three years ago. I'm afraid they must be much further than that now, but it should still be interesting."

So Klaus quits his job at the bank in Melbourne and moves in with them on Great Barrier Island. When he first visits the complex, he notices all the rooms that are still empty. "Marcus, you really seem to be planning something here."

"Indeed I am," Marcus replies. "We still have to grow much stronger, but you'll be a great help."

The computer division of SR Inc. gets right on the coded document. They promise that they will be able to decipher it.

As with all other newcomers, Marcus gives Klaus a couple of days to get used to Great Barrier Island and to the colleagues in Auckland. But Klaus can't wait. For years he has suppressed his desire to deal with parabilities. Now he can wait no longer.

9 Technology and Silatraviate

End of May 2011

At the SR Inc. offices, Marcus explains the ten major aspects of Para-research to Klaus. “What do you think Klaus, can you see yourself working here?”

“I wouldn’t be here otherwise, would I? I really want to help. What do you want me to do? By the way, have they decoded the report yet?”

“Not yet, unfortunately. But they’re optimistic. They know what method was used.”

“What kind of method?”

“Are you familiar with Public Key Cryptography³³?”

“Sure I am.”

“Then you know that this procedure creates documents that can not only not be faked, but can also be authenticated. However, algorithms have become better and better, and that will make it easier to decipher this code.”

“What’s the problem, then?”

“The problem is that they realized that the codes were not secure anymore, so they started to develop new algorithms based on so-called ‘L systems.’ Your document also seems to be based on these. But a couple of mathematicians from Auckland University are working on it. My friend Mike is one of them. He’s pretty sure they can crack it.”

“And what will my part in all this be?”

“First of all, I want you to help find new paras. Second, I want you to work on the following problem: how much technology,

³³ Public Key Cryptography was suggested the first time by Diffie and Hellmann, in 1975, and the first practical algorithm to implement the idea was discovered by Rivest, Shamir and Adelman: in their honour, the algorithm is called the RSA algorithm. The basic idea of public key cryptography is that a message is encrypted using one key (known to the public) but decrypted by another key only known to the intended receiver of the message. This idea is essential for the secure delivery and storage of digital documents.

especially computer technology, can realize or simulate the effects of parabilities. We've been quite successful in this field, but you'll see that later."

Klaus is fascinated with the robot they used in the fire at the factory. He can go on about it for hours. "It's incredible what you can do with that thing, but what's even more interesting is that you start to identify with it after a while. When you see through its eyes with the steering glasses or touch something with its arms, you start to forget that you're not there with the robot. You start to believe that you're inside it."

"I know what you mean. There's a book called 'The Mind's I' where the authors speculate that we think our consciousness is associated strongly with our extremities. We only think that, but our consciousness is mostly located in our brain. However, when we operate a robot, then we start to feel that our consciousness shifts to the robot.

The electronic devices of the other rescue vehicles also impress Klaus. The "Variable Cart" especially fascinates him. It's the size of a minivan and it can alter its physical dimensions. It can expand to accommodate dozens of people. It can reduce its specific weight to the extent that it can float.³⁴ With only one passenger, it can be reduced to the size of an armchair.

The computer technology of the communication glasses even goes beyond that of the steering glasses. They come with various functions. Marcus shows Klaus the standard model. It consists of two parts. One part is a computer the size of a credit card. You can carry on you, in a pocket, for example. This computer is very fast and can save huge amounts of data on "memory cards"; these are fairly long and less than a millimeter thick. They have no moving parts, which makes them very robust. They have a capacity of

³⁴ According to Archimedes the Greek para mathematician (who had his best ideas in his bathtub full of silatraviate-laden water) an object floats when its weight is less than that of the water it displaces, i.e. a 1000-ton ship must have an interior of more than 1000 cubic meters. Even though the Variable Cart is heavy, it can expand its interior indefinitely. Therefore, it can easily float.

several hundred terabytes³⁵. The computer has an inbuilt GPS system and a wireless connection to telephone and computer networks.

The second part, which gives the device its name, looks like a pair of glasses. They contain complex electronics. An additional collar contains an inbuilt throat microphone. It understands spoken words, even with your mouth shut. It then sends commands to the computer or transmits them to other people. If they are also equipped with communication glasses, the language and other acoustic information is transmitted directly to the auditory system. The communication glasses enable you to talk to people at any distance without anyone else noticing.

Marcus continues, "When you understand telepathy as the desire of two people to communicate without anyone else noticing, then you could say that we have managed to simulate telepathy with these glasses."

"Wouldn't it be possible to communicate without having to speak at all? Couldn't you just work with the impulses in the brain?" Klaus asks.

"In a special way, you can, but we're still far from being able to reconstruct thoughts from brain activity. But what we can do is recognize certain moods and conditions of the brain. For example, you can spell words by thinking of a different symbol for every letter. That's what the headset is for. This brings us even closer to true telepathy. Anyway, the lenses contain tiny mirrors. Can you see them?"

Klaus nods.

"These mirrors can project pictures through the pupils directly on the retina. These images can also be texts or films. Since both eyes are used, everything can be three dimensional."

"And where do those pictures come from?"

"They can come from the computer, or from a computer network, or from a camera connected to the network. Those cameras can be in the glasses of a friend, in a robot, in a remote-controlled airplane, or one of our cameras."

³⁵ With 100 terabytes, you can save every book ever written, billions of pictures, and thousands of movies.

“What do you mean one of my cameras?”

Marcus smiles. “Have a closer look at the glasses. You’ll see that there’s a tiny camera in the middle, which can even be removed. With this camera, you can show someone else what you’re seeing at the moment. You can take it out and put it down your throat, for example, so a doctor who’s far away can make a diagnosis if you have a sore throat. You can point the camera at a flower and the computer will give you all available information about it. You can also see through the camera.”

“Why would I want to do that when I can already see through the glasses?”

“Because the camera can also see in darkness or through fog. It’s sensitive to frequencies that the human eye isn’t. It has a zoom function, which allows you to use it as a microscope.”

Klaus looks at Marcus baffled. “Do you mean that we don’t even need Maria’s paraskills when we use those glasses?”

“Not quite. Maria can still do a bit more, but it’s still interesting how we can come close to and even surpass certain parabilities.”

“Surpass them?”

“Yeah, in some cases we can. Maria’s eyes have to stay in the front of her head, but the camera can also be positioned on the back of the head. That would enable you to look forward with your eyes and at the same time backwards with the camera. You could also attach it to the toe of your shoe to get a better look at a woman’s underwear. Just kidding.”

“Aha! I see.”

“Other devices make it possible to scan the face of a person and will give you details about their identity. The camera can also observe the movements of your hands and arms. That way, you can tell the computer what to do. You can measure the distance to, and temperature of, any object. You can hear in any direction and even into rooms. With the inbuilt compass, the computer always knows what you’re looking at and where it is, and, of course, exactly where you are. And those are only some of the many abilities. Don’t forget, you’re logged onto a computer network and you can extract almost any information at any time.”

“So technology is really on the verge of beating paraphanomena?”

“To a certain extent, yes. We don’t know how far we’ll get with it, but really strong parabilities are still far beyond our reach. But let me show you one more thing: our remote-controlled flying robots. We call them drones.”

Marcus shows Klaus one of the newest models. It’s smaller than a hummingbird. It has a camera, a microphone, and flies almost noiselessly. “Klaus, put on the glasses now and I’ll connect you to it.”

Klaus puts on the glasses and can now see the complex on Great Barrier Island.

“Your ‘hummingbird’ is sitting on a tree next to the houses. If you want to fly it, make a fist with your right hand. When you want to stop, make a fist again and it will fly back to the position where it started...yes, now you’ve activated it. Use your left hand to control the speed and the right hand to steer it. By lifting and lowering your right arm, its camera will zoom in or out.”

The longer he flies the drone, the more Klaus feels as if he himself were flying. He discovers Sandra who is sunbathing naked on the beach. “I can see Sandra,” says Klaus.

“Is she sunbathing again?” Marcus asks as he puts on another pair of communication glasses. “I’m now like a passenger. You steer the drone and I can see and hear everything just like you.”

Klaus gulps but then decides to fly closer to Sandra. “A first-class voyeuristic adventure. Can I talk to Sandra now too?”

“Kind of. Make a fist with your left hand; that will activate the loudspeaker. You can alter the volume by lifting and lowering your left arm. But don’t do it now. That would scare the crap out of her. Better stop the flight now. I have to explain something to you.”

Klaus hesitates and then makes a fist with his right hand. Picture and sound disappear. The hummingbird returns to its original position and deactivates.

Klaus takes the communication glasses off. “Marcus, the technology is great but this is also a catastrophe. It’s Big Brother to the bone. This is terrible.”

Marcus stares at Klaus for a long time. “I know. The further we develop this technology, the more it stresses our moral code. The military has been using flying robots since the late nineties. Mini surveillance cameras have been around for some time too. People

have been ignoring the problem out of laziness. As far as we know, the hummingbird is the most effective system at the moment. But other groups may be even more advanced. Remember the brochure I gave you when you arrived? You haven't looked at it yet, right? It gives you detailed information about the observation going on Great Barrier Island. It will tell you which parts of the island can and can't be observed by hummingbirds. Did you notice that the hummingbird sometimes refused to follow your commands?"

"I did. I was a bit surprised about that."

"We can give the hummingbirds limits and tell them where and where not to fly. That way, we can maintain a bit of privacy. In addition, we regularly search those private areas for objects in case someone is trying to spy on us. We have also developed a 'warn chip.' Attach it to your e-helper³⁶ and give one to Sandra, too. It will warn you when a drone approaches."

Klaus is a bit worried. "Have you been watching Sandra and me?"

Marcus smiles apologetically. "You've only been here for three days, Klaus, but it's pretty obvious that you and Sandra get along pretty well. I showed you all this to assure you that you have your private sphere. Is that enough technology for now, or do you want to see more?"

"Don't tell me there's more than that. How much of all this has been developed here and how much have you bought?"

"Let me answer the second question first. We buy a lot of this and then further develop it. The rescue robot is nothing new and there are hundreds of variations of communication glasses and hummingbirds. As far as we know, our technology is very advanced. We don't let any of this knowledge get out, even if we could make a lot of money with it. Our biggest secret is the holoprojection. Only very few people know about it. Let me show you a bit of what it can do.

Marcus leads Klaus into another room, which is bare except for a table and chairs. "Put your hand on the table, Klaus."

³⁶ The e-helper is a small multifunctional computer often carried like a wrist watch.

Cautiously, Klaus does so but feels nothing. His hand sinks through the table.

“Yes, this table is only a hologram, just like in Star Trek,” Marcus explains. “What we have here is basically not new. It’s a giant hologram, only we’ve made some important advances. First of all, the hologram can be viewed from all sides.³⁷ And second, the projectors are very small.” Marcus points to four little boxes in the corners of the room. “And third, for the first time, we are now able to transfer moving scenes into holograms. Just watch.”

Marcus calls out, “Forest scene.” The table disappears and Klaus can see a few trees, a creek, and a couple of birds. “This is a live scene from Great Barrier Island. If we manage to develop this further, we’ll soon be able to do a bit of what Barry does.”

Klaus is so overwhelmed by all the new impressions that he doesn’t register the meaning of the last statement.

“Klaus, it’s time for a break now. Let’s get some coffee and continue later.”

While they are having coffee, Klaus wants to know more. “You told me that I could supervise some of the technical aspects. What exactly did you mean by that?”

“No one knows all the details about those developments. I’m probably the one who knows the most, but still, I only know them superficially. It would be important to have a person who could analyze them in more detail, who could try to find a way we could combine all the developments, who could find out what’s missing, and what we could still include from paraphenomena, and so on. For example we had been using the e-helper and the communication glasses for quite some time before I realized they could be combined. I think I only had this idea because I knew the functions of both subsystems. It’s this kind of coordination that you would be in charge of.”

³⁷ By the year 2003, hologram technology was only able to look at holograms from a limited angle (less than ninety degrees). Creating and projecting holographs was time-consuming and the results were rather unimpressive.

Klaus is amazed. "Give me some time to get myself into it. Once I understand a bit more, we can both decide if it's the right thing for me."

Marcus agrees. He leaves it to the head of the computer division to fill Klaus in on the rest of the details. The research department has long awaited a coordinator, a knowledge manager.

Back at his desk, Marcus finds a report on the state of the silatraviate research:

We have finally proven that silatraviate can sometimes strengthen, and even cause, paraphenomena. Even skin contact can already cause a reaction. However, there is a greater effect if silatraviate is taken orally. Silatraviate can be found in certain stones (see table, Appendix 1), which mostly originate in deeper levels of the ground. It occurs in many, but not all, hot springs. The water in Rotorua is especially rich in silatraviate, with local variations. The geysers of the American Yellowstone are surprisingly poor in Silatraviate. The Strawberry Springs of Colorado, the water in Baden-Baden, Gastein, and the thermal springs of southeast Styria are also especially rich in silatraviate, and so are several springs in Egypt. We are working on a map showing the worldwide distribution of silatraviate, which should be ready within four weeks.

"More than any other plants, fruits from the Cucurbitaceae, as well as Cucurbita families, tend be rich in silatraviate.

"There is an especially conspicuous effect when silatraviate is exposed to short-frequency radio waves. It doesn't reflect them, but creates a rapidly varying frequency spectrum. So far, it has been impossible to create something like this technologically. We will continue intensive research on this unusual phenomenon."

If Marcus knew more about Botany, the term cucurbitaceae would probably mean something to him. Maybe this would have helped him in his search for the origins of paraphenomena.

But the final paragraph of the report intrigues him more than botany. Are they on track for a really important discovery? He'll have to get involved in this personally. An ex-physicist like him always needs to know more about frequency spectra.

Before Marcus can continue working, he gets a phone call telling him that the PPU report has been deciphered and is already on the

way over. He calls Klaus who arrives almost simultaneously with the report. They both read it. When they are finished, Marcus asks Klaus to summarize his impressions of it.

Klaus explains, "Apparently, silatraviate plays an important part in paraphenomena. It seems that people who've been having a lot of contact with the substance are more likely to develop parabilities. Also, consumption of the substance normally strengthens a parability. Strangely enough, it also seems to be a means against paraphenomena. If it's exposed to short frequency radio waves, it's neither absorbed nor reflected. Instead, its energy is bounced back in a very unusual way: it behaves like radiation with a frequency that varies irregularly and unpredictably millions of times per second. This is the reason why this effect is difficult to prove and has hardly been researched up to now. However, this radiation seems to block parabilities in 'both directions.' In other words, a telekinetic person loses his skills when surrounded by such radiation. Conversely, 'normal' people who are surrounded by it seem to be protected from parabilities. So, if I was surrounded by this radiation, Lena, for example, couldn't work her empath skills on me, and Monika wouldn't be able to locate me, etc. Do you understand the results in the same way?"

Marcus nods vigorously. "Yes, I understand it in the same way. Our research group has also found out about this strange radiation, but we haven't yet analyzed its effects in such detail. It seems that a small amount of energy is enough to surround a person with 'anti-para' radiation. But there are still a couple of things I don't understand. I just got a report from the research unit saying that the springs in Rotorua contain especially large concentrations of silatraviate. I'm pretty sure that Barry's parabilities originate from the time he worked as a lifeguard there. I think you, Lena, and I should drive to Rotorua because there is a good chance that we'll find more parabilitists there. What do you think?"

Shaking his head, Klaus answers firmly, "I don't think it should be our top priority to find more parabilitists at the moment. With what we know now, we should first try to develop some kind of a protection shield against parabilities. Don't forget, the PPU is three years ahead of us. Who knows, maybe they can already strengthen parabilities, and at the same time shield themselves against them, or

even turn them off. That could really put us in a lot of trouble. Let me start working on it with the technology. The clock is ticking!”

Marcus gets the impression that Klaus is too pessimistic, but he tries to compromise. “O.K. Klaus, I’ll give you ten days. We have enough silatraviate in this house. Try to make some progress toward developing a shield. But then we’ll take a trip to Rotorua. If we find parabilitists, we don’t have to contact them right away, but I really want to know if there are a lot of them there because of the presence of silatraviate. Is that all right with you?”

“I can live with that. And I’m willing to accept your proposal, but I have to warn you again, you have never, or hardly ever, dealt with evil parabilitists. You managed to win me over even though I worked against you for some time. I’m happy about that fact. But you only knew Justo when he was harmless. What if we find an extremely dangerous parabilitist in Rotorua? What will you do then?”

Marcus can tell that Klaus is serious, so he gives it a little thought. “All right, then. Let’s postpone the trip to Rotorua for a couple of weeks. That’ll give you some more time to develop some kind of protective method.”

“I’ll do my best.”

That evening, Marcus tells Maria about the reports. She asks him about the names of the fruits that can carry large amounts of silatraviate, but Marcus has already forgotten their unusual and complex names. Maria would’ve been able to tell him that they are one of the many families of pumpkins. Maybe the combination of thermal baths and pumpkins, which can be found near her home in southeastern Styria, would’ve led her on the right track. Styrians eat pumpkin soup and stew, they roast pumpkin seeds for oil; even pumpkin preserves, pie and ice cream are part of their daily menu. In short, the average doses of silatraviate that a Styrian consumes by eating pumpkin and relaxing in thermal baths is disproportionately high.

Maria hasn’t been to Rotorua in a long time. She’s really looking forward to their visit. She’s sure that Stephan and Lena will like it too. For Klaus and Sandra, it will be a new and interesting insight

into their present home. Maria convinces Marcus to take the whole team on the trip.

Klaus tells Sandra about the hummingbirds. She realizes that some things that she thought were private aren't. It makes her a bit uncomfortable. She has to think about the things that she and Klaus have been doing on the beach where she sunbathed today. She is not sure that they were the only ones who shared those special moments. Klaus is amused. He is completely in love with Sandra. Even during the old PPU days, he thought of her as interesting and attractive, but back then, the principle that a boss should not have an affair with an employee was stronger than his feelings.

For Sandra it's a little different. She's in love with Klaus, but she suffers from self-doubt. She has always suffered from being able to read other people's feelings. She didn't even want to believe in the possibility of a relationship before. The hypnosis that still keeps her from reading Klaus enables her to experience love in a new way: never to be sure if you are doing the right thing or if you are appreciated. Now, everything's different; everything's exciting. This makes her envy "normal" people even more than before. At the same time, she's also rational about it. She asks herself if that is the reason why she loves Klaus so much and if they truly belong together. She'll have to live with those doubts for some more time. Her confidant is three-and-a-half year-old Lena, who's also an empath. She often tells Sandra that Klaus loves her very much.

10 The Brodlyn Twins

June 2011

Three weeks have passed. Klaus has worked intensively on a device for protection against parabilities. He has created two prototypes that can be attached to an e-helper. He gives one to Marcus and explains how it can be activated. When you press a button, a little piece of silatraviate is hit with X-rays and a form of frequency-variable radiation is created. The nucleus of the piece and the source of the X-ray were created in a way such that they can cover one person with anti-radiation. Klaus doesn't tell Marcus that he has also built a larger model. This one weighs almost fifty kilograms and can cover almost fifty square meters. Unlike Marcus, Klaus worries about finding new parabilitists without further protection measures.

Klaus has tried the newly equipped e-helper on himself and on Barry. When Klaus uses it, Monika can't locate him any longer and Lena can't read his feelings anymore. When Barry uses it, he can't materialize a Parabarry. Similarly, the machine can shut off Marcus' parabilities. But Klaus is not satisfied. The X-rays constitute a danger and require a lot of energy which drains the battery relatively quickly. He also doesn't know if the anti-radiation works on all kinds of parabilities.

The trip to Rotorua, which had originally been planned for only three people, has turned into something of a field trip for the group. Maria, Marcus, their children, Barry, Monika, Sandra, Klaus, and Aroha all come along. Marcus is proud to show Rotorua to the newcomers. From Auckland, they go south in several cars. They pass the intersection leading to the glowworm caves of Waitomo. Marcus and Maria remember them with mixed feelings³⁸.

When they enter Rotorua, they immediately notice the odor of the hot springs. They also see the hot steam rising from several holes. Marcus has booked several rooms in a hotel right by the hot springs of Whakarewarewa. They can even see some of the geysers from

³⁸ See "Experts: The Telekinetic", Chapter 11.

their rooms. In addition to the steam fountains, there are mud volcanoes, geysers, and hot pots shimmering in many colors from yellow to red. Whakarewarewa is also interesting because of a Maori village that is alive with culture and tradition.

When they first wander around, they soon realize why this place was populated so early on. The constant availability of fresh and hot water were two good reasons for people to settle here.

In the evening they attend a Hangi, a traditional Maori dinner with dancing shows. Many big hotels in Rotorua offer such events. The most authentic shows can be attended in the traditional maraes. Those can be found in every Maori settlement and are used for informal gatherings and religious rituals.

The Ohinemutu Marea lies right by Lake Rotorua.³⁹ Before the dances begin, one person, symbolically standing for all the visitors, is welcomed by the Maoris. They pick Klaus. Several tattooed Maoris welcome him with threatening gestures, screams, grunts and stuck-out tongues. Finally, they throw a little twig with green leaves at his feet. Klaus slowly picks it up, as he was advised to do beforehand, and presses it against his chest, making the traditional sign that he comes as a friend. Those gestures, the dances, and the moving songs are a good introduction into Maori culture which one learns to respect over the years. Stephan and Lena are especially enchanted by the dances, which range from slow and sad to fast and rhythmical.

Marcus explains that, in addition to Whakarewarewa⁴⁰, there are three more areas with volcanic activity. "Hell's Gate," which is always mentioned in travel guides, is, apart from its boiling waterfall, the least interesting of them. Waimangu, meaning "thermal valley", is situated about twenty kilometers south of Rotorua. In addition to the volcanic activity, it offers a nice walk to Lake Rotomohano, which was famous for its white terraces until

³⁹ With its perfectly round Mokoia Island and the many legends and songs, Lake Rotorua is one of the major sights of the town.

⁴⁰ The word Whakarewarewa has nothing to do with either hot springs of geysers. It commemorates the beginning of a famous Maori battle.

they were destroyed in the eruption of Mount Tarawerea in 1886. A little village called the Buried Village that lies behind Blue Lake and Green Lake was also destroyed.

Mount Tarawerea is also worth a visit. The eruption created a huge gap along the summit. Just south of Waimangu lies Waiotapu⁴¹. That's where Marcus takes them the next morning. "We have to be there by 9 a.m. That's when the Lady Fox Geyser erupts," he explains. This eruption is one of the strangest occurrences. You can stand around a three-meter high mantle and watch the hot water slowly flow out. At nine a.m. sharp, a guard arrives and pours in washing powder. This reduces the surface tension. First it foams a little, then a fountain of water emerges, grows bigger and bigger, and finally huge amounts of boiling water pour out of the cone, which previously looked so inconspicuous.

Workers washing their clothes in the hot water were the first to note this phenomenon. To their surprise, the strength of the fountain threw their clothes high into the air. They later found it hard to collect their laundry from the trees.

Afterwards, they walk through Waiotapu. This "thermal wonderland," is truly spectacular. On the way back to Rotorua, Marcus decides to show them one of the less well known hot lakes. "On this side, the water is only warm, but on the other side, it's boiling hot. It drains underground and reappears as a hot water creek. The creek has several small waterfalls where some marvelous ponds have been built. They're pretty amazing, but they're so well known⁴² that they're usually crowded with people. If you want to be alone there, you have to go very early in the morning."

"Can't you swim in the lake," Klaus asks.

"Sure you can, but the water's pretty muddy."

Nothing can keep Klaus from jumping in. After screaming, "It's great in here," he even starts swimming a strong crawl.

⁴¹ Waiotapu means holy water.

⁴² In 1995, Kerosene Creek was still a secret and could only be reached after a ninety-minute hike. By 2003, it was mentioned in the official Rotorua guidebook. You can now drive to within 100 meters of the most attractive spot.

Marcus shouts after him, "There might be branches in there!"

But it's too late. Klaus swims into a branch lying just under the surface. He is frightened and rips his foot out of the water. The branch stabs him in the thigh, causing a severe wound. "I think I've hurt myself," he screams, and cautiously swims back to the shore. Marcus tries to make the swim easier with his parapowers. He feels guilty for not having warned Klaus beforehand.

When they help Klaus out of the water, they are shocked at the sight of the wound: it's long, deep and bleeding profusely. It's also ridden with dirt from the branch.

"Sandra, we have to take him to the hospital in Rotorua immediately. I know the way so I'll drive. You take care of Klaus in the back seat. We'll all meet back at the hotel," commands Marcus.

They quickly dress the wound with handkerchiefs and lay Klaus down in the back seat of the car. Sandra lifts up the wounded leg. Marcus speeds off. Klaus is losing a lot of blood and comes closer and closer to fainting. Marcus tries to close the wound with his pseudohands. He knows this is necessary; otherwise, Klaus would bleed to death. Only by speeding up his individual time can he do that and concentrate on the driving simultaneously.

They are admitted professionally and quickly. Still pale, Klaus rolls out in a wheelchair about an hour later. His leg is in a huge cast. The doctor reports, "He'll be fine now. The problem was that a large artery was cut. We had to stitch both the artery and the flesh wound. That's why it took so long. He's lost some blood, but we refilled him a little. Mr. Neidly should take it easy tonight. He doesn't need the wheelchair, but you can take him to the car with it. Tomorrow, he can start to walk again, but carefully. Make sure he's back for a check up next week. We have to see if everything is healing properly. We'll take the stitches out in two or maybe three weeks."

While Sandra rolls Klaus to the car, the doctor holds Marcus back. "Is it true that this happened at the hot lake north of Waiotapu?"

Marcus confirms that.

The doctor shakes his head. "It's hard to believe that Mr. Neidly survived that. However fast you may have been driving, it must still have taken quite a while to get here. I can't understand why he

didn't lose more blood. He should've been critical. I have to say that Mr. Neidly had a guardian Angel."

Marcus bids him goodbye. "Thanks for your help. You did a great job. Looks like we got lucky today."

The doctor nods.

Back at the car, Marcus turns to Klaus. "Sorry that I didn't warn you in time."

Klaus laughs, "Come on, I'm not a child anymore. First, I was stupid enough to jump into water I didn't know, and then I started swimming like Johnny Weissmuller. It serves me right. I'm sorry if I slow you down for a couple of days; it's me who has to apologize for that."

Maria, Marcus and the kids spend the afternoon in the Agrodome. The kids enjoy watching the sheep play and how the sheepdogs keep them together. Marcus has to keep Stephan from goofing around with his animalactivator skills. For the first time, father and son engage in a sort of paraduel. Stephan makes the sheep charge the dogs, very much to the surprise of the dogs and the shepherds, but Marcus moves them back with his pseudohands at the last moment. Stephan and Marcus can't help looking at each other and burst out laughing. No one around them understands what's going on. Only Maria and Lena know and laugh along.

When the trainers make the sheep stand on a podium, they are very surprised to see them jump down and run toward the audience. Marcus forces them back on stage.

"Stephan, it's time to stop," Marcus warns his son.

"Just one more trick, please? Just a small one?"

The trainers can't believe it when two sheep run underneath a third and carry it across the stage on their backs. Marcus laughs, "O.K., that's it for you, young man. The last trick is mine."

He forces one sheep onto the back of another and a third sheep on the back of the second. The three-sheep tower runs a victory lap around the stage.

The audience goes absolutely nuts. The trainers get a lot of praise they don't really deserve. "That show beats everything!" The trainers can't explain it. From now on, the highlight of every show will be two sheep carry a third on their backs. What they don't know, of course, is that someone gave the sheep a perpetual

command to do so. This dressage will make them so famous that they'll even make it onto TV. One day, Maria will see that show. She will shake her head and smile.

When they are on their way to the food court of the Rotorua Central Mall, Maria addresses her son: "Should you ever need a job, son, you'd make a sensational trainer at the Agradome."

Stephan nods, but he dreams about much bigger things. During dinner, Lena suddenly shudders, "Mama, Papa, I'm scared. The man there with the green shirt, and the woman with him, they're evil, they 'glow' evil!"

Maria and Marcus look at each other. "Don't be scared, Lena. We'll make sure they don't come near you. But we'll find out if they live here."

When Richard and Anne Brodlyn leave the parking lot of the mall, Maria, Marcus, and the kids follow them. They write down their Rotorua license plate number and follow them at a discrete distance. Neither notices that they're being followed. They drive straight to Taupo road, take a turn north, enter Sunset Road after a couple of intersections and drive into the garage of a big villa. The door closes automatically behind them.

Maria writes down the address and points to an apartment building nearly across the street from the villa. There is a sign that reads "Apartments for rent." That could come in handy. Marcus wants to go over straight away to rent an apartment. They'll have to observe the two parabilitists for some time. But Lena is extremely agitated and close to tears. "I wanna go. They're mean and evil people."

Marcus decides to come back later, alone.

Maria and Marcus ask Lena why she thinks the two people are evil. As expected, she can't explain it. Sandra, who spends a lot of time with Lena, already told them weeks ago, "Lena is a strange kind of empath. She has a very strong sense of other people's feelings, but she can only put them into a few categories like sadness, happiness, dislike, or evil and so forth. With me, it's the other way around. I can differentiate better, but I can't sense so strongly."

They hold a "war council" at the hotel. They decide to rent an apartment so they can observe the two paras. As inconspicuously as

possible, Marcus walks by the gate of the villa and memorizes their names. He gives this information to a detective agency. He tells them to be very cautious and to gather as much information on the Brodlyn family as possible.

The next morning, Aroha stays with Lena. Barry and Monika have decided to take a trip to Lake Taupo. "We'll bring back some trout for dinner," they promise before they leave. The others, including the recovering Klaus, leave early to go to the new apartment to observe Richard and Ann.

Klaus knows right away: "It's true, they both have strong paraskills of a nature I've never come across before. I'm not sure, maybe Lena has influenced me here, but they're scary somehow. We'd better be careful."

Sandra observes, "As you know, the villa is within my parareach. I could probably sense the feelings of people I know over that distance, but I haven't even met them yet, so that won't do."

Maria reports that Richard and Ann apparently live on separate levels. She can even see that they're having separate breakfasts at the moment. She roughly describes the house. Together with Marcus, who rakes the objects inside, they draw a detailed plan of the house. This could be especially important for Barry if he has to materialize a Parabarry there. Maria is particularly interested in the hobby room in the basement. It has comfortable furniture and fitness machines but also strange, unidentifiable objects. When Marcus goes through the locked closets, which Maria can't see into because of the darkness, he finds cords, chains and other things that could be found in certain sex shops. When he tells Maria about them, they don't know what to think.

Richard is the first to leave the house. He drives away without saying goodbye to Ann. Sandra only sees him for a moment, but that's enough to make her pale. "Lena was right, He's a monster. His feelings are a mix of desire for sex, for power, for humiliating others... He despises every human being. His feelings are very strong. Apparently, he can somehow use his parability to dominate others. I would never want to meet this guy! Klaus, do you think your group could make some more of those anti-para devices? I think we should all carry some kind of protection from now on."

Marcus is shocked by the intensity of Sandra's words. Richard really seems to be powerful and evil. They haven't had much time to talk about Sandra's analysis when Maria interrupts to tell them that Ann is getting ready to leave the house. She is barely out of the building when Sandra reacts almost like she did with Richard. "Ann is very similar to Richard; almost exactly the same, really. Her desire for sex is a little less intense, but she really wants money. She's a monster just like him. We're dealing with a satanic couple here!"

Ann is walking toward the city center. The group decides to separate. Because of his injury, Klaus stays behind. He will call the detective agency to get an initial report. Sandra will return to Great Barrier Island with him to take over Aroha's babysitting duties. Maria and Marcus will cautiously follow Ann and try to find out more about her.

Ann goes straight to a jewelry shop in the city center. Maria and Marcus sit down in a coffee shop nearby. Maria observes Ann, informing Marcus all the while. "Ann is busy looking at extremely expensive jewelry. There are some more customers in the shop. Ann can't seem to make up her mind."

"Now she's alone. She seems to have decided on a large piece. Unfortunately, I can't hear what she's saying, but...what's that...she only pays twenty dollars for the piece? The saleswoman must be crazy. Ann's leaving the shop now. The saleswoman is watching her go. She doesn't know what just happened to her."

Maria and Marcus discuss if it's now better to follow Ann Brodlyn, question the saleswoman, or separate and do both. Maria decides, "I'd really like to follow Ann; you can go into the jewelry shop."

"All right Maria. But take my e-helper with you. When you feel an unpleasant influence on you, just press the button. You should be safe then. But please try to avoid any contact with Ann. I really don't like this whole thing."

They agree to meet back at the hotel in no more than an hour.

Maria follows Ann. It doesn't take long before Ann walks into another big jewelry shop. It's the same thing again. Ann waits until she's the only customer in the shop, then she offers to sell the piece

she's just bought. After a little haggling, the jeweler hands her a check. Unfortunately, Maria can't read what's written on it.

Ann walks to the next bank to cash the check. Even though Maria can't determine the exact sum, it's obvious that she leaves with a thick wad of hundred dollar notes. Apparently, it only took her half an hour to rake in thousands of dollars. How is that possible? Will Marcus know more?

"Hello, Maria," says a voice near her. It's Aroha. "Is that Evil Anne who Lena keeps talking about?"

"That's her," confirms Maria. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm doing a little shopping," Aroha explains. She doesn't tell Maria that she has been following her for quite a while now. Aroha wants to keep following Ann. Her Mindcaller acts funny around Ann. It vibrates and gets warm; a new phenomenon for her.

Marcus enters the jewelry shop where Ann "bought" the very expensive piece. The saleswoman is alone there. When Marcus comes in, she turns away to blow her nose once more. Then she turns around again and asks Marcus if she can help him. Marcus can see that her eyes are all red, apparently she has been crying. He walks over to the display case that Maria described to him before. All the jewelry in there costs between ten and twenty thousand dollars.

"You only display the most expensive pieces in this case, do you?"

"Yes," the saleswoman answers, finding it hard not to start weeping.

"I don't understand something. I just met a woman who showed me a wonderful piece. She told me that she found it in this case and that she only paid twenty dollars for it. Is that true?"

The girl looks at Marcus with lifeless eyes. Then, with an unsteady voice, she starts to tell the story: "This woman came in and she wanted the dolphin. It's an \$18,000 piece. She asked me if I could reduce the price a little and...I don't know what came over me...but I felt somehow sorry for her," then she breaks down completely. "I gave it to her for twenty dollars!"

"And she didn't force you in any way?"

“No, not at all. She was very nice. She was grateful and happy. It’s all my fault! How could I have been so stupid? I don’t know what got into me!”

“So you owe the owner of this shop about \$18,000 now. I suppose that’s a little less than you make in a year, right?”

“Yes, it’s a catastrophe. I just bought an apartment; I’ve been saving for years. And I also had to take a loan, of course. Money is really scarce and now I’m completely ruined because I’m so stupid!”

Marcus thinks for a little while, then he takes his checkbook out. “How about this. I buy this beautiful Marea model that, according to the price tag, costs \$20,000. You give me a 5% rebate, and then I’ll also give you an additional personal check for \$17,980. But there are three conditions: you will tell nobody, not even your parents or friends, about this transaction. Second, should this woman come back here, you’ll call me at this number immediately and someone will be over to help you. Third, you let me install this surveillance camera in the corner up there. It will only activate when you call me.”

It takes the saleswoman a while to comprehend this offer. Is everyone going crazy? This stranger wants to pay for her mistake, and on top of it, he also buys an expensive piece, which will get her a 25% commission. So all in all, she stands to make \$2000. “Why would you want to do that? I’m sure you know that you could get more than a 5% rebate, and why do you want to pay for my mistake?”

Marcus hesitates but then decides to almost tell her the truth. “What you have just done wasn’t stupid. You were hypnotized. We want to put this woman behind bars because she’s used hypnosis in quite a few frauds like this. What she did here with you is especially dangerous because the victims don’t even notice that they’re being hypnotized. But we have to solve the case without undue attention. That’s why we want to help you to forget what happened. But you have to help us by keeping quiet about it. Can you promise that?”

The girl nods and tears of relief are in her eyes. “Are you with the police?”

“Kind of, we’re a special unit,” Marcus answers.

As Marcus leaves the shop, a very grateful girl watches him go. Marcus feels like a boy scout who has just done his good deed for

the day. He notices the look the girl gives him. For one moment, he is tempted: 'She's kind of pretty, there's a lot she'd do for me right now after all that.' But soon he has himself back under control. He's angry about his thoughts and realizes how thin the line is between good and bad.

In the meantime, Klaus has evaluated the report from the private detectives. Richard and Ann are not a married couple, they're twins. Richard doesn't work much, but he seems to be an extremely talented real estate agent. He seems to be able to sell anything to anybody at any price. He also seems to somehow make his customers fall in love with whatever they buy so that they never complain about the cost. He's extremely successful with women even though his looks are below average. He must have seduced dozens of young women who later regretted what they did. He also seems to have destroyed several marriages. But he never has long relationships with the women.

Ann is also a very talented businesswoman. She buys and sells jewelry and art and has accumulated quite a respectable fortune. They are both pretty popular, even among their "victims," who often feel extremely stupid for selling far too low or for buying far too high. This report adds to what Maria and Marcus have just found out: apparently, Richard and Ann use their parabilities to hypnotize people without a word.

Klaus sums it up: those two can do with humans what Stephan can do with animals. They can give orders that humans are simply compelled to carry out. They can probably even make people do things much later on, whether they want to or not. The victims believe that they are doing all this of their own volition.

The group discusses the situation: Richard and Ann have very strong parabilities, they're swindlers and use their skills to their own advantage to accumulate money or for sexual purposes. It may not be very noble, but Marcus, to a certain extent, has to admit that he did similar things when he was younger. No one dares to say it aloud, but they all think the same thing: if they could get Richard and Ann on the right path, they could be unbelievable assets to the group. And even though Lena and Sandra characterized both Brodlyns as pure evil, they don't really seem to have committed major crimes.

Of course, what Ann did today, how she put that young woman in such a difficult position, shows how reckless she is. Do they really want to deal with those kinds of people?

"Where's Aroha," Klaus suddenly asks.

"I met her accidentally when I followed Ann," Maria explains. "She wanted to do some shopping."

After Aroha and Maria separate, Aroha follows Ann inconspicuously, or at least she thinks so. The Mindcaller she wears under her blouse becomes so warm that it almost hurts. It also vibrates, apparently because of Ann's proximity. Aroha is fascinated and doesn't notice that Ann is suddenly standing near her, looking at her.

All of a sudden, Aroha knows: she has always wanted to go to the park with this woman and talk. Aroha walks directly to a park bench. She is not surprised at the fact that she knows which bench she's looking for, or that Ann sits down with her. She can feel the woman's sympathy. She knows that she will answer any question truthfully.

"What's your name?"

"Aroha."

"Why have you been following me?"

"I was wondering why you bought something in a jewelry shop and sold it in another one."

Ann doesn't like the fact that Aroha knows about all that. She's impatient; she doesn't want to waste time on such matters and has to make short work of this situation.

"You're here in Rotorua to visit the sights?"

"Yes, I've already been to Whakarewarewa, in Thermal Wonderland, in..."

Anne interrupts her, "Are you here with your boyfriend?"

"I don't have a boyfriend."

"Do you have your own apartment, or, do you live in a motel?"

"I live in a big, old hotel and..."

Ann again interrupts, "It was nice talking to you. I have to go now."

Ann gets up and Aroha is overwhelmed by a deep sadness. This person, who she'll always consider a friend, leaves her there alone.

Aroha feels as though she is leading such a worthless life. She must end it. She'll buy a revolver. She knows intuitively where she can buy one. She will then shoot herself at the hotel. She'll take the revolver and shoot herself through the mouth, or in the temple... Pull the trigger!" Her life no longer makes sense.

Full of determination, she gets up. She doesn't notice how the Mindcaller buzzes, and how it tries to fight the para-spell. It's too weak because it's only half of the whole thing, and the second half hasn't turned up yet, despite her grandmother's prophecy.

She has no problem finding the gun shop. She illegally buys a revolver and ammunition and has everything explained to her there. Then she takes a taxi to the hotel. She rushed into her room, locks the door, carefully loads the revolver and puts the barrel into her mouth. Without hesitation, she starts to pull the trigger. She stops for a second because she notices that someone is touching her, but her urge to commit suicide is so strong that everything else becomes irrelevant. She will die now...

"There's Aroha!" Klaus shouts when he sees her stepping out of the taxi. They are all surprised when she passes the grand suite where they are all sitting and goes directly to her room. Then everything happens topsy-turvy. To his surprise, Maria throws herself on top of Marcus and embraces him. The others are frozen with surprise. "Marcus, see what I see, do something!"

With Maria's eyes, Marcus can look inside Aroha's room. He sees her loading a revolver. He increases his individual speed to have time to think, even though he loses sight of Aroha that way. He blames himself for never before having tried to change his individual speed while looking together with Maria. For the first time, he realizes that he can't do both at the same time. Marcus decides to increase his speed even more, and to blindly scan Aroha's room with his pseudohands. His pseudohands run up and down her body, find the weapon, and wrench it out of her mouth. They can all hear the shot.

Maria screams in relief, "You did it Marcus! The bullet went straight into the ceiling."

Marcus decreases his speed to normal again and embraces Maria so that he can see with her eyes. Aroha stands in her room, unbelievably looking at the revolver. She still wants to die; she still

has to die. She points the weapon to her temple, but Marcus rips the gun out of her hand. He grabs her wrists with two pseudohands, unlocks Aroha's room with a third and tells Sandra to go and get Aroha.

Sandra runs to Aroha, who is forced by Marcus to walk toward her. "What's the matter with you?" shouts Sandra.

"Leave me alone! I want to kill myself!" Aroha, who is usually quiet and balanced, is not easily calmed. Marcus keeps holding her tightly with his pseudohands while Sandra and Maria tie her up and give her a sleeping pill. Suddenly, Lena says, "Aroha wants to sleep and never wake up again."

"Yes," Sandra agrees, "there's an overwhelming urge to commit suicide. And there is another feeling of extreme love for someone."

Sandra shrugs. "Now I understand it. Ann Brodlyn must've met with Aroha. She must've suspected something and given her the command to commit suicide and to love her forever, or something like that. We can only hope that Ann didn't ask her questions that'll lead her to us. If she's done that, we're all in great danger. Klaus, you're the parascout here. You'll have to be constantly alert and warn us if Richard and Ann get anywhere near us. Maybe we can get Aroha to tell us what exactly Ann told her."

Even though the situation becomes clearer, they don't find a solution. The urge to kill herself seems to be burned into Aroha's brain. She's going to try to kill herself as soon as they untie her.

Klaus gets up and walks over to Aroha. To the astonishment of the others, he puts his hand down her blouse. Before anyone can react, he says, "I'm not doing anything dirty here, I have to check the Mindcaller. Yes, it's warm and vibrating. It's never done that before. I think the force of the command hit it. It's like with the anti-radiation. I think it's trying to weaken or extinguish the command."

"How do you know that," Marcus asks surprised.

Klaus looks at Stephan. "Stephan helped me. Go ahead, tell them."

Stephan blurts out, "Daddy, do you remember when I found the splinter of the Mindcaller on the island? I only found it because I can look around corners. That's why I could see it under the stone. I

noticed that the piece was a little warm and that it vibrated. I think it reacted to my parability. I told that to Klaus.”

Klaus continues, “That was very important for our research. Now that we know that parabilities can be shielded by variable frequency radiation, and that silatraviate has something to do with it, well, it’s only logical that para-influence is caused by exactly that kind of radiation, and that it also leads to certain reactions in silatraviate. Like warming it up, for example. We’re pretty sure by now that many parabilities are transcended in frequencies which change rapidly, so silatraviate works as a kind of transformer; if silatraviate is confronted with a certain energy, it produces radiation which is similar to that of our parabilities. In that way, it can also extinguish parabilities, of course. Conversely, if silatraviate is exposed to this kind of radiation, then it produces certain types of energy. So this could cause warmth, short wave radiation, mechanical energy, or vibration in the Mindcaller. We still lack some instruments for measurement, but we’re close to proving what I’ve just roughly explained. Stephan’s observation was the key to this.”

Stephan enjoys being the center of attention. “We have to get rid of this spell cast on Aroha. I can give commands to animals in the same way that Richard and Ann can give commands to humans. I’ve noticed that animals will only follow my commands if they’re very detailed. They always do what I tell them, but sometimes it’s not exactly what I wanted. For example, when I tell a school of fish to come over to the shore because I want to see what they look like outside of the water, they lift their tails out of the water, then their bellies, and then their heads. Sometimes they just make a short jump. So I can see their bodies outside the water, but they don’t think of crawling out of the water. They follow my command, but they do it in a way that suits them best. Once the animals have followed my command, it’s gone and they’re free again. Maybe Aroha can do something like that too.”

Klaus takes up the point. “I think Stephan is right there. We could try it like this: Aroha probably got the command to shoot herself with a revolver. According to what Maria said, it was probably also part of the command to shoot herself in the mouth and temple. But if the commands did not explicitly state she had to use a

revolver to do it, then we could get rid of the command by letting her use something else to shoot herself.”

“What do you mean by that, Klaus?” Marcus asks.

“Well, if humans react like animals and if Aroha didn’t get an explicit command, then we could put a revolver in one of her hands and a water pistol in the other. Then she will follow her instincts to shoot through the window with the revolver and shoot herself with the water pistol. Then she will have followed the command, but aside from a little water in her mouth and hair, nothing will have happened.” They are all too baffled to speak. “What do we have to lose? If necessary, Marcus can knock the revolver out of her hand again. We just have to make sure she follows the orders. I suggest the following: we open one window in Aroha’s room, take her inside, and put a revolver, ammunition, and a loaded water pistol within her reach. We leave her alone with all that stuff because this could be a part of the order. Marcus keeps watching her through Maria’s eyes and interferes only if necessary.”

Marcus congratulates Klaus and Stephan: “Whether this works out or not, that was good teamwork.”

But against all odds, the plan works flawlessly right down to the last detail.

Several giant trout⁴³ are already sizzling on the stove. Barry and Monika brought them home from their fishing trip. Aroha is back to normal. Cautiously, they keep asking her about the last few hours. They all agree that the meeting between Aroha and Ann could have turned out much worse. Fortunately, Aroha didn’t give away details about the group because she wasn’t explicitly asked about them. But Stephan warns them about one order still active within Aroha: she still considers Ann a friend. It would be fatal to mention her or to consider actions against her in Aroha’s presence.

Aroha is exhausted and soon hits the sack. The others exchange the latest news. Barry and Monika are so in love, it’s almost too

⁴³ The rainbow trout made its way to New Zealand from North America via Europe. In the rivers entering Lake Taupo, the fish can reach sizes that are usually only found in fishermen’s stories.

much for the others. They go on and on about their fishing trip. "It didn't even take us an hour to catch these trout. Man, they're almost the size of salmon! The whole environment was unreal there and, believe it or not, there were stones floating in the creek!"⁴⁴ No one is so indiscreet as to ask what they did the rest of the day.

It's more important for Klaus to make sure that the news about the 'suicide' can be found in the local newspaper the next day. Ann could get suspicious otherwise. It takes a lot of convincing and money on Marcus' part to make the newspaper print the fabrication.

They plan the next steps. They are going to use e-hummingbirds to install mini surveillance cameras in Richard and Ann's villa. The hummingbirds themselves would be too obvious. They hope to get new insights about Richard and Ann that way. Maybe they will still be of some help to the group, or, more likely, it will be necessary to stop their activities. Klaus is the only one who takes precautions for a worst-case scenario.

They are able to install the cameras the next morning. Maria, Lena, Stephan, Aroha and Klaus make a trip to Tauranga Bay. The others watch Richard and Ann from afar. In the evening, when Aroha is absent for some time, Sandra reports the bad news: she has seen Richard disappear into his villa with two teenagers. He had happiness, sex, triumph and violence on his mind. The girls were all full of sex and subjugation, feelings probably induced by Richard. When they left the villa later with tears in their eyes, those feelings had turned into astonishment, shame, and despair. The videos, which they retrieve from the cameras the next day confirm her worst fears: apparently, Richard made them obedient through hypnosis, forcing them to submit to his perversions.

Hardly inside the hobby room, the girls beg Richard to undress and please him. He finally "gives in," sits on the chair and "reveals his goods." One of the girls kneels in front of him. While she takes great care of his private parts, he undresses her. The other girl holds

⁴⁴ Waimarino River, which enters Lake Taupo from the east, is home to forty cm long rainbow trout. It's said to be the best spot for fly-fishing in the world (if you don't believe it, stay at Creely Lodge in Turangi and get a guide to take you there). Volcanic pumice, which is lighter than water, comes down from the Kaiwanawa Mountains and floats in the river.

the first's hands behind her back while pressing her head further down on Richard. After a while, she insists that it's her turn now and the girls switch positions. The second girl now begs for punishment. Soon, the true meaning of one of the devices in the hobby room becomes clear... Apparently against her will, the girl asks for even harsher punishment.

They watch the video with disgust, hoping that this will be the climax. But the girls keep begging for even more extreme "favors" and Richard "graciously" carries them out. All this appears to be routine, so they are sure that this is not the first time he's done this. Finally, the girls leave the villa, followed by a hummingbird filming them: astonishment, disgust, and shame mix in with the tears running down their faces.

Only Marcus and Barry watch the video to the very end, and don't miss the most important part: shortly after the girls have left the house, Ann comes back and enters the hobby room. She soon knows what has happened there. "So those two crying girls were your guests, huh? I guess you had to let off some steam again."

Richard shrugs, "They wanted it that way. You have no idea what kind of ideas those young vixens can come up with!"

Ann looks at him contemptuously. "And why did you have to take pictures when you can have anything you want anyway?"

"You don't seem to understand, baby sister. Today, they had to do what I wanted. Tomorrow, I'll show them the pictures, then they'll come back on their own freewill and will have to come up with their own ideas until I'm pleased with them. Otherwise, I'll show the pictures to their parents. That's the fun part. You'd be surprised at what kind of ideas those girls can come up with just to amuse me when they're afraid. I can't wait for tomorrow," he grins.

"You pig!" exclaims Ann.

Richard can't let that be unanswered: "Don't give me that morality crap, not you. What about those two boys who wanted to make it with you? You know what you did with them, don't you? You enjoyed telling me about it. That's certainly not what a good girl would do. And didn't one of them commit suicide two days later? I'm sure you had nothing to do with that. I know I'm no saint myself, but percentage-wise, the suicide rate of your love toys is much higher than mine. Talking of suicide, do you really think it's a

hell of lot of fun for your victims to give you all their valuables as “presents” just because they love you soooo much and have suuuuuch deep feelings for you? And what about that saleswoman from the jewelry store in Wellington where you bought that “cheap” diamond bracelet? She jumped off the bridge the next day, but I’m sure that had nothing to do with you!”

“Just shut up, Richie, will you? None of us are angels. We’re so superior to other humans that we can’t be bothered if some of those cretins have the occasional accident.”

Klaus and Marcus are shocked. “That’s one nice couple,” Klaus remarks. “Lena was right, we have to stop them. You know, I’m already developing a paraprison on Great Barrier Island. Sorry, I haven’t told you about it yet.”

Marcus waves him off, but Klaus continues, “We should hit them with a dart gun and knock them out before they can even leave the house tomorrow morning. Make sure they don’t make a move before nightfall. Then we can fly them to Great Barrier Island with the Moller. It would be easier to knock them out tomorrow night, but we know about Richard’s plans for those girls.”

“Anesthetic darts?” asks Marcus.

Klaus walks over to the closet and takes a pistol out. “This holds two darts, only five millimeters long. They contain a fast-working anesthetic. Someone has to pull the trigger and hit exposed skin before Richard and Ann get the chance to figure out the situation and “convert” the shooter. Unfortunately, Parabarry can’t materialize with the pistol. Marcus, I’m afraid you’ll have to get it inside the house first so Parabarry can use it later. We’re assuming that Ann and Richard can’t use their parabilities against Parabarry.”

Marcus nods. “I’ll get the pistol inside somehow. I hope your new protection method works, but after all, I can always shift my personal time. Let’s talk this over with the rest of the group.”

Long into the night, the group discusses all the probable scenarios, or at least all the ones they can come up with.

Very early in the morning, the operations group drives to the apartment opposite the villa. The team consists of Marcus, Maria, Parabarry, Sandra, Stephan and Klaus. It will be Marcus’ job to get

the pistol inside the house and to restrain the twins if possible. Maria will supervise everything. Parabarry will probably play the main role once the pistol is inside the villa. Sandra will read the twins' feelings. Stephan will distract their attention if necessary and Klaus will coordinate the whole thing.

Soon after their arrival, Maria starts to scan the house. "They're still asleep. All right, Marcus, you can embrace me now. Try to tie them up with your pseudohands. Make sure they can't see the doors to their rooms."

Marcus embraces Maria. He tells her to concentrate on Richard first. Marcus can see inside Richard's bedroom. There's a bathrobe hanging over the back of a chair; its belt will be ideal for tying him up. Slowly, Marcus pulls it out of the robe with a pseudohand and approaches Richard's arms. Altogether, he has ten pseudohands at his disposal and he has had a lot of practice with them. He will use two of them to turn Richard on his side and then tie him up as fast as possible. This should not be difficult.

When Marcus touches the body with his pseudohands, Richard wakes up immediately. They were expecting this. What they weren't expecting, though, was Richard's ability to build an anti-parafield. It affects Marcus' pseudohands in a way that he has never experienced. He cannot reach further than a few centimeters into the house anymore. At the same time, Marcus loses his sight. He lets go of Maria. "Can you still see anything?"

"Yes, but everything's in a haze. I'm not used to this!"

They all seem to have underestimated the difficulty of the job, but Klaus remains calm. "Barry, can you materialize in the hobby room?"

"Sorry, Klaus, I can't do that at the moment."

"Sandra, can you read Richard's feelings?"

"Yes. He has now woken up Ann. They're both surprised, but not scared."

Maria confirms, "Ann is with Richard now. They're discussing the situation. Now they're reaching out their hands to each other; their paraskills are getting stronger, too. Oh, I can hardly see anymore!" Maria almost panics.

What they can't hear is what Richard and Ann have to say to each other: "Ann, we've joked about this but now it's serious. We'll have to hypnattack them."

"We'll have a lot of fun, brother. Whoever they are, they'll have one hell of a surprise!"

Klaus remains calm. "Marcus, you'll have to get the pistol inside the villa now. Maria will guide you. We'll see what happens once you're inside."

Marcus dons his communication glasses. That way, he can stay in contact with the team and send back images if necessary. Klaus sends several hummingbirds through the entrance. "Once the door is open, I'll send those into the most important rooms. That will aid Maria's vision."

Maria is relieved. She can't see anything anymore. Marcus runs over to the villa, climbs the fence, and approaches the entrance. He uses one pseudohand to reach for the door. 'At least that's still possible,' he thinks. He unlocks it from the inside. Several hummingbirds fly into the house but they can't enter Richard's bedroom. The door is locked.

Marcus enters the house. Richard and Ann's anti-parafield strikes him immediately. This is a completely new experience for him. His parabilities are dramatically reduced. All of a sudden, his pseudohands cannot extend longer than a meter; his time shifting abilities are highly reduced too. When he approaches the bedroom door, an even stronger resistance hits him.

He can hear Maria's voice: "I can see better now. They're both lying on the bed."

Then Sandra comes in: "I can read their feelings. They're ready for a fight. They are concentrating 100% on Marcus."

Klaus turns to Stephan: "Now it's your turn. Try to gather whatever animals are inside the house, insects and rodents, too, and make them disturb the twins. Marcus, if you get the chance, try to open the window inside the bedroom."

When the twins realize that ants and cockroaches are crawling up into the bed, their concentration is diminished for a moment. That gives Marcus some time to open the window inside Richard's room.

Klaus is in total control now. "Stephan, get all the flies and mosquitoes to the window but don't let them in yet. We need them

for shock effect. Maria, you can relax; the hummingbirds are giving us a good enough view for now. But stay ready - we may need you again. Barry, can you materialize somewhere inside the house now?"

"No can do," he replies.

This worries Klaus. If Sandra could read his feelings, she'd be even more worried than she already is.

"It's up to you now, Marcus, you have to go inside the room and shoot the pistol yourself."

When Marcus starts to open the door, he can feel a strange, growing pressure in his head. He speeds up his individual time as much as possible and enters the room. Richard and Ann stare at him. Marcus lifts the pistol, but can't aim at them. He receives an order to drop the pistol. He is practically paralyzed and almost drops it. 'I hope you did a good job, Klaus,' he prays as he pushes the button for the paraprotection inside his e-helper. His parabilities disappear immediately, but his head clears, too, for a moment.

The anti-parafield surprises Richard and Ann, but it doesn't take them long to get used to it. The field is not strong enough. Marcus is tempted more and more to drop the pistol.

Klaus follows the developments through one of the hummingbirds. He is shocked, but his voice remains calm. "Get ready for action! We need 100% now!" Maria and Sandra concentrate their powers on the room. Stephan lets tens of thousands of insects fly into the room to attack Richard and Ann.

The twins are paralyzed by the attack of the insects. They can still keep the order "drop the pistol" going, but they lose control over all other parafunctions as flies, gnats and wasps fly into their eyes, noses and ears. It's like being in a horror movie. Parabarry materializes inside the bedroom, takes the gun out of Marcus' hand and shoots Richard and Ann. Suddenly it's all over.

In the darkness of the following night, the Moller lands in the villa's garden. This is a bit of a problem because they only received permission to land in Rotorua and not here. Still unconscious, Richard and Ann are transported to Great Barrier Island and put into the new paraprison. It's in a separate building with bars and surrounded by an anti-parafield.

“Klaus, can you guarantee we’ll be safe when they wake up?”

“Marcus, I took measures that can even contain a para-MCA⁴⁵. I think we’re relatively safe, but we’ll have to keep them under constant surveillance. We have installed hummingbirds in both rooms and there are also special devices which will shoot anesthetic darts if necessary.”

When they finish debriefing, they are all relatively optimistic. Marcus summarizes quickly but precisely: “All of us have unusual parabilities, but success is only guaranteed when we work as a team. What we experienced yesterday has proved this once again. We needed the parascouts, Lena and Klaus, to locate our targets. We needed a paralocator, Monika, in case the twins ran off. We needed a paraseer, Maria, to guide us during the action, and an emotiopath, Sandra, to monitor their feelings. We needed a paradoppelganger, Barry, to operate the weapon and a telekinet, me. An animalactivator, Stephan, really turned the tide for us, and another paraskilled friend, Klaus, guided the whole operation. Finally, let’s not forget about the Mindcaller, which still protects Aroha from bad influences. This should always remind us that we’re only strong as a team, not as individuals.”

Suddenly Lena speaks out from the background: “We should get the other part of the Mindcaller. I know where it is. It’s with Herbert in Rotorua.”

“Herbert who, honey?” Marcus asks in surprise.

“He’s the man in the Mexican restaurant in Rotorua.”

They are not sure what to think of this, but they know that they’ll have to follow up Lena’s remark. But another question is more important now: what will they do with Richard and Ann? They can’t keep them in the prison forever; however, it doesn’t seem to be possible to integrate them into their team or even into “normal” society.

From a completely different perspective, the Prime Minister of New Zealand has similar thoughts. Since the freeing of the milk factory manager’s son, she has intensified her surveillance of Maria and Marcus. Two new agents have joined Dick Entwistle and Ken

⁴⁵ Maximum Credible Accident.

Palaviccini. Originally, only Maria and Marcus were observed. In the meantime, the surveillance has been extended to Aroha, Monika, Sandra, Barry, Klaus, and even to Stephan and Lena. The paragroup has grown stronger. SR Inc. has grown, too, and has developed advanced technologies. According to her agents, the group has now kidnapped Richard and Ann Brodlyn, two innocent, highly acclaimed citizens from Rotorua. They are holding them hostage on Great Barrier Island. She knows that SR Inc.'s Moller 600 landed in the garden of the Brodlyn villa without permission, and that it was used to transport the unconscious twins to Great Barrier Island.

They have broken so many laws! How much further can she let them go? But on the other hand, if she takes the whole thing public now, then won't everyone demand to know why they weren't informed earlier? With all she knows now, there only seems to be two ways to deal with SR Inc. Either leave them completely in peace, or fight them with all her power. This group seems to be too strong for a third alternative.

The PM still trusts her intuition, which tells her that SR Inc. is altogether a positive phenomenon. But slowly she is starting to consider attack scenarios against them. Her fears are growing. With all their perfect technology and their remote control robots, couldn't they control the entire government or even eliminate it if necessary?

The PM is the PM for a reason. She has come close to the truth. Marcus himself has ordered supervision of members of the government by hummingbirds. The pictures they have retrieved so far would be enough to force most of them to resign. Marcus knows that. What he doesn't know is that Klaus will equip the newest version of the drones with poison darts.

Marcus sends Sandra to Wellington to find out what the PM thinks about SR Inc. She returns with alarming news. "She trusts you, more or less, but she's taken precautions. She has scenarios in her head about how she can destroy us in the event of an emergency. Her plans scare me a little."

Marcus calls for Klaus. He wants him to hear what Sandra has found out. As usual, Klaus stays cool as a cucumber, showing no emotion. "This doesn't surprise me. Just put yourself in the PM's

position. She's a great person. She only trusts you because she met you during your crazy trip up the Beansburn, and because you helped during that kidnapping without asking for anything in return. But she's risking more and more by not initiating anyone into the details. For her, the situation is getting out of hand. The longer she waits, the fewer excuses she'll have for her behavior. And once she gives us away to the public, or even only to members of the government, we won't be able to survive as a group or even as individuals. If you're O.K. with it, I'll also work out a defense scenario."

Marcus nods. He still hopes to keep the PM as an ally. He still hopes there won't be a battle. He can clearly foresee what such a conflict would bring. They wouldn't be able to surrender. The government would put them away forever, or even kill them like they tried to kill Marcus in Europe. If they decide to fight, they could cause a lot of harm, no matter how weak the group has become. But in the long run, they wouldn't be able to win against an entire nation unless they become ruthless dictators. That's something none of them wants. And even if they take over the country, the whole world would be against them: a no-win situation.

So if there were a conflict, there would only be one solution left: to withdraw to an even more remote outpost on an unsettled island somewhere in the South Seas. Marcus can't imagine a life like that. He looks out his office window overlooking Auckland, this friendly city. He thinks about Great Barrier Island and about his children. A trace of despair descends upon him. Maybe he should fly to Wellington and discuss it all with the PM. No, the Brodlyn twins come first.

11 Control

End of June 2011

The continuing interrogation of the Brodlyns troubles Marcus. It reminds him of the days after he was captured in Europe. The PPU tried to force him to cooperate, and to have a chip implanted that would have allowed them to control him.

The options that Marcus has to offer to Richard and Ann go in a similar direction. Soon it becomes clear that the two of them are absolutely unwilling to cooperate. In addition, they realize that it doesn't make sense to work with people who profess to inhuman values.

In the end, Richard and Ann can only choose between two alternatives: lifelong but comfortable imprisonment, or freedom with an implanted chip. This would not only keep them from using their parabilities but would also leave the group in complete control of their actions. Klaus is sure that this wouldn't be a problem, technically.

Marcus can't help thinking back to his own situation. He has the feeling that this offer is a bit fairer than the offer the PPU made. Back then, he could have chosen between a simple cell, and cooperation enforced by the implementation of an anesthesia chip.

Marcus is fairly sure that there won't be any new possibilities in the future if they want to protect themselves from evil parabilitists, but where does good end and evil start? Will it be necessary one day to implant a chip into all parabilitists that can be activated by some external institution, like a court, and that will turn off all paraskills? Will the PM, or any government ever be able to trust him and his allies without insisting on such a system of control? Are there really no other solutions? As usual, Marcus suppresses the problem, but he knows that they will be confronted by it again sooner or later.

Richard and Ann are not willing even to consider either of Marcus' alternatives. They know that Marcus will not kill them (something they would have done right away), so they exploit this knowledge. They keep coming up with new demands and try to get less surveillance. Sandra can't read their feelings through the anti-parashield. This would have helped them find out if Richard and

Ann were reacting honestly to any of their suggestions. Sandra would have noticed that the term "honest" does not even exist for these two. For them, "good" means "good for them", and nothing else. Sandra asks Klaus if it is possible to develop one-way parashields that would allow an influence from the outside but not vice versa.

Klaus finds the idea interesting. "Yes, that would definitely come in handy, but unfortunately, we don't yet know enough about parabilities to develop something like that. But we'll definitely make this a parameter of our research efforts."

The negotiations are at an impasse. Aroha wants to know if she can talk to Ann.

So far, they have had good reason to keep Aroha away from the prisoners. She admits that she still considers Ann a good friend. Rationally, she knows that this feeling is only based on the post-hypnotic suggestion. Even though she has by now learned all about Ann's unpleasant sides, her strong feelings remain unchanged. It troubles Aroha that she is not in better control of herself.

"I know how you must feel, Aroha," Sandra tries to calm her down, "but don't we all know situations when what we feel is completely opposed to what we rationally know or want? How often are people in love or jealous even though it makes no sense? How often are people powerless against their feelings?"

Finally, after taking precautions, the conversation between Aroha and Ann can take place. Ann insists that they should be able to see each other while they speak, something that Marcus is very suspicious of. But Ann will remain in the prison while Aroha stays outside. Sandra will constantly check Aroha's feelings. If necessary, they will immediately create an optical barrier between Ann and Aroha. It was Stephan's idea to attach a thermometer to the Mindcaller. It will send a reading to a monitor that Stephan will operate.

The conversation develops in an unusual way: when Aroha sees Ann, she is overwhelmed by a wave of sympathy. While Aroha is trying to convince Ann of the chip alternative (to which Ann is completely opposed), Aroha begins to hear quiet whispers in her head:

"We're friends, Aroha. You have to help me. Can't you see that I'm sick? Even though it's so hot in here, they have to cover me with a blanket. I'm not evil and you know that. Only Richard is evil. He tried to win me over to his side. Help me get out of here, but make sure Richard stays in prison. He deserves it."

Even the surveillance cameras don't show that Richard is hiding underneath the blanket covering Ann. His and Ann's hands are entwined tightly. With their combined parabilities, they try to get Aroha back under Ann's influence. The pillows and blankets on Richard's bed make it look as though he is asleep there.

The voice in Aroha's head keeps whispering: "We're friends, Aroha, and I know how you can help me. But don't tell anyone, understand? You're my friend and you will do as I tell you. Give me a sign to tell me that you're on my side. Lift your right arm and wave at me."

Ann and Richard try as hard as they can to concentrate on Aroha. They know that if she follows this first order, no matter how small it may be, the dam will break. Aroha is compelled to wave. "Aroha, wave to your friend." She doesn't want to at first but can't resist.

Suddenly, Stephan notices something. "Klaus, Papa, the Mindcaller is warming up. Ann somehow broke through the parashield to get to Aroha."

Sandra frowns. "All I notice is that Aroha loves Ann and is trying to show it with a gesture." Klaus increases the strength of the parashield to its highest level. The voices in Aroha's head fade. The pressure to wave fades too.

Ann is getting angry. She whispers to Richard, "Give it everything you can." But both he and her brother's energy are almost completely absorbed by the shield. Richard's support is not continuous. Ann squeezes his hands to strengthen his support. She's so weakened that she can hardly talk anymore. The team outside the house notices that something unusual is going on inside. Suddenly, Ann realizes that Richard's support has stopped completely. With the last of her strength, she shouts the order to Aroha. "Wave! Just wave, damn it!"

Aroha hears that and starts to lift her hand again. Then Ann collapses and the urge to wave is gone.

They all look at her questioningly. "The temperature of the Mindcaller is going down again," Stephan shouts.

Klaus is worried. "Are you all right, Aroha?"

"Yeah, I'm all right, but she nearly had me under control again. But now there's absolutely nothing coming from her anymore. There were these whispers in my head before."

The hummingbirds show Ann lying lifelessly under the window. But what's that? There's an extra leg underneath the blanket. That must be Richard... but isn't he asleep? Klaus sends a hummingbird to the head of Richard's bed. "They tried to trick us. There's no one in Richard's bed. They tried to use their combined strength to take control of Aroha. They used all the energy they had and they broke down in exhaustion."

"Sandra, let's go inside and have a look," Marcus suggests. "I have the dart gun with me".

"I'll come with you," says Klaus.

"No, Klaus. You're not fit enough yet. You stay here. Just keep an eye on us. We'll stay in contact via the communication glasses."

Cautiously, Marcus and Sandra enter the paraprison. Ann and Richard are still lying under the window. They're not moving. "Take the pistol. If something happens, just shoot. Shoot me too if you have to. Marcus walks toward Ann. He tries to find her pulse on her neck. He can't believe it. "She's dead."

He rips the blanket away and tries to find Richard's pulse. There is none. "Klaus, turn off the parashield. Be ready to turn it back on if I lift my hand."

"It's off."

"Sandra, can you sense any feelings?"

"Absolutely none. They're not only unconscious, they're dead for sure."

Slowly, they start to understand what has happened. Ann and Richard went beyond their limits during their para-attack and it killed them. Marcus doesn't want to, but he can't help thinking, 'that may solve one problem for us, but it may also create a new one.'

Klaus takes command. "We'll have to take them back to their villa tonight. Then someone will anonymously call the police and tell them that Richard and Ann have not been seen for several days, and that it would be good if they could have a look. The police will

find them there dead, and the autopsy will conclude that it was a mysterious double suicide... it would be interesting if we could somehow get those autopsy reports.”

Maria can't believe how coldly Klaus reacts to human death, even though nobody will miss the twins.

They carry out Klaus' plan. The next day, the police find the bodies in the villa. The autopsy shows multiple brain hemorrhages. This is so unusual that they ascribe the death to an accident or suicide by unknown drugs.

By the time the PM gets the autopsy report, her agents have already reported the Moller delivered two packages to the villa. Based on the estimated time of death, she knows that Ann and Richard must have been killed on Great Barrier Island several hours earlier, and by some unknown method.

Cold shivers run down her back. It's time to act now. She'll have to inform her colleagues in the government. They'll have to take immediate measures against SR Inc. and the paragroup. There's only one problem: what kind of measures? They don't know enough about these paraskills to fight against them, but they can't just have them all killed, especially in a country that has long abolished the death penalty and where people are allergic to any kind of war.

She is convinced that she has only two options: she'll either have to expel the whole group from the country, or, in an even more unpleasant vein, she'll have to ask Dirkman, the Head of the EU Commission, for help. She remembers how he told her about their experience with paraskills, and how they have even started a research group in that field. But she won't be able to take the decision alone. She'll have to discuss it with her cabinet. She'll have to face strong accusations, maybe even pressure to resign, but what else can she do?

On the day of the deaths of the two parahypnotics, Marcus sends Sandra to Wellington. It's her job to keep a close eye on the PM's feelings. He can't rule out the possibility that the PM has heard about the events in Rotorua and that she could possibly decide to take action against their group. He must keep her from doing that. If

necessary, he'll have to meet with her and explain the situation as much as necessary.

Sandra warns him just in time: "Apparently, the PM has decided to tell everything she knows to the members of the government."

Marcus does not hesitate a second. He calls the PM at the private number she gave him after the kidnapping. Before the PM can call her cabinet, she sees that Marcus is calling her.

The question, 'Can he read thoughts?' flashes through her head. She can't rule that out. She knows so little about this group and what they can do. But still, she answers the phone.

"Hello, Ms. Prime Minister. This is Marcus Simmer from SR Inc. speaking. I'm calling you because there are new developments that I'd like to explain to you. I know that you know certain things about us, but I think it's necessary that you know everything before you make any big decisions. Please don't talk to anyone before I get the chance to talk to you."

The PM hesitates. Whatever Marcus has to say, how could he possibly justify the murder of two innocent citizens? Finally, she gives in and promises not to do anything before they have a talk in Wellington. "You have to promise me that you will come alone to Wellington, without any other members of your group."

Marcus breathes a sigh of relief. He understands this precaution and agrees. Sandra is there already, but that's not contrary to the promise. That way, he'll be able to know if he can trust the PM or not.

The next day, Marcus meets the PM. After long consideration, she decided to take the risk of meeting him alone without special surveillance. It makes her feel uneasy but she knows that whatever Marcus has to say, it should not be heard by any other ears.

"I know that you've been observing me and my group to some extent. Do you want me to give you a full report or is there a specific point you want to discuss immediately?"

"I think we should talk about the main point first. How do you explain the murder of two respectable citizens of New Zealand?"

"You're talking about Richard and Ann Brodlyn from Rotorua, right?"

The PM nods.

“Let’s start there then. Those two were anything but respectable citizens; they were manipulative, inhuman criminals.”

The PM looks surprised. “But all the people that were questioned by my agents only had positive things to say about them.”

Marcus nods. “They were highly skilled parahypnotics. Without even talking, they could force people to do anything they wanted them to. They could even give them posthypnotic suggestions. One of those standard orders was to speak only in positive terms about them.”

Marcus tells her about the way Richard and Ann made a fortune. He explains how Richard used his abilities to engage in uninhibited sexual adventures. With news reports and copies of police files, he lays out a trail of suicides for the PM. He tells her about the suicide order that Ann gave Aroha.

The PM can’t believe what she’s hearing.

Marcus continues, “If you have a strong stomach, let me show you a video that we recorded with a surveillance camera in their house.”

Marcus starts the video of the two girls. First, it looks as though they were doing all this of their own volition, even though it’s hard to understand why they would want to do something like that. What follows is the conversation between Ann and Richard. This makes it all clear: under a hypnotic trance, the girls were compelled to do everything Richard wanted them to do. In truth, the video shows two brutal rapes. The rest of the video proves what Marcus explained before.

The PM is very upset. “I understand those two were monsters, but that didn’t give you the right to kill them.”

“Of course not. We didn’t kill them; we would never kill anyone. We put them away and wanted to convince them to agree to give us control over their hypnotic skills before we set them free again. This shouldn’t have had any kind of negative effect, but it turned out to be more complicated: the two of them tried to suggest to Aroha, the woman who nearly committed suicide because of Ann, to set them free. They used their paraskills to such an extent that it had a lethal effect on them. The autopsy report, which we haven’t had the opportunity to read yet, should give further insights into that. But please, first look at some more scenes.”

Marcus shows her a video of the 'meeting' of Aroha with imprisoned Ann. She can see how Ann breaks down in the end, and how Marcus confirms the deaths of both Ann and Richard.

"That fits in with the autopsy report," the PM notes. "Have a look." The PM hands it over to Marcus: heavy bleeding in the brain caused by several burst blood vessels.

The PM can lean back now. "You don't know how happy I am that there is such an explanation for this whole thing. I owe you an apology. I even think that our country owes you something for dealing with those criminals. But I still have a problem concerning you and your group. I mean, we have this group on Great Barrier Island, a collection of people with unusual abilities, a group that, I assume, can evade and operate outside the legal system at any time. Don't you think that this could become a problem or even a crisis eventually?"

"Eventually, sure. I do understand your worries, you know. Even though I can guarantee we'll always do only what's best for the country, and help whenever there's a catastrophe, I know that we have a problem: I know that you can never believe or trust me 100%. There's always the possibility that a person with paraskills, even one of our group, could abuse them for criminal purposes. Would I really stake my life on any of my people? I'm not sure. Would you do that for the members of your cabinet? Let's be frank. It's even difficult to agree on what's best for the country. What if you were to ask us to help you win the next election, for example? I'm sure that with a little manipulation, we could make things much easier for you. Personally, I'd really like to see you reelected. But whether that's what's best for the country or not isn't for me to say."

The PM can't help smiling.

"Also, the fact that we have to operate underground, in a way, doesn't really make our work easier. For example, I have strong telekinetic abilities, which means that I can move things by just thinking about them. This can be extremely useful, like when you want to rescue a person trapped under wreckage or rubble, because it makes it very easy to move things out of the way. But wherever I use this parability, as we call it, I have to make sure that nobody notices what I'm doing. In fact, that's why we had to develop all those high tech vehicles and other devices. And that's why we like

to keep a little mystery around them. That way, if something 'unusual' happens, we can always give the credit to technology. But trust me, the whole business is rather frustrating."

The PM seems to want to interrupt Marcus for a moment, but she lets him continue.

"Eventually, we'll have to 'out' ourselves. But if our timing is off or we haven't taken sufficient precautions, everyone will just see us as monsters and we'll be persecuted. Naturally, we don't want that to happen. It would be a shame for this country, too, because if we are imprisoned, kicked out or even killed, then we'd never be able to help anyone again."

The PM has been listening carefully. "I understand all that you're saying there, but do you have any suggestions as to what we should do?"

Marcus considers his answer carefully. "We put a lot of effort into pararesearch. For example, we've created a prototype that can shield entire buildings from para-influences. That's how we were able to imprison the Brodlyns. Otherwise, they would've found it easy to hypnotize all of us. So sooner or later, we'll be able to provide protection against all kinds of parabilities. Then no one will have to fear that someone is reading his thoughts or something."

The PM looks up abruptly. "You can read thoughts?"

"No, we haven't come across someone like that yet. But for example, Lena, my daughter, can sense twenty categories of emotions, like happiness, sadness, anger, and fear.

"Oh, I see. Sorry for interrupting you. Please continue."

"So soon we'll be able to develop mechanisms against parabilities like that. It also looks like we'll soon be able to shut down someone's parabilities at will. On the other hand, there are technical developments that we have to protect ourselves from."

"What do you mean," the PM interjects.

"I assume your military uses remote controlled drones for reconnaissance purposes?"

The PM nods.

"Eventually, these kinds of drones will be so small that they'll be able to observe every action of every human being. Is there really a big difference between this and what my daughter or I can do? So I have a suggestion to make and a favor to ask. Let us continue in

secret for now. It would be wonderful if you and I saw one another as allies. You can call us whenever you need us, and you help us whenever you can. We all know that we'll have to 'out' ourselves eventually, and we think that won't be a problem when the time comes. When protection will be guaranteed by law, and protective devices can be controlled and used effectively without the chance that they'll be abused or endanger the privacy of all citizens, we'll be able to go public."

The PM remains silent. Finally, she smiles and says, "Good speech. But seriously now, I think I'm willing to trust you and I think we can continue as we have. My name's Jenny," she says impulsively and offers her hand to Marcus.

Suddenly, he feels something he has never felt before in such a situation: the floor begins to move under his feet. Marcus has a strange sensation of dizziness. 'What's that? Does she have paraskills too?'

The PM feels it too. However, when the alarm goes off, it is clear that they are 'just' experiencing an earthquake. The PM can't help laughing. "And I thought that you...me...you know." They are almost double over. Shocked by the alarm, the secretary comes in. It's clear she doesn't think this appropriate behavior for a Prime Minister.

Soon the PM begins acting like a true head of state again. The news comes in from all corners. The earthquake was only a four on the Richter scale, and no severe damage is expected. There is no news about anyone in danger. Relieved, she sits back down on the sofa.

But she soon receives another phone call; bad news after all. The scaffolding on the new archives building has collapsed, burying Business Minister Patrick Fisher, who was visiting the site. He was able to make a call from his mobile phone, but apparently he is severely injured and they have now lost contact.

"Marcus, you have to get my colleague out of there," she almost orders him. "If you can only help him without cover, don't worry and just do it. I have a way to make it un-happen. I have a gift for you. I never thought this could become so useful one day."

She sends Marcus away and tells her assistant to have him flown to the site of the accident by helicopter. She makes sure the assistant tells the pilot to return immediately and pick her up.

“But why don’t you just fly together with Mr. Waller? There’s enough room for you both,” her assistant suggests.

The PM waves him off. “I know. But I have to take care of something here.” She takes a small barrel of whiskey out of the cabinet in her office, uncorks it, and pours some white powder from a small bag into it. She puts five more of the bags into her jacket, then tells her secretary to bring her a box of fifty whiskey glasses. “I’m sure Patrick Fisher will be saved. We should celebrate this with a drink. Get your things together. We’ll fly to the Archives and you make sure that everyone drinks their whiskey.”

The secretary is speechless even though she has already experienced several of the PM’s idiosyncrasies.

Marcus arrives at the site. “Where do you think he’s buried?”

The construction workers point to a spot where rubble is piled several meters high. Marcus extends all of his ten pseudohands, speeds up his individual time and probes the rubble for the Minister. Subjectively, this takes him forever. Objectively, it takes only eight minutes to find the trapped man. He’s unconscious, but has a steady pulse, but seems to have a large and heavily bleeding wound on his head. Marcus lifts the material on the man to literally get the load off his chest. Marcus digs some holes through the pile of rubble, wood, and metal to let some air into the “cave” he has created.

Now he must make a critical decision: should he tell the rescue crew where they can find the minister while he makes sure the cave doesn’t collapse and that the minister doesn’t lose too much blood? But this operation could take hours. He is not sure if the minister will be able to survive that long. But there’s another option. He could use his parabilities to work a miracle, but that would put an end to his secret.

Out of the corner of his eye, he can see the PM land and get out of the helicopter with a small barrel of whiskey tucked under her arm. Is she out of her mind? Hasn’t she promised that she would make a miracle “un-happen”? But wouldn’t now be the right time to prove he trusts her?

He decides to use his strong telekinetic powers with less subtlety than usual, and not slowly, but with all his might. Those who see it, including the PM, cannot believe what is happening: the huge pile of rubble suddenly erupts like a volcano. Tons of stone, wood, and steel are ejected into the air and suddenly the Minister of Commerce slowly ascends from the hole as if lifted by a huge, invisible hand, which in a way he is.

The sirens of the approaching ambulances indicate that medical care is about to arrive. The PM picks up a megaphone. "The minister is alive, and safe. Every one of us should drink to this miracle." She lifts a glass of whiskey as her secretary hands out the drinks to everyone present. The PM takes the glass out of Marcus' hand and gives him another. "Here's a special one for you," she tells him conspiratorially. They all drink their whiskies.

Patrick Fisher slowly regains consciousness. "He only has a light concussion and a lacerated scalp," the paramedic reports as they prepare to take him to hospital.

Marcus, the PM, and her secretary fly back to the parliament building.

When they are alone again, the PM can't hide her admiration. "If all of you can do things like that, then you're even more powerful than I imagined."

Marcus smiles. "We're very strong as a team...but today I pushed it to the limit and now everyone will wonder what happened there."

"No they won't," the PM answers. "I have a gift for you to thank you for what you've done and for trusting me."

She takes the five bags out of her pocket. "This powder ensures that you'll forget everything you've seen or heard during the ten minutes before you take it. I got it on a state visit to China... and there's more of it. I put this powder into the whiskey. The two of us were the only ones who didn't get any. But if I hadn't exchanged your glass, even you wouldn't be able to remember what you did. That would've been amusing."

Marcus realizes what this powder could mean for future operations. "But don't people wonder about this memory loss?"

“No. They just believe the first good story they hear and believe they were a part of it. Now it’s time to make that story up and leak it to the media.”

Marcus and the PM part warmly.

When Marcus asks Sandra about the feelings of the PM, she can’t help giggling. “She trusts you and is in complete admiration of you. But I’m afraid there were also other feelings in both of you that Maria wouldn’t like too much.”

After the conversation with the PM, Marcus is walking on sunshine. All his problems seem to have evaporated, but now Sandra has told him about the feelings he shares with the PM, he has to admit his good mood isn’t just due to the outcome of the meeting with the PM, but also to the PM herself. “I’ll try to be a good boy,” Marcus says.

“You better, but I bet it won’t be easy. The PM likes you a lot and she’s a divorced and unattached woman. I’ll try to keep you on the right track, dear.”

Marcus is not sure if he is happy about that.

Since the Rainbow Warrior incident⁴⁶, you shouldn’t mention the French Navy in front of New Zealanders. This incident is one of the reasons the PM gets the information that a French naval contingent from Tahiti is approaching the Cook Islands. It is possibly on its way to New Zealand.

When she contacts the French embassy on the matter, they only give her the runaround.

In the meantime, she has met with Marcus in Wellington again to find out more about parabilities. She has also visited SR Inc.’s offices and is impressed by the level of the research. In addition to the emotions she feels for Marcus, she has also learned to appreciate the effort his group makes. She realizes that this could have a great,

⁴⁶ The Greenpeace ship *The Rainbow Warrior* was blown up by French Navy divers while docked in Auckland Harbor to stop it from disrupting French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

even political, impact on New Zealand. When she hears about the French ship, her subconscious rings a bell. Didn't Dirkman mention that the French are getting especially busy in pararesearch?

She tells Marcus about the ship and what she remembers from the conversation with Dirkman. Marcus will have to be careful, but he's happy that this situation gives him an excuse to take a short vacation. He will take his yacht and go to the Cook Islands. From there, he will "accidentally" approach the frigate and try to find out if the people on board have anything to do with pararesearch.

Maria, Marcus, the kids, Sandra, and Klaus fly to the Cook Islands first. They all enjoy the South Seas atmosphere. They rent motor scooters and ride around the island. They also hike all the way across the island, through jungles and cross a chain of mountains.

Sandra and Klaus agree to take care of the kids for two days. This allows Maria and Marcus to fly to the little island, Aitutaki. They stay at a hotel by the big lagoon that used to be one of the many stopovers for floatplanes on the famous "Coral Route" between Auckland and Los Angeles.

The lagoon is surrounded by many smaller islands such as One Foot Island, which is especially beautiful with its spectacular reef. An opening in the reef allows swimmers to enter the lagoon from the outside during high tide. It's every snorkler's dream to float motionless above coral, mantas, schools of barracuda, and an endlessly rich world of sea life. Occasionally, reef sharks can stir up a bit of adrenalin too. Maria, who generally swims and sunbathes a lot on Great Barrier Island, looks fit and gorgeous.

Marcus finds it hard to keep his eyes off her. He insists on taking her to one of the lonely Motus⁴⁷. Maria knows what he has in mind, and she's proud of the fact that Marcus is still attracted to her. They start a photo session. She's completely naked and Marcus takes pictures of her in and out of the water, lying on her back or belly, sitting, swimming, leaning on palm trees, and in whatever other

⁴⁷ Motus are miniature islands in the lagoons of the South Seas. They consist mostly of sandy beaches and a few palm trees.

poses she can come up with. Finally, Marcus cannot take it any longer. He puts the camera away and leaps on top of her.

She plays hard to get and runs off to tease him. But soon he catches her, lifts her up and tenderly lays her down in the sand. It doesn't take long and they both become wild with passion...

After this short vacation from the vacation, Marcus gets news that the three French ships have now come within 300 km of the Cook Islands. The whole group rents a yacht along with a skipper and stewardess and sails in the direction of the French ships. When they encounter them, they exchange the usual courtesies. Marcus invites the captain and officers to come over to the yacht for dinner. After hesitating at first, the captain accepts the invitation. The parateam can start their work now. Klaus and Lena notice right away that none of the French crew is paraskilled. Lena senses that they have something like the Mindcaller on board, but whatever it is, there's a lot more of it. Even though Lena discovered Herbert has the second half of the Mindcaller, Maria and Marcus never realized how sensitive she is to the presence of silatraviate until now.⁴⁸ With her paraeyes, Maria scans the ship and Marcus likewise rakes it with his pseudohands. Both discover a room housing unusual equipment.

Sandra has the most important part. She analyzes the answers that the crew gives to the paragroup's questions. Soon, she knows that it's the frigate's mission to sail as close as possible to New Zealand and its surrounding islands to test the equipment on board. She also finds out that these devices have something to do with parabilities. She senses the captain has a guilty conscience, but it's not because of the devices, but because he has orders to enter New Zealand waters without the permission necessary for a navy vessel. With a civilian ship, they would have had too much trouble with customs.

The dinner turns out to be a fine time for all. The crew of the frigate has nothing evil on their minds. They will do as they have been told and make certain measurements without understanding exactly what it is they're measuring.

⁴⁸ Herbert works in the food court in Rotorua. They have not had time to contact him yet.

While they take a skiff back to the frigate, Klaus gets the idea to send a hummingbird into the cargo room. Fortunately, a hatch is open and it is able to fly inside and photograph the instruments in question. Since they don't get an invitation back to the frigate, there is not much more they can do.

Marcus calls the PM to tell her that the French ship is planning to break maritime law and enter New Zealand waters illegally. He also tells her that it would be of great help if the New Zealand Navy could confront the ship and bring it in to investigate the instruments. This cheers up the PM, who has long been waiting to give the French Navy a lecture.

The group spends a few more days on board the yacht. Stephan often entertains them by "attracting" sea animals to the boat. They all swim with dolphins who, as it turns out, decide to stay with them even after Stephan has long stopped giving them orders. For years afterward, the skipper will tell stories about the strange behavior of the numerous fish and dolphins on this trip.

Back in Auckland, they can't wait to find out about the frigate. The pictures sent from the hummingbird have already been handed over to the research department. The PM has kept her promise. When the frigate entered the thirty-mile zone off the coast of Auckland, the New Zealand Navy forced it into the harbor. It's a triumph for all of New Zealand who's Navy usually doesn't get a lot of international attention⁴⁹. After all, the frigate is bigger than any ship in New Zealand.

Klaus manages to smuggle a couple of SR Inc. scientists into the team that investigates the frigate. The sparse results cause some worry. The crew has destroyed all the devices. The captain explains that this was a strict order. All they find is large amounts of silatraviate.

Puzzled, the parateam confers on Great Barrier Island. "Does anyone have any idea what kind of devices the French could have wanted to try out here?"

No one dares speculate.

⁴⁹ New Zealand's navy only consists of four frigates and several patrol boats.

"I'm afraid we'll have to send spies to Europe," Klaus concludes.

Marcus nods in agreement. "Can you please get that started, Klaus?"

Finally, there is some good news too: Sandra and Klaus have decided to get married. They drink to the couple and put some pressure on Barry and Monika. "Isn't it your turn now?"

The situation is a bit embarrassing and luckily, Aroha interrupts, "I met with Herbert, the guy who has the other half of the Mindcaller. He seems to be nice, a Maori. I'd really like to invite him over here one day. Is that all right with you?"

"Of course," answers Maria, "but isn't Herbert kind of a funny name for a Maori?"

"Yeah, but he's not really a full-blooded Maori. His grandfather was Austrian."

They all laugh at the unbelievable coincidence. Then Maria asks, "Will Herbert give you the second half of the Mindcaller?"

Aroha reddens slightly. "We haven't really talked about that yet. We only met once and that was briefly. But we've agreed that he'll come over to my house when he comes to Auckland the next time."

They are all looking forward to meeting Herbert. They do not know that, along with Herbert, another surprise is on the way.

12 Surprises

August 2011

Technical, chemical and physical research are all progressing well. While the development of devices that can imitate, shield, or strengthen paraphenomena have long been the main focus of the research department, they now concentrate equally on the qualities of silatraviate.

Marcus receives a list of all plants that are rich in silatraviate. Cucurbita, one of the many genera of the cucurbitacea family, is especially rich in silatraviate. This “Styrian pumpkin,” especially its hull-less seeds, and the products thereof, is becoming more and more popular worldwide. But different genera from New Zealand, North America, and the Mediterranean Region are listed too. Marcus laughs. When he first read the terms cucurbitacea and cucurbita, he had no idea that the authors were talking about pumpkins and that pumpkins were of ten different varieties and more than 500 types.

Marcus also receives a list of hot springs, spas and baths around the world that contain large proportions of silatraviate. It includes most of the ones in Styria, the Gasteiner springs in Salzburg, the Roman baths in Baden-Baden, Germany, the baths in Bath, England, the springs in Rotorua, the Strawberry Springs in Colorado, the springs in Truth Or Consequences, New Mexico, the springs in Banff, the Radium Hot Springs in western Canada, most of the ones on the Kamchatka Peninsula, and even some in Japan and Egypt. What is also interesting is that hardly any silatraviate exists in sources in the Yellowstone area, eastern Canada, Iceland, Australia, Hungary, and Romania.

There seems to be a clear pattern: areas rich in silatraviate are more likely to produce people with parabilities. Maria and Marcus are both from Styria. They have spent a lot of time at the spas in south Styria and eat pumpkin seed oil on almost every salad. They keep this “oil tradition” alive on Great Barrier Island. Klaus is from the area around Salzburg. He used to visit Gastein quite frequently. Sandra’s parents took her to Baden-Baden quite often and she spent most of her childhood in Bath.

When Monika was a teenager, she lived in Truth Or Consequences and still goes on about the great pumpkin pie they had there. Barry worked as a lifeguard in Rotorua. Aroha just loves pumpkin soup, has been to Rotorua quite a lot, and the Mindcaller she wears is sparked with silatraviate spots. The Brodlyn twins spent all their lives in Rotorua. They also find out that Justo and Jan de Keep often vacationed in Greece and were fans of *passa tempo*, roasted pumpkin seeds.

Marcus is especially fascinated by another detail of the research. He finds out that Oppenheimer, one of the leading figures in the Manhattan Project⁵⁰, suffered from severe back problems that even endangered his work. For security reasons, he was not allowed to leave Los Alamos to go to a spa. That's why they regularly delivered large amounts of water from the nearby springs at Truth Or Consequences (called Hot Springs until 1967). It worked for him. Once his back problems stopped, Oppenheimer became a new person. Apparently, he was a paramotivator, which enabled him to push his team to the limit and finish the project with an amazing amount of energy. Without him even knowing it, the healing waters probably strengthened Oppenheimer's parabilities.

Of course, there are a large number of people who consume pumpkins and silatraviate, but never develop parabilities. Silatraviate seems to be essential in the development of parabilities, but it's not enough by itself. There must other influences, such as genes. There is a lot more research to do. Marcus remembers hearing stories about Russian parabilitists. He has to find out if they were somehow exposed to silatraviate too.

Marcus is suddenly overcome with a feeling of melancholy. He can't help thinking about his home, Styria. With its combination of spas and pumpkins, this province seems to be predestined to develop parabilities. He can't help thinking about the mountains near Eisenerz and what they look like in the morning mist. He also remembers Andrea, the girl from Innsbruck, and how she and her boyfriend Toni took tours around the Styrian Mountains. They both

⁵⁰ The Manhattan Project concerned the development of the first atomic weapons.

become very fond of pumpkin seed oil; should they ever have children, there's a pretty good chance that they will be parabilistists.

In the evening, Marcus tells Maria about the new results in the silatraviate research. He also tells her about his attack of melancholy and how it made him want to take a long trip to Europe: "We have both changed so much that they won't recognize us anymore. I'm sure the EU has stopped looking for us since we 'died' in that plane crash. Maybe Barry, Monika, Klaus, and Sandra would like to leave New Zealand for some time as well. They could also try to find out what the EU is cooking up in paramatters. We could stay mostly in Austria and visit our friends, right? I'd also like to spend some more time at the National Library in Vienna. There's something I need to find out pumpkin-wise."

Maria laughs and she's all excited: "I would love to go back, too! I know the kids would have a blast. And my parents, they would just love it if we came to visit them in Graz. It's getting more and more stressful for them to keep flying to New Zealand."

It doesn't take much to convince the rest of the family. Klaus and Sandra are excited and certainly want to come along too. Sandra insists that they visit some of her relatives near Bath while Klaus is busy spying out the PPU in Brussels. He has already smuggled in two people he trusts. Barry and Monika don't know Europe well so they want to come along too. Monika gets sentimental and soon has several wishes. She wants to stay with Barry in the "Kleinen Prinz" in Baden-Baden, she wants to dine in the "Erbprinz" in Ettlingen, and she wants to try her luck in the Copper Hall of the casino. Barry can't help thinking back to the nice days he had in Baden-Baden with Hannelore, but all that seems to be far, far behind him. He agrees to all of Monika's wishes.

Maria, Marcus and the kids fly directly to Vienna via Singapore⁵¹. Sandra and Klaus fly to London via Perth. Monika and Barry take the Auckland—Tokyo—Munich connection, one of the fastest routes

⁵¹ Singapore Airlines still offers the best connection between New Zealand and Europe. The stopover in Singapore allows enough time for a quick dip in the swimming pool in the transit area of the airport.

to Europe. They all consider their voyage a vacation, but with a purpose. They all plan to return to Auckland on the same day. Aroha has promised to prepare a welcome-back dinner for the day after their return. This could also be the day Herbert comes to Auckland, and if that's the case, she will invite him too.

Before Marcus says goodbye to the others, he takes Sandra aside. "What's your feeling about Aroha and Herbert? Is there anything in the bush?"

Sandra laughs. "You're a bit nosey, but that's alright. For the first time since the death of her boyfriend, she seems to have fallen in love a little. I hope this guy deserves it; I haven't met him yet. Maybe there will be a little surprise for us when we return to New Zealand in five weeks. I'm really anxious to find out if he could be an asset to our group."

When they arrive in Vienna, Maria takes the kids directly to her parents' place in Graz. Marcus will follow them in a couple of days. He's planning to take his family on hikes in the mountains near his home in Eisenerz. He especially wants to take Stephan to the Hochtorn, Marcus' favorite mountain, for some father-son bonding. Maria is happy about that: "You and Stephan should really do that. You've spent too little time with your children anyway. Maybe you should try to come up with some kind of father-daughter adventure too. You don't even notice how much Lena admires you."

Marcus spends the following days in Vienna's National Library. He wants to find historical literature about pumpkins. Many facts fit in with what he already knows. For example, there is the story about the giant pumpkin; there even seems to be some kind of mythology about pumpkins. Halloween⁵², for example, is strongly associated with pumpkins in North America. Its origins are supposedly Celtic. Irish immigrants probably brought the tradition to North America and built on it. It has extended all the way to the West of the continent. Marcus finds more and more legends and stories. He is sure that parabletists must have played a part in most of them. The

⁵² By now, Halloween has become so commercialized that its economic relevance has surpassed Easter and even approaches that of Christmas.

connection to these legends and the silatraviate in the pumpkins is too obvious. He believes that this is not a well-known fact because paras always had to hide their skills in order not to be persecuted like the “witches” in Salem⁵³.

Egyptian history offers even bigger surprises. Only in 2000 did scientists find out that there is absolutely no rational explanation for the speed with which some pyramids were constructed. When the Egyptians built the Khufu pyramid in Giza, it took them on average only two minutes to add the huge blocks, each one weighing tons. Marcus now thinks he has found a connection between this and the many springs containing silatraviate. In addition, there is proof of a pumpkin cult in ancient Egypt. What an explanation that would be! The pharaohs must have employed telekinetics! That would also explain the great number of workers who were killed once the pyramids were finished, as many sources show.

These suspicions keep Marcus thinking. He contacts the Institute of Archaeology and offers them a substantial sum to find the tombs where those workers were buried. It would be fantastic if they could find some bones. That would allow him to find out how they were killed.

The professor in charge considers it unlikely the tombs will be found, and even more unlikely that the cause of death could be determined. But this guy from New Zealand, who speaks perfect German for some reason, doesn't seem to be put off by that. After all, the amount he is offering is very tempting for a financially limited institution like his. This project will also allow the professor to do other research at the same site.

“Please send the final report and any specimens directly to this address,” Marcus tells him, and gives him Robert's name and address at SR Inc. He will inform Robert about the project.

Further research in the National Library confirms his hunch: apparently, parabilistists already existed in very ancient times (even 14,000 years ago in Canon de Diabolo in Mexico). It must have

⁵³ Salem, situated on Massachusetts Bay just north of Boston, is today a town of 40,000 inhabitants. It was founded in 1626 by farmers and fishermen and reached dubious fame in 1692 when it became the site of witch trials. Nineteen “witches” were executed.

been the silatraviate they consumed in their favorite vegetable, pumpkins, which made them paras. They have always been considered enemies and persecuted for their abilities.

‘How little this has changed,’ Marcus thinks. ‘Maybe we should stop adding fluoride to the drinking water and add silatraviate to enhance all the parapotential there is.’

The historical facts have finally proven the importance of silatraviate for Marcus. But SR Inc.’s research department will have to investigate the compound’s physical dimensions: how it transforms energy into variable frequency electro-magnetic waves, and how these waves affect parabilities. New insights could have a dramatic impact!

But now, it is time for Marcus to give some attention to his family. He enjoys taking part in a climbing course with Lena. She is much more talented than him, and cannot believe how clumsy her father is when it comes to learning new knots. How can it be so hard for him to tie a double eight or a palsteck?

One of the high points is the mountain tour he takes with Stephan to the Hochtör. There are many surprises. Maria drives them to the trailhead of the Waterfall Path in the Enns Valley. From there, she takes Lena to her parents-in-law in Eisenerz. On the next day, she will start to approach Marcus and Stephan from the easier Johnsbach side of the mountain.

The Waterfall Path is an easy climb. It is not necessary to have special equipment. Where it gets more difficult, there are ladders, iron hooks, and steel cables that are mounted on the rock. Marcus knows that Stephan will be able to make it and that he will enjoy himself. This day is also a test for Stephan. They will spend the night in the Hess Hut. If he can make it there without any big problems, he will also be able to climb the peak of the Hochtör the next day. Maybe they will even be able to do the route through the Schneeloch (snow hole), which is a bit more difficult and not safeguarded.

The thought of the Schneeloch takes him back. For a moment, Marcus is not sure if he should go back to a spot that awakens so many memories⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ See “Xperts: The Telekinetic”

With the humidity of the afternoon, the start of the tour is a bit strenuous. Neither Marcus nor Stephan is used to high temperatures under such conditions. Even the Cook Islands were better in this respect. First, they hike up through a forest. Then they cross the ravine, in which a small creek flows. They follow it up a steep slope until they cross it again, heading east. When they approach the waterfall, the path gets a bit more difficult and they have to use their hands to climb now and then. They pass two young British women. Their names are Ruth and Cindy. They help them to find the best path and cross the creek a third time. Marcus notices that they are only wearing street shoes, which can be dangerous on a trail like this. At first, he considers telling them this but then he decides not to because, after all, they are adults, and who is he to stick his nose into their business?

After they part, Marcus and Stephan move on quickly. The path continues along the bottom of an almost vertical wall, which even hangs over the path occasionally. The Sun has disappeared behind thick clouds. A light wind is coming out of the west and it's not so hot anymore.

When they reach the most critical point of the hike, Marcus stops and looks over the Enns Valley below. The darkening cloudbank is blowing in. Far in the West, over Admont, a kind of fog descends upon the valley. It must already be raining there.

"Stephan, I'm afraid we'll have to hike back to the last overhang. A thunderstorm is coming. It'll be here in about fifteen minutes. We won't be able to climb the wall before it gets here, but we'll be safe under the overhang."

Stephan is sure that his father knows what he is talking about so he complies. They walk back and try to get comfortable underneath an overhanging rock that overlooks the valley. They will wait here until the weather has passed. It does not take long before Ruth and Cindy show up.

"You fellows tired already?" Ruth shouts.

"Not really, but there's a thunderstorm coming and it would be too dangerous on the wall. Why don't you wait here with us?"

Ruth shrugs. "Ah, we don't mind a little rain."

Marcus also warns them about the lightning, which is especially dangerous around the metal ladders, hooks, and cables on the wall.

But that doesn't impress these flatlanders either and they continue toward the wall.

While they are waiting, Marcus tells Stephan a little about the Waterfall Trail: "This is Styria's oldest climbing trail. Just think - people have been coming up here since 1896. Some of the best mountaineers in the world have trained here in the northern limestone ridges. There're some even older climbing tracks in Austria, like the Haidsteig⁵⁵ at the Rax. That's Vienna's hausberg."

The storm arrives. Lightning dances on the summit and thunder rolls ceaselessly. The wind is almost a gale. After a little while, sheets of rain begin to pour down. Stephan comments, "I wouldn't want to be on that wall right now."

Marcus nods thoughtfully. "I'm sure those two girls regret not waiting here with us now. As far as I remember, there's no cover between here and the top of the waterfall."

Half an hour later, the rain, wind, and clouds have moved east. The Sun is shining again, but it's a little cooler than it was before. Despite the fact that the ground is slippery now, the rest of the hike is a real pleasure for them. Once they have climbed the first ladder, they encounter certain sections where they have to use the inbuilt steel mountings.

Stephan enjoys having the lead and is very graceful, as Marcus proudly observes. When they reach the trickiest part of the climb, they find Ruth and Cindy, who are wet as bathmats. They are shivering and look miserable. Marcus notices that Ruth is injured. "What happened?"

"We should've listened to you. The storm hit us right here. We were trying to climb a little further up when a bolt of lightning hit right above us. I was so frightened I lost my grip and slid down a couple of meters. It's not so bad though."

Marcus has a look at the wound. Ruth's injury is worse than she thinks. She's still in shock. She only has a couple of scrapes on her

⁵⁵ Every Austrian city has a 'hausberg', which is usually the nearest respectable mountain. The Haidsteig has been very boldly laid out. It's one of the best climbing adventures in the eastern Alps. This is one of the routes that every respectable mountaineer should take.

upper arm, but when Marcus checks her legs for wounds, he finds a bump that shouldn't be there. She winces when he touches it.

"Get out of those trousers. I have to have a look at that."

Ruth doesn't hesitate to do so. Marcus ignores her panties, which are also wet from the rain and as such are transparent. While Stephan serves the girls some hot tea, Marcus examines her leg. Her shin must have hit a stone during the fall. A large blood vessel must have burst somewhere and has caused a growing welt. It has already reached the size of a tennis ball. Ruth is shocked. She hasn't even noticed the injury.

Marcus calms her down: "It's not as bad as it looks."

He quickly takes out a pressure bandage and wraps her leg tightly. Then he dresses the scrapes on her arm. "Do you have anything dry to put on?" Marcus asks. Unfortunately, their extra clothes were in their rucksack and unprotected from the rain. Marcus plays the Samaritan now. He takes a dry flannel shirt and a pair of tracksuit trousers from his rucksack. "Get out of all, and I mean all, your wet clothes and put these on. I know it's not the latest fashion, but they'll keep you warm. If you need it, I'll give you another sweater further up."

After another cup of tea and a handful of gorp⁵⁶, Ruth and Cindy feel better.

"It's starting to get late; we better move on. It's easier to climb up to the hut than go all the way back down again. We only have to make it over this rock and a couple more ladders. The rest of the hike is easy; it's just through some meadows. Stephan, you go first, but slowly. Cindy you follow Stephan. I'll stay right behind Ruth."

Marcus and Stephan take the girls' rucksacks. The following stretch can normally be done in fifteen minutes, but under these circumstances, it's very difficult. Ruth and Cindy keep slipping even though Marcus helps them a little with his telekinetic powers. They become less confident and more desperate. Finally, when the girls see the steep ladders above, they completely lose it. "We can't do that," they cry.

Marcus knows that they only have one good hour of daylight. They have to reach the Hess Hut by then. "I think I have to do

⁵⁶ Gorp: Good Old Raisins and Peanuts.

something now," he says. Only Stephan really understands what he means by that.

Marcus takes Stephan aside. "You go up there now. I'll send the girls once you're there. Make sure to give them some more tea when they get there, but let me put some of this powder in first."

Stephan knows about the powder. He climbs the ladder swiftly as a cat. Ruth and Cindy do not understand the plan. When Marcus knows that Stephan must be on top by now he says, "All right, it's time for a little magic. Close your eyes and please, don't be scared."

The girls look at him quizzically.

"I said, close your eyes. And don't open them until you're told to."

Ruth and Cindy are in such despair that they ask no questions. With his parability, Marcus lifts them up above the ladders and sits them down on a bench.

"Open your eyes," shouts Stephan. Ruth and Cindy no longer understand this world. How did they get here? "My father can do some magic tricks, me too. But you should forget about all of this. Here, have another tea."

The English girls drink their tea. After Marcus has joined them, they continue the hike over soft, green meadows.

His parapowers are still a riddle to Marcus. How is it possible that he can lift many times his own weight through the air? Yes, it is a little strenuous; otherwise, he would have lifted Stephan as well. But still, will anyone ever be able to explain this?

They enjoy the rest of the walk. The girls are busy discussing what just happened. By now, they believe that they climbed the ladders themselves.

When they get a first glimpse of Hess Hut a bit above and and at still some distance, Marcus asks Stephan, "Could you run up ahead and organize a couple of things for us?"

"Sure, what do you want me to do?"

"See if there're rooms for us and for the girls. If you have to, get one for the four of us. I really don't like those big dorm rooms anymore. Here's my Alpine Club card. That should help. Hang the wet stuff up and order soup for us, tea for you, and jagatee for the girls and me. That way, the girls can get something warm in them

right away, take a hot shower, and go straight to bed. Is that O.K. with you, girls?"

They both nod.

By the time Marcus and the two girls reach the hut, Stephan has organized all this. But there had only been one room. They enter the *gaststube*⁵⁷ and soup and tea are served to them immediately.

After the girls have taken showers, Marcus checks Ruth's injuries again. The scrapes are harmless and the swelling of the contusion is going down. Marcus changes the bandage. "You were lucky, Ruth. You'll be fine again soon." However, Ruth and Cindy soon go back to their room.

The "men" stay up a little longer. Stephan likes the atmosphere of the hut. In a corner of the room, a group of mountaineers sing old folk songs.

Marcus feels at home here. The hut is almost like he remembers it from his childhood. Reinhard, the patron, hasn't changed much either, but Marcus has, and he's relieved he's not recognized.

It's almost dark outside when a man about the same age as Marcus enters with his daughter who is about eight years old. "So we finally made it after all. We had to wait in Johnsbach for the storm to pass, that's why it got so late," the man says loudly when he comes in. He sits down at the table next to Marcus and Stephan, fortunately with his back to them. For some time, the girl's gaze hangs on Stephan and Marcus.

Marcus is confused. How is such a coincidence possible? That's Toni, Andrea's boyfriend. Marcus took several mountain trips with them years ago. The girl must be their daughter. He can't allow Toni to recognize him. He'll have to withdraw to his room immediately and as inconspicuously as possible.

"I have a headache," he says to Stephan. "Maybe it's from the you-know-what. The patron is going to start a bonfire outside soon. If you want, you can join the group there. But don't let it get too late. We'll start for the peak very early tomorrow morning."

Stephan is surprised at that. His father seemed to have been in such a good mood and now he wants to rest all of a sudden. But he

⁵⁷ Most alpine huts have cozy *gaststuben*: a combination restaurant, bar and living room.

is not tired yet and wants to stay up. He has heard about those fires from his father. Too bad he'll have to enjoy it without him. Before Marcus can get up, he hears Tony address his daughter: "So what do you want to eat, Alina?"

'So Alina is her name.' Marcus looks at the girl for some time. 'Who does she resemble? She's cute and somehow familiar.'

Alina notices his looks. She likes him somehow. There's something about him that she doesn't understand, and his son has that too.

'The dice that life throws,' Marcus thinks. But neither he, Stephan, Alina, nor Tony know the truth yet: Alina is Marcus' daughter. Only three of them will ever find this out.

Marcus takes a shower. The room with the two bunk beds is quiet and dark. Ruth and Cindy seem to be asleep already. Marcus finds the trousers and flannel shirt he gave to Ruth on his bed. He puts them on and goes to bed.

Cindy turns on the little light. "No, we're not asleep yet," she says. "Ruth and I want to thank you. What you did today was so nice, and really great. Are all Austrians, or New Zealanders rather, so nice," she asks flirtatiously.

Marcus laughs. He notices that Cindy's naked arms and shoulders are showing from under the blanket... 'Sure, she doesn't have anything dry to wear,' he thinks.

"Marcus, can you help me with something? I'm so cold. Could you come over and warm me up?" Marcus is surprised at this so-open invitation: 'So much for the stereotype of the reserved English,' he thinks, amused.

"Cindy, that's very nice of you, but you should know that I'm a happily married man..."

"What kind of a girl do you think I am," Cindy interrupts him, pretending to be outraged. "I only want you to warm me up a little, there's nothing wrong with that, right?"

Marcus' blood doesn't only rush to his head. He has been with Maria for eight years and has never cheated on her. But a little cuddling and massage, there's really nothing to that.

Marcus gets a bit cocky now. He lifts Cindy's blanket long enough to see that she's completely naked.

"What are you doing!" she screams.

"I only wanted to see what you're wearing, and since you're wearing nothing, I don't have to wear anything either."

He turns his back to Cindy and takes off his shirt and trousers. Ruth, who is lying in the other bed, raises herself and watches him. "Interesting," she comments.

"The things you do for tourists," says Marcus before he slips in with Cindy. They embrace each other. She smells tempting. Marcus can feel her nipples harden against his skin. Cindy nestles her head against his neck and shyly begins to kiss it. When she slips down a little to fit against him better, Marcus holds her back. "That's against the rules."

When Cindy realizes that he is still serious about being true to his wife, she starts to stroke and massage him lovingly. Even though she doesn't touch him "there", she notices that Marcus is very excited. 'If he wants it after all, then he'll have to give me a sign,' she thinks.

They have long been rid of the blanket. Ruth gets excited as she watches how Cindy deftly strokes Marcus and how she kisses his neck and forehead.

"It's your turn now," Marcus says.

He turns Cindy on her belly and lets his hands run over her perfect back, buttocks and thighs. Cindy opens her legs. Marcus caresses her there but doesn't enter.

Ruth can't take it any longer. Both Cindy and Marcus are aware that she's watching them; that even adds to the thrill. Ruth uncovers her body. Marcus can see one of her hands slip down between her legs.

Marcus turns Cindy on her back. He feels her hard nipples, her soft belly, and the triangle of coarse hair between her legs. He drives her crazy by running his fingers over the insides of her spread thighs. She tries to force his fingers inside her but he resists. Instead, he finds it easy to guide her hand there.

"Go ahead," he says. While he continues to stroke and kiss her nipples and earlobes, Cindy rubs herself, breathing faster and faster.

Once, Marcus forces her fingers further inside and she sinks into her first wave of ecstasy.

Marcus notices that Ruth is also getting more active. He finds it hard to restrain himself and he can't adhere completely to his own rules. Occasionally, he rubs "himself" against Cindy's open hand and even leaves a bit of fluid on her breasts. When Marcus puts a finger in her mouth and tells her to suck on it, Cindy loses all control. While she is quaking with desire, Marcus holds her tightly in his arms. She can feel that he is still hard, but he suddenly withdraws with a fleeting kiss.

He kneels in front of Ruth's bed and watches the play of her fingers. Ruth has never experienced anything like this. 'This man is watching me pleasure myself.' She feels that she's on a wonderful tightrope and she would like to go further, much further.

Marcus changes his position. His tongue caresses Ruth's breasts, then climbs up to her neck, her chin, and her cheeks. Ruth tries to catch it with her mouth but Marcus avoids it and keeps playing, moving his tongue down to her navel and even further until he reaches the first hairs. Ruth's rhythmical movements become even more intense.

Cindy is fascinated. She feels her excitement rise again. She is so curious that she slips out of her bed in order to see everything in detail.

"Cindy, you can't just watch. Ruth wants to be kissed. Kiss her, but French style."

Cindy hesitates. This is no longer familiar ground. She lets Marcus press her head toward Ruth.

"Kiss her!" orders Marcus.

The two girls' lips touch.

With one hand, Marcus twists Ruth's nipple; with the other he slaps Cindy's ass. "I said French!" he reminds them.

Their mouths open and their tongues intertwine. Now Marcus' hand moves up to Cindy's breasts as well. He is fascinated with how the two tongues play with each other. He turns Cindy's head to the side a little to create some space for himself. Almost simultaneously, the girls are hit by tsunamis of ecstasy.

The three of them lie together in Ruth's bed for a short time, then Cindy and Marcus slip back into their own beds.

"You got a raw deal, Marcus," observes Ruth.

"I don't see it that way. It was fun, very arousing. I'll think back to it often. By the way, I could hypnotize you if you want to forget about that kissing part."

The two girls consider it. Finally Cindy says, "I don't think it'll ever bother me and I don't think I'll have the urge to kiss Ruth again and vice versa, right?"

Ruth nods.

Cindy continues, "It was only you being here that brought that on."

"I don't think I could've put it better than that," Ruth agrees. "It was wild and it felt right at the moment. But what you did with us was really something."

"I didn't start it," Marcus defends himself. "Cindy invited me."

"Before you came in, we were talking about you and how well you treated us, even though we hadn't taken your advice. We talked ourselves into the hots a little. So we both thought that, since Ruth is a bit disabled at the moment, you might be interested in my charms and that this would be the best way to get something going. We were aroused even before you came in, even though we thought you'd be coming back with Stephan. By the way, weren't you worried about him interrupting us?"

"Not really. Can you see the light from that fire outside? The fellow that runs this place has a bonfire going. I knew Stephan wouldn't want to miss out on that." Marcus doesn't tell them that he locked the door with his parability. "What would've happened if Stephan had come up with me?"

"Then it just would've been bad luck. Why didn't you stay with Stephan in the first place?"

"Because I was longing for you."

"Ha ha!" They're not sure if they can believe that. They chat a little longer. When they can hear Stephan coming up, they quickly turn off the light and say good night to each other.

"I wish you two all the best. We won't see each other tomorrow. Stephan and I are leaving very early in the morning and later we'll meet the rest of the family."

“It’s a shame. You must have a great wife. Night.”

Stephan and Marcus get up before everyone else in the hut. The sun is still coming up and it’s a little foggy outside. “It’ll be a beautiful day,” says Marcus. “The fog will be gone soon.

While they are starting to climb the peak, the fog indeed lifts. By the time they reach the first difficult parts, they already have a great view over this mountain world. Stephan hikes easily and even has enough wind to talk the whole time. He goes on about last night and how much fun he had with Alina by the fire.

When Marcus hears that Stephan and Alina have exchanged addresses, Marcus becomes wary. ‘That’s not good. Maybe it’d be better if her address disappeared. I hope she doesn’t start writing Stephan,’ he thinks.

Stephan is a bit disappointed when they reach the peak. “That was a lot easier than you said.”

Marcus agrees: either his memory tricked him or they have improved the path since the last time he was here. There is absolutely no reason not to take the hike down through the Schneeloch. This turns out to be more fun for Stephan. On more than one occasion, Marcus feels that his son is challenged.

When they reach the main path, Maria and Lena are there waiting for them. They have come up further than they originally planned. Maria has a surprise. “Sandra and Klaus are coming to Bad Gastein⁵⁸ tomorrow. Shall we meet them there?”

Marcus is looking forward to the reunion. They reserve an apartment in the beautiful Hotel Sonngastein. It only takes two hours to get to Gastein via the Ennstal Autobahn and the Bischofshofen-Kitzbuehel Expressway.

“Austria is even smaller now with all these new roads,” Maria notes. They drive to the center of town. It’s situated at the foot of a

⁵⁸ Around 1900, Bad Gastein was one of the most extravagant spas in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Even the fastest express train between Salzburg and Italy made a stop there. Toward the end of the 20th century, Bad Gastein was still popular in the winter. In the summer, its elderly clientele and accommodation are a bit less impressive, despite the beautiful mountain surroundings. Only in 2006 did private investment change the situation for the better.

rocky slope at the end of a valley. Dozens of thermal springs emerge from the mountain there. In the middle of the town center, the Gasteiner Ache comes down in three waterfalls. Because of the lack of space, high-rises were already being built in the days of the monarchy. Some of them stand so close to the waterfall that you can't open the window without water sprinkling in.

"The New York of the Alps," Marcus announces. Even though Klaus will make a good guide when he arrives tomorrow, they go to the information office on the main square. They are barely out of there again when Lena suddenly gets nervous.

"Daddy, Mommy, the woman we just talked to, she's a para! She's very sad."

Maria agrees to go back inside and ask for another brochure as an excuse to start a conversation with the woman. In the meantime, Marcus and the kids wait in a nearby café.

When Maria joins them, she is in high spirits. "She might be an asset to the group. Her name is Cynthia. She seems to be very nice. We can find out more when Sandra gets here tomorrow. She speaks good English. She's just been laid off, she lost her boyfriend, and she has hardly any relatives here. So she might be willing to go abroad for a time."

"Do you have any idea what kind of a para she is?"

"No. She doesn't even seem to know that she is a para."

The days together with Sandra and Klaus turn out to be hectic. First, they "investigate" Cynthia. After they have met her too, Klaus and Sandra confirm what Maria reported yesterday. Cynthia has a parability, and she doesn't know about it. Klaus has never come across an aura like it.

"The only thing I'm sure about is that her parability is very special and that it has something to do with the past. We know that Aroha can look into the past, in a way. But she doesn't seem to have control over it, and never knows when it will happen or what she will see. Cynthia seems to have this control, but her parability sort of eliminates the past. I know this sounds stupid, but that's what I sense. I don't know more than that yet. We don't even really know about Aroha's skills, and now there is a parability that is even more of a riddle. This'll certainly keep our research department busy."

Sandra explains that Cynthia is a simple, honest and friendly woman. She would enjoy coming to New Zealand for three months, the length of time she could stay without a visa.

“Well then, let’s take her with us. We’ll get her an airline ticket and give her a nice advance. At first, we won’t be able to employ her without a visa and a work permit. Maybe she could help us with some clerical work on Great Barrier Island. Does anyone have an objection to proposing this to her tomorrow?”

No one does.

On the next morning, Marcus offers Cynthia the job. She accepts immediately.

“She was really happy and will do her best,” says Sandra, who para-eavesdropped on her.

Now it’s time to visit all the beautiful spots in Gastein. Klaus takes them to the Gruenen Baum, the Malerwinkel, the Anlauf and Rauris valleys, to Sportgastein, and much more. Marcus has a lot to say about his findings in connection with pumpkins and silatraviate.

In addition, Klaus has news about the PPU in Brussels. “They’re now able to create huge anti-para fields. We’ll also be able to do that soon. They’re also working on two new top-secret developments. The first one is likely to be a device that can locate parabilities. I’m not sure about that, though, and I don’t know if such a device could do more than me, for example. I hope to know more in a couple of weeks. The second development is a paraweapon. I have no idea what that could be or do. There’s one positive thing at least. They’re not planning to apply those devices for many years.

The days in Europe fly by all too quickly. Soon they’re back on a plane to Auckland. They are now one stronger than when they left. Cynthia has joined the group. Maria, Marcus, Cynthia, and the kids are the last ones to arrive on Great Barrier Island. Barry, Monika, Klaus, and Sandra are already there. Aroha has brought Herbert along.

Immediately after their arrival, Klaus asks to have a word with Marcus. “Marcus, believe it or not, this Herb is paraskilled too. Aroha doesn’t know it yet, and neither does he. His case is similar to Cynthia’s: we only know that he’s paraskilled, but not in what way. According to Sandra, he’s a good and honest person.”

“Sandra hasn’t failed us yet,” notes Marcus.

Marcus is still tired from the flight but they don't let him relax. Everyone wants a secret appointment all of a sudden. Sandra is next.

"You know I'm the snoop-in-charge here. That's why I feel I should tell you a couple of things. First, you should know that Herb is O.K. He likes Aroha a lot and would like to work for SR Inc. Aroha's going to ask you to offer him a job. Second, the PM wants to talk to you. I only know that she's worried about paradevelopment in Europe. Third, you should know that Barry and Monika had a great time in Europe, but something stirred up their feelings a little."

"Is it so unusual that it could endanger the group?"

"It's not unusual really, but it could endanger the group because it could cause jealousy and other strong feelings to arise. Those feelings could cause friction between us."

"What exactly do you mean?"

"Well..." Sandra has to think a moment. "You also seem to have had an experience that endangered your loyalty to Maria. Something similar happened to Barry and Monika, and even to Klaus and me. It seems that all three couples are now trying even harder to stand together, but will it always be like this?"

Marcus is a bit angry after his talk with Sandra. Of course she is an important person for the group, but does she really have to dig up all these private matters?

As Sandra predicted, Aroha soon approaches him asking about a job for Herbert. She is relieved when Marcus agrees.

The next day's dinner party is a great feast. Herbert and Cynthia, who have not yet been initiated, immediately feel comfortable with the group. They are happy to have Herbert as a new colleague at SR Inc. He and Aroha are glowing with happiness: now they will also be able to live in the same city. Sandra is happy for the two of them. They do not yet have a sexual relationship but are very good friends. They feel a deep understanding of each other. Aroha has never been someone to push others and Herbert is calm and peaceful. He feels that if something is meant to be, then it will happen. This attitude reminds Sandra of a book she once read, *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* (Sten Nadolny).

Marcus and the PM have a friendly conversation, but it doesn't bring any new results. The PM warns Marcus about the new PPU

activities she has heard about. Marcus tells her all he knows about it. They both decide to stay on top of the matter and to find out as much as possible.

In the ensuing weeks, Cynthia and Herbert are slowly initiated into the fact that they are parabilitists. Together with Aroha, they attend regular meetings at SR Inc. to discover the nature of their parabilities.

The Archaeological Institute in Vienna sends an interim report on their research in Egypt: they have actually found graves of some workers who worked on the pyramids. They have even found some human remains and it was possible to smuggle a couple of grams out of the country. These are attached to the report. Marcus can't wait to get the results of their analysis.

He soon has a report on his desk. The results are clear. The remains are those of three different people. All of them were poisoned. Disproportionate amounts of silatraviate were detected. This finally proves it: silatraviate improves parabilities or is even necessary for their expression. Those capabilities must have been around for thousands of years. People have always been scared of them, and parabilitists were often killed after being abused or when they were no longer needed. Marcus will give this report to the PM to assure her that it will be necessary to remain undercover.

Marcus personally takes the report to the PM. Dark clouds appear on the horizon during their conversation. The PM has received concrete evidence this time: the PPU has almost finished producing a parolocation system that will be able to detect all parabilities within a radius of twenty km. They plan to find all parabilitists worldwide, put them into paraprisons, and force them to cooperate.

The USA may have the strongest nuclear weapons, the Middle East may have the most devastating chemical and biological weapons, but Europe will surpass them both with an army of parabilitists. They are also working on a paraweapon, which will be the ultimate war machine.

"Marcus, what are you going to do? They'll find you and put you under their control. Is there anything I can do?" The PM is truly concerned.

“You are our best ally. But don’t worry, we’ve already taken precautions.”

This calms the PM somewhat. But although he doesn’t show it, Marcus is still very worried: he has exaggerated. If the PPU really has such a paralocator, it will cause them enormous problems. Marcus comforts himself with the fact that such a device could do much more harm in the hands of other nations. At least Europe has some comparatively responsible governments now.

Marcus tells only Maria and Klaus about the conversation with the PM. He doesn’t want to worry all the others as well. They talk for hours and hours, but they can find no solution to the problem.

Klaus finally sums it up: “All we can hope for is further breakthroughs in technology and pararesearch on our part.”

Marcus nods.

Little do they know that they have already found the solution in Cynthia and Herbert.

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 Paracomunicator” (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.

Preview of...
XPERTS: The Paracommunicator
by Jennifer Lennon

PART ONE: The Mindcaller

Chapter One

The Elders

Eons ago

Eons ago, in the depths of a cave on Earth, four humanoids hunch over what looks like a polished pebble lying on a ledge of rock. Many similar objects, large and small, are visible on other shelves carved into the walls. Some are glowing with a warm golden light.

The beings are not men and women in the earthly sense. They are Elders from another planet circling the distant sun Alpha Cygni. The heads of the four, Alfa, Betha, Ganna, and Deltaa, are completely bald. Their clothes range in color from black to white, and have an uncanny sheen to them like rock star's stage clothes.

A human being would find the shapes and colors in the cave very strange. Amazing formations of stalactites and stalagmites jut from the roof and walls and grow at a rate of inches per day instead of the usual inches per century. There is not a straight line to be seen anywhere. The horizontal, spiraling ones will later be called helictites and nobody will be able to understand how they developed...

The inhabitants, who have an almost drugged look on their faces, are staring, unblinking, at the pebble-like object on the rock workbench. But, perhaps strangest of all, there is no talking even though the Elders are obviously working cooperatively. In fact, they really are communicating, and their 'conversation' holds fascinating words like qubits and quantum gates, and they mention Turing machines several times. Further eavesdropping would disclose they

are discussing highly unconventional models of computers not available today, and talking about them as if they were the most natural things in the world.

“We come back to the problem of breaking the Turing barrier. It’s the only way we can change space, time, and the thing we need most— speed,” Alfa complains.

Betha despairs. “Conventional silicon technology for computing machines, no matter how powerful, is just not good enough.”

“Well, how about this for an idea,” Ganna says, diffidently. “We put one of our silicon computers into orbit, one of the small ones, and see how close to the speed of light we can get it to go. Relative to earth, that just might provide the speedup we want.”

“But just how close to the speed of light would we actually need to accelerate the satellite to?” Betha queries.

“Let’s see ...” Alfa says.

Outside the cave a waterfall is pounding onto a small pile of pebbles that have been arranged in a complicated pattern. You may be hard put to guess what their function is: they provide power to the entire settlement!

The stream flows west to the ocean. On its northern bank there is a steaming volcanic mud flat. To the South, on a small path that winds through primeval thickets, there are more cave entrances.

What is most surprising is that there are no outward signs of civilization: no buildings, no roads, and no manmade noises. A few people can be spotted down near the seashore, working in fields. Here, the Elder’s predilection for curves can be seen in the furrows and irrigation ditches. They are made in concentric circles and spirals and beautiful shapes, which will be found repeated, later, much later, in the art of the Polynesian people and the Maoris.

Flitting through the fields there are what appears at first glance to be moths or butterflies. On closer inspection, however, it’s clear they are tiny Para gliders. No more than three inches wide, the banana-shaped parachutes are made of a golden, silk-like material. Underneath each one is strung at least one of the ubiquitous smooth pebbles. Watching them for a time, one can see that each seems to have a purpose. Some drop seeds in or near the furrows. Others carry

stone tools many times bigger than themselves. A group of young adults are watching them intently.

The second of the caves along the track is a house with several rooms lit by more of the saucer-shaped pebble lights. One room is obviously a sleeping room. Sleeping platforms made of plaited flax with small stones worked into the patterns along each edge levitate two feet off the floor. In another room the lights are giving off a kaleidoscope of ever-changing colors. Sounds are being emitted from sculptures placed around the room. Perhaps it is music to the alien ears, but to humans it is just a jumble of low-pitched thunder and squeaky noises like a motor scooter.

What is missing in this house are kitchen and bathrooms; these are provided by the mud flats. Hot water is channeled into various pools and cooled by the stream. Some are used for cooking, and others lower down the valley for washing.

Sounds are coming from the next cave down the track. Is it a school? Yes—but a most unusual one. In a large space the youngest children are playing with their pet Para-gliders. Using single syllable voice commands, they are taking them for ‘flying lessons’. Considerable time is spent untangling the strings!

The middle age group of children has stones of a different shape and color under their parachutes. It looks as if they are magnets of some form because the children are attempting to get them to pick up and drop piles of different-colored sand.

The oldest group, however, seems to be simply staring into space while their gliders do circus tricks through hoops, down slides, and bounce playfully on swings.

What should really be just a side room off the main room looks like another world, complete with hot, moist, jungle sights, sounds, and smells! An Elder is pointing out various features to a small class. After the lesson the Elder picks up a rust-colored object and suddenly the jungle scene disappears and all that is left is a smooth-walled cave.

Later that day all the children take their pet gliders down to the beach. Now the activities are harder. The young children shout commands to get their pets to touch the water’s edge and ‘hump-back’ onto the sand. The older children have attached tiny surfboards

to the underbellies of their pets and are competing to see who can surf them the furthest distance along the rolling waves.

Most of the Elders of the little community take turns at working day and night in the uppermost cave. It is, as one might have guessed, a laboratory. Of the multiple rows of polished stones and chemical powders, some seem to be just collections of the colored pebbles, while others are heavy black granite. A few are black and flecked with light gray spots of a special chemical.

Betha says, "Our first decision, I guess, is which data model should we choose for our archival and communication modules?" She picks up a transparent phial and gives it a shake. "DNA? Or RNA? This D54 machine is a DNA model with 1,000,408 parallel processes."

"But if we use it, how will we control it?" Alfa argues. "Using the C series by themselves is hard at the best of times."

"Today's kids are getting better all the time," Betha says. "Yesterday I saw a pair youngsters mind-controlling two C100s. The second one was chasing the first one along the crest of a wave!"

Ganna says, "And I saw a little tyke thought-control his P3 through the sound barrier—not that he meant to do it!"

Weeks later they are still working on their fundamental problem: trying to compute infinite sequences in finite times. There is an increased sense of urgency in their work, which is only interrupted when two young men race into the cave calling to them to come quickly.

Outside the cave, on an outcrop of rock, an Elder is staring at the granite-like rock surface in dismay. "More tremors!" he exclaims. "Big ones this time, and closer to the surface."

"Things are going to blow," Ganna yells, "and soon! An eruption of this magnitude could give out enough dust to plunge the entire world into an ice age."

"Well this is it then," Deltaa says sadly to himself.

"Sound the alert," Alfa bellows. "Activate all life pods. Quickly!"

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Continued in XPERTS: The Paracommunicator



**Hermann Maurer, Coordinator
of The XPERTS Collection**

Marcus, the telekinetic, who is still on the most wanted list in Europe, and Maria, a "para-seer" who can look through walls, join forces with other persons with "parabilities." The growing team of people with supernatural talents has headquarters in New Zealand. They are trying to help other people, yet have to remain under cover. They encounter a series of almost unsolvable problems. Yet with luck, ingenuity, advanced computer science technology and the support of New Zealand's prime minister they manage to solve them, only to be confronted with a deadly danger... This book by one of the most prestigious European computer scientists makes you wonder how much is truth and how much is fiction!

"Fascinating Science fiction - with lots of emotion and suspense, impossible to put down. A piece of advice: If you begin to read this book one evening make sure you have a free day ahead of you. You will not find much time to sleep that night!"

Lydia Gruenzweig, Baden

"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. Thus, it easy for us to make friends with them."

Peter Lechner, Vienna

