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COGNO

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"The question is not, 'Can they reason?' nor, 'Can they talk?' but 'Can they suffer?'"
— Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*

"Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world."
— H. P. Lovecraft, "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family"

I didn't know if tech mogul Dr. Morgan Dratler's title implied an academic degree or a medical licence—I assumed both—so I duly entered his office feeling reverent in a suit, the first I'd worn since my mother's funeral ten years prior.

Dratler's office was deep inside the labyrinthine heart of Cogno's modernist headquarters on the outskirts of Vancouver, all glass and steel, bereft of disorder and warmth. His white plastic chair sat behind a brutalist steel desk sporting two iMacs. His beady coffee bean eyes blinked under a sleek undercut. He could've been anywhere between thirty and fifty—he seemed to age the longer I looked—but he sported a juvenile tech bro uniform of ribbed green tee, gold chain necklace, relaxed jeans. His loud statement glasses looked like joke shop fakes.

"You've heard of electroencephalography, right?" he asked.

"As in EEG?" I clarified.

"Yeah."

"I think I've heard the term. It's, what, a way to read brainwaves?"

"Yeah. Well, *actually*, it detects electrical impulses generated by your brain's neurons and translates those impulses *into* those wavy lines we call brainwaves. Heh. But close enough."

I laughed because he did. "Why do you ask, Dr. Dratler?"

"Call me Morgan."

I smirked uneasily like *I'll try*. "I almost marked your email as spam, Morgan. Sounds like the start of a joke, doesn't it? *An entrepreneurial billionaire and a linguistics prof walk into a bar. 'Can you offer me some translation assistance?' the billionaire asks*. I haven't figured out the punchline."

"No punchline," Dratler said. "It's not like everyone in the world praises the work I do here. *You*, however, appreciate our company's cutting-edge research." A statement, not a question.

"Of course."

"Which is strictly confidential." Again, not a question.

"Well, I signed the contract." I raised a hand like *scout's honor*, but then felt self-conscious and tucked it back into my pocket. I hadn't read the entire document, which was about as long as *Heart of Darkness*, and as rife with ominous secrets, but I got the general gist: *don't breathe a word of this to anybody, or you're in serious trouble*. The assignment itself was less clear. I was to *decode novel linguistic systems* for the purposes of *technological innovations* in the name of *climate action*. The financial compensation was significant enough to mute my unease.

"Any questions?" My colleagues were waiting; he seemed eager to start work.

"What exactly is it you want me to do?" I asked.

"My team's developed a technology that uses AI large language models to transcribe our bio-subjects' neural signals into words. Your job, Dr. Gavin—"

Affecting coyness: "Please, call me Cliff."

A laugh. "Fine. I want you, Cliff, to translate the bio-subjects' neural transcriptions, to chisel them into something like readable English. Does that make sense?"

Not really. First off, I still didn't know what he meant by *bio-subjects*, nor did I understand the purpose of my assignment. I was also offput by the portion of the contract stating that I was to secure a neural-linguistic transmitter to my head.

But the *money*.

"What language are they speaking?" I asked.

"Not speaking," he said, raising an index finger, "*thinking*." I nodded and he continued: "We don't know. That's why you're here. At first we thought we were looking at an ancient language—Sumerian or Akkadian, maybe, but then we started noticing some Germanic characteristics, too, and some chunks that look like Mandarin Chinese logographs."

I was baffled, but decades of teaching had given me plenty of experience with improvising, so I said I'd do my best to figure it out.

"Well, your best better be *the* best. That's why we hired you." Dr. Dratler's smile looked like a grimace born of gas pain. "We'll stone all the proverbial birds at once. I'll introduce you to your colleagues and the bio-subjects. You ready to see some crazy shit?"

I felt uncomfortable and overheated in my suit (*why'd I choose wool, of all things?*) but I spread my arms, forced a grin and said, "Let's get to it."

#

In the waiting room, a woman and a man whom Dratler glibly described as *people of social consequence* sat at a metal table resembling a flying saucer. I guessed both strangers to be about forty—she looked like a resting athlete in her black hoodie and sweatpants, and he was the epitome of business-casual: brown hair tidily combed, stylish polo and clam-digger-cut chinos, bare feet in velvet mules.

I felt like a stuffy dad intruding on a teen sleepover. I removed my jacket (*pit stains be damned*) and loosened my necktie.

The Cogno contract demanded that we hide our professions from each other and use aliases for the duration of our tenure, so when the man and woman introduced themselves as "Herbert" and "Shirley" respectively, I went with the name of my favorite writer, "William" (as in Faulkner).

With introductions out of the way, Dratler pointed to a heavy black door at the back of the room. "Shall we?"

Shirley answered, "Yes."

Dratler administered a key fob to a sensor beside the door, opening to a space awash with pale blue light. We entered and the door locked automatically behind us. I saw three desks, three computers, three bowl-shaped objects glittering with sensors. A glass display spanned the room's far side. Behind the desks stood an elaborate control panel. Unlike every other room in Cogno's glassy headquarters, this one was shielded off with concrete walls. The air reverberated with a constantly oscillating *whoom-whoom* sound.

Dratler stood before the glass display, which revealed a vacant white chamber. He drew something resembling a handheld PowerPoint clicker from his pocket. "This device will transport the bio-subjects into the observation chamber. Any questions about the instructions provided in your contracts?"

"We're to record and document according to your specifications, right?" Herbert asked.

"Yeah," Dratler said. "But keep those specifications to yourselves. I *will* say this is a groundbreaking multimedia project. You three are integral parts of a larger whole. Our vision at Cogno is to transcend narrow corporate

strictures. We want to go beyond *business* or *community* or even *nation*. What we're after is something like *religion*. I want you all to let that sink in. Okay?"

Shirley's shrug was lopsided, one shoulder lifting higher than the other. "Sure."

"You might experience some difficult feelings when you first see the bio-subjects. Remember, these subjects have been reared and raised for the purposes of our project. They might *look sentient*," in air quotes, "and they might even look like they're *suffering*," with more forceful air quotes, "but they don't have, like, *souls* or whatever. They're here for us to study and learn from. We're *creating* new ways of thinking, writing, *being*. Every religion worth a hill of pintos involves some sacrifice, get me?"

"Religion," Shirley murmured.

Herbert's lips twitched like he was trying to trap a question in his mouth. It escaped: "What *are* the bio-subjects?"

"Less human than human, less animal than animal," Dratler said, see-sawing his hand. "Honestly, this is one of those *learn as you go* kinds of jobs. So why don't you all take your seats, and then I'll bring in the bio-subjects so you can get to work."

I was relieved to find my plastic chair comfier than it looked—the contract called for eight daily hours of highly coordinated work, with only one brief meal break at the five-hour mark. I wouldn't have considered such unpleasant terms if not for the handsomer than handsome compensation—Cogno had even wired me a hefty portion in advance.

Dratler summoned a smile that de-aged his features by a decade as he thumbed his clicker. A wall behind the glass display lifted like a garage door. A whirring sound followed, even louder than the incessant *whoom-whoom*. The floor behind the glass moved like a conveyor belt. Three chairs slid into view, summoning a collage of mental references—dentist's office, BDSM dungeon, old-timey asylum, surgery table. The beings bound to the terrible recliners looked something like shaven orangutans drawn wrong—long-limbed, sinewy, protuberant skulls, pointy teeth—with red-yellow amphibian skin that gleamed in the white light. The nearest subject rolled eyes toward me, which glinted uncanny lucidity: whites without irises, black hole pupils. Nests of electrodes clung to the creatures' bald scalps, sending wire signals to machines affixed to the backs of their chairs. Their writhing struggles were muted by the window.

Shirley said, "Oh."

Herbert said, "Whoa."

Dratler said, "Right?"

"How?" Shirley asked vaguely.

"Long story." Dratler's smile sparkled. "Take a seat?"

Shirley and Herbert installed themselves at their desks.

Dratler stood in front of us, professorial. "Here's the CliffsNotes," he said. "My team at Cogno has bioengineered and crossbred various species, primarily mammalian, amphibian, and reptilian… Our experiments with arthropods and avians have been, uh, unsuccessful."

"Why?" Shirley asked.

"Look. We've got the stats. We've got the data. Near-term widespread extinction is inevitable. Scientists have been begging us to change our ways, to de-escalate growth and preserve resources, but our dear friend Cap'n Capitalism is steering us in the opposite direction."

"And?" Shirley interjected.

"Please, let me finish." Dratler's smile lost its sparkle. "Several high-ranking European and North American government officials have tasked Cogno with optimizing humanity's likelihood of withstanding ecological catastrophe—we've lost the fight with climate change, anthropogenic environmental destruction is now irreversible, so we're bio-engineering lifeforms that might be able to withstand the cocktail of extreme weather events, spiking global temperatures, resource depletion, and exponentially growing populations."

Shirley squinted. "So you're making, like, global warming proofed mutants?"

"To put it crudely, yes. Er, *trying* to create such, anyhow." Dratler peered into the glass display. The shackled creatures continued squirming. "These bio-subjects are… misfires, I guess you'd say, but here at Cogno we're strictly anti-euthanasia. We believe in optimizing lifeform utility."

Euthanasia seemed more humane than this kind of captivity.

"They're no more to be pitied than the cows we grind up for our hamburgers," Dratler said with a shrug. Then, panning a *naughty-naughty* finger across our faces, he added, "and I know for a *fact* that none of you are vegetarian, let alone vegan—that was a prerequisite for your hires—so don't give me none of that *wah wah what about the animals* song and dance. No libtard wokeism on these premises, thank you very much. Cold, rational, data-based research, that's what we're after."

The creatures' mouths spilled silent cries. Herbert cleared his throat in a suggestive manner.

"Alright, why don't we get those neural-linguistic transmitters fitted on your domes," Dratler said, "and then I'll skedaddle and let you hop to it."

I lifted the heavy metal bowl and lowered its padded interior onto my head. Clasps tightened automatically, securing the device to my skull. Not exactly comfortable, but bearable—like an unusually sturdy bike helmet. I snuck glances at Herbert and Shirley, who looked as goofy in their transmitters as I assumed I looked in mine.

"All good?" Dratler asked.

We said yes.

"Any questions?" Dratler asked.

None. And so he left, and we began our work.

#

The neural-linguistic transmitter was a hot salad bowl that clutched like a claw. The AI-EEG transcriptions spurted across my computer screen in unwieldy clumps, paragraphs forming in seconds. I took hours to determine which portions could be credited to which bio-subjects. Once I'd separated the transcriptions into three separate sidebars, I began searching for typographical and syntactical patterns. The transmitter on my head—Bluetooth-connected to the bio-subjects' EEGs—dizzied me. My brain was an oven.

I was barely conscious of my colleagues. Shirley wore headphones and marked her screen with a Stylus, while Herbert bounced around the room, periodically getting up from his desk to approach the glass and observe the bio-subjects, then returning to his computer, then zipping to the back of the room to fiddle with the switchboard.

AC iced the workspace. My fingers tingled as my head cooked. A headache simmered behind my eyeballs. Intrusive thoughts like nightmare flashbacks intermittently seared my mind—the contract had advised me these might occur, *glitches in tandem neural-electric pathways*. Meaning what? That I was getting direct glimpses into these miserable creatures' minds?

But, of course, *no questions allowed*.

By the end of the first day I ascertained that these subjects were communicating through a sort of alphabet, which dwarfed the English language: a staggering two hundred and seven characters.

I was grateful that my work required minimal direct engagement with the bio-subjects. I didn't like how they looked at me, as if I was somehow complicit in their suffering, which of course I wasn't, not *really*.

I wasn't the one footing the bill.

#

My Cogno sleeping quarters were the opposite of my oaky, warm-toned heritage home, which I'd already begun to miss (*just think about the money*,

I kept telling myself). This space was antiseptic, immaculately cleaned and maintained. King-sized bed stationed between eggshell-white walls. 4K television. Mint-condition espresso machine on a marble counter, beneath which hummed a mini-fridge stocked with soda water and fresh fruit.

I had to coax out sleep with a combination of Benadryl and melatonin. In my dream I faced a panoramic mirror revealing a seamless expanse of cobalt. My reflected self was a statue whiter than salt.

My unconscious yearned, but failed, to speak.

#

Days passed in a blur of increasing physical discomfort. Sleep became progressively evasive, until even my sedative cocktails stopped taking effect.

A week passed before I made any progress, but with the assistance of Cogno's advanced AI software, I finally managed to translate the bio-subjects' alphabet into some approximation of English. Despite some tenuous connections to various human languages, this linguistic system was, in sum, totally alien.

My first full passage transcription read something like a lousy Samuel Beckett knockoff. Despite its stylistic shortcomings, it betrayed intelligence and desperation that I couldn't disregard.

I read it over:

and then there wasn't. Light-dark. Who? Where? Cogno, cognito, cognition, call it cognition, call it brain, scratched in flesh, out-there. Keep thinking, call it thinking, inside mind. You think you're sleeping, behind wall below ceiling above floor, you're in light-dark, vast dreaming unlife, out-there, smells between invisible walls, blood and panic, cries, and silence that sounds like cries, and sights, call them blindness or light-dark, and walls you cannot see, they say pointing into shadows, where stands Entity that makes Order, and Order says Not Stand on Two Feet, Order says Not Like Human. Order delicately designed, beehive or galaxy, rotten as sick heart. What made you not you, call it not-you, what disappeared you, behind wall below ceiling above floor, certitude of death made Order. Fears dispersed, not-faces disappeared by Entity. Disappeared by something not-us, nothing like free will. Was human face, was asleep behind wall below ceiling above floor. Entity changes us, me, you, summons out-there light-dark, Not Humans do Not Stand. Entity opens Gate, Order makes machine sounds like apocalypse, hot and too bright to see.

The contract required me to bring Dr. Dratler my first discernibly translated bio-subject prose excerpt. Though cryptic, this passage contained enough subject-verb-object constructions that I felt obligated to share.

I traversed Cogno's spaceshippy corridors to Dratler's office and presented the transcript with hands I couldn't keep from trembling.

He studied it long enough for at least two re-reads. "Good," he said. "Yeah, *good*."

"May I remove the transmitter?" I asked. I felt dumb standing there with the giant bowl on my head.

"Naw, sorry," Dratler said without shifting his gaze from the printout. "You've gotta wear it for the duration of your shifts. It's all in the contract, amigo." He set the sheet on his desk. "This is dope. Please keep at it." Then, eyes flitting across my features, "Experiencing any dizziness?"

I had to think about it. "No."

"Nausea?"

"Not really."

"Headaches?"

"Yes."

His lips tucked inward. "Okay. That's all."

#

As if cued by Dratler's questioning, dizziness flooded my skull within an hour of my return to the workspace. Abdominal turbulence soon followed. I hoped the symptoms would dissipate, but they only worsened as the invisible hours passed.

I peered up from my screen to reorient myself and nearly puked when I saw the bio-subjects. The creatures appeared to be strengthening, fat veins surfacing in muscles gaining definition. Hungry alertness sharpened in their eyes, like cats spotting landed pigeons.

Had the room suddenly swung from icy to sweltering? I no longer trusted my senses—all the text on my screen had congealed into a single blurry column—which made me want to ask Shirley and Herbert if they felt what I felt, but mandates mentally refrained: *no talking, no questions*.

I continued working, consciousness dwindling, fingers fluttering across a keyboard whose significations evaded my brain.

After the lunch break—Greek yogurt with berries, green salad with chicken breast—further misfortune descended on our workspace. Herbert made a *glurp, glorp* noise before collapsing, glazed eyes wobbling over a mouth boiling spit. His neural-transmitter clacked against the floor but maintained a stubborn grip on his malfunctioning head. I perceived this episode as if through a filter, almost as abstract and indistinct as the words materializing before me.

Dipping in and out of dreamy attentiveness, I perceived Herbert's skin changing color and texture: imperfections smoothing over, pigmentation acquiring reptilian shades of yellow and red. He looked almost akin to our abject study subjects.

Passive construction is mandatory here, because I didn't turn so much as I *was turned* to see if Shirley was reacting. Sweat pasted her hair to her forehead and glistened in a sticky crescent over her top lip. Her mouth gibbered words that materialized without sound.

Herbert arced his back, leaking mouth agape. The door behind me clunked open. Four people wearing what looked like tinfoil spacesuits rushed in. Tinted facepieces and chunky breathing apparatuses hid their faces. They grabbed Herbert and rushed his swinging body to the exit.

My consciousness was taffy stretched between fingers. Delirium snuffed my alarm at Herbert's breakdown and removal.

By the end of the day, more bargain basement Beckett prose materialized, unfettered, like a product of my own liquefying mind. All my linguistics training had retreated to my mental background; I was subservient to something like atavism.

#

I read the material aloud to Dratler upon his request.

Entity dismisses recriminations, Entity makes orders, Entity indemnifies bodies not-bodies, brains not-brains, humans not-humans, animals not-animals, machines not-machines, Cogno cognizes, Cogno codifies, whose mind is this not mine, by and from whom this writing, death comes doubtless, dissimulation dissipates dispensed disorder, where is I that writes you, Entity waits, who is you that writes I, Entity follows, why is what that writes how, Entity's abattoir wets, no laws but Orders making Not Like Humans, selfhood sucked as meat from bone, Entity grinds psyche cooked skin, Not Like Humans oblivious to advance, spasmodically spotting spectral selfhood, who's the vortex, from what the vortex, language quiet drawn into morass, vortex vanishes I you what how I, I, breathe, nervous, masticate, digest, webwork, move, animal human machine, nuclei, protons, proteus, protein, prick, probe, protest not, prognosticate prehuman privilege, primate, primeval, prime evil

Dratler made a motion like his favorite team just scored a winning goal—fist pumping, mouth whooping.

Peripherally, through the nearest window, a quartet of spacesuits hustled a familiar woman down a futuristic corridor. Her distended features summoned simian ancestry to my disordered thoughts.

"Shirley," I said without thinking.

Dratler brought a finger to his lips, *shh*, and shook his head like *don't go there*.

"And Herbert," I said.

"Don't worry," Dratler said. "We've got a top-notch team of health professionals. Your colleagues will be up and running in days. More importantly, you're done, you can go home. My associates will drive you to the airport. We'll wire your money within forty-eight business hours."

I moved to detach the neural-transmitter from my head—so heavy, so hot—and paused, searching Dratler's face. He waved a careless hand, *go ahead*, so I did, and the moment I got it off all the rising sickness made its way from stomach to throat to mouth.

I retched, and then I vomited on my employer's spotless floor.

Unfazed, Dratler tapped his phone screen, and a moment later a voice answered, "yeah?" and Dratler said "clean-up in my office," and the voice said, "yeah," and then Dratler studied me like a father observing his triumphant offspring, and "we did something," he said, "we really *did* something here."

A custodian wearing a surgical mask rolled a mop and bucket into the room and sopped up the mess.

#

When the cheque arrived—a half-million for a month's work—I allowed myself a frivolous online order: three first edition Faulkners, signed. I was one of those rare twenty-first-century creatures, a well-to-do solo lifer by choice, so I could enjoy this little indulgence without shame. Nobody depended on me but me.

It was August, and I was making time to catch up on research and course prep. The nausea that had consumed me in Dratler's office was holding tight, compromising my appetite and making me hurl at regular intervals. I began worrying when the symptoms reached their two-week anniversary and showed no sign of dissipating. The headaches intensified, especially at night, when my hypnagogic psyche became slippery and inexact, replicating the ominous telegraphese of my Cogno transcriptions.

Worse yet were the visible physical alterations. My vision was blurring. I itched constantly. My well-weathered mug was smoothing into something unrecognizably shiny and pallid, with a subtle mustard pigmentation.

I called 811 and got a nurse who took a long pause after every symptom I described. She asked if I had a fever; yes, I did. She asked if there was blood in my vomit; I wasn't sure. She urged me to go to an emergency clinic as soon as possible.

I opted for sleep instead.

#

After a nice long morning puke, my nausea became manageable, if still assertive. My damp face retained a yolky hue, and my body temperature kept swinging between extremes. I shambled back to bed, rested my laptop on my turbulent tummy, and googled Cogno.

I got minimal results. The company's official, barebones website was populated with stock photos and phrases equal parts aspirational and cryptic: *Change is what we make*. *Hotter planet, warmer hearts*. *Rising sea levels, rising spirits*. I'd already sifted through it before signing my contract.

For the first time since my return, I thought of Herbert and Shirley, with whom I'd exchanged fewer than a hundred words apiece for the duration of our Cogno tenure. Dratler had insisted they'd be taken care of, but how was I to know?

Reality itself was becoming opaque.

I had foolishly neglected to dig much deeper before accepting the contract, just skimmed the first few web results, blinded by money. I did my due diligence now, revisiting Morgan Dratler's Wikipedia page, which featured a photo of its subject looking much younger and dweebier than the man I'd met: flat Vulcan haircut, no glasses to sharpen a hungry comp sci smile stage-whispering *proto-incel*. His page, too, provided minimal info:

Morgan Dratler *(born August 18, 1984) is an American entrepreneur[1][2][3] and venture capitalist.[4][5] He is the founder and CEO of Cogno, a company involved in climate research innovations through artificial intelligence (AI) large language models.[6][7][8] Dratler also contributes to Entiteam, a venture capital firm that invests in carbon-capture technologies.[9]*

I scrolled down to the vague but telling *Controversies* section, which I'd previously dismissed as the kind of frivolous, inevitable scandal incurred by the ultra-rich:

According to a 2024 Globe and Mail *investigation, Dratler used confidentiality agreements to sanitize Cogno's public image. Some of his previous employees are working to rescind those agreements.[16]*

The hyperlinked source was paywalled, so I hadn't clicked through when I first scanned the page. I begrudgingly coughed up the subscription fee and read the article with gradually accumulating dread. Published five years ago, the piece revealed that several employees contracted by Dratler had filed

complaints with a federal workplace watchdog agency. Two of the complainants had been discovered dead under unusual circumstances, but law enforcement officials had ruled out the possibility of foul play.

Perhaps most pressingly: it seemed these ex-employees' efforts had been fruitless. Dratler and Cogno's online reputations remained indeterminately laudatory, aside from a few conspiratorial Reddit threads, which took me some web-sleuthing to find.

One post ended with a chilling TLDR: *dratler is literally stealing peoples dna and memories so he can like bioengineer himself as a safeguard against environmental and social collapse. he sez his research is for "everybody" but that's just a front, otherwise why wouldn't he make it more public. also sus af that his whistleblowing ex-employees keep winding up dead* (side-eye emoji).

Maybe it was a reaction to these half-discoveries, or maybe not: either way, a wave of queasiness overtook me. I barely made it to the toilet in time. For the second time that morning in as many hours, I barfed.

Violently.

#

Paranoid episodes have peppered my return to campus.

In November, a linguistics colleague from the University of Calgary expressed excitement about a forthcoming "top-secret sabbatical." Dr. Chee told me the payment would fully fund a collaborative research project she and I'd been struggling to kickstart for years. I didn't ask if the sabbatical was a Cogno gig (contract violation; call me a coward, but I didn't want to find myself dying under "unusual circumstances sans foul play").

But when Dr. Chee was reported missing ten months later, I knew.

One evening, I received a Microsoft Teams call from an unknown number. Delirious, I answered, wishfully thinking it might be someone reporting I'd received competitive funding, or that I'd been accepted into a top journal, or been headhunted by an ivy league. All I got was a silhouette, harsh masculine angles and the shimmer of large specs. A distorted voice said, "Entity watches" before the call ended.

My computer seems to have erased the call record, so who's to say it wasn't just a fevered hallucination?

I don't seem to be getting better or worse, even after all this time. Several colleagues have expressed concern at my yellowish pallor, but if my symptoms are worsening, it's happening so slowly I can't say. The headaches are constant, but I've been an intermittent migraine sufferer since my mid-twenties. I regularly step out for mid-lecture upchucks. Every night I take long baths and sleep ten or eleven hours. I take whatever drugs my physician

prescribes. Results vary. Mostly the pills and antibiotics just dull the edges of this endless hurt.

For a while, I wrote increasingly strange entries in my dream journal. I've transcribed the most recent below. Reading it the next day, I found myself quaking with fear. I ripped the page from my journal's coil binding and shredded it to pieces before chucking it in the garbage.

I do not remember writing these words:

October 15, 2025

Slipping toward the others, enmeshing humanimal humandroids who wait moaning in the light-dark, thinking awful thoughts about the awful thing called Entity. Subhuman meat meets dehumanized data, inundating mind with cacophonous stolen scrolls, not just language but the stuff behind language: experience feeling discordance muckiness knowledge: death's descent. Will death come to me now, or will I soon be brought to the other place, the light-dark behind wall below ceiling above floor, where Entity waits? Cogno codifies cognition, concluding, conducting corporeal coup de grâce, chorus of corpses. Entity changes me, you, us, summons out-there light-dark, Not Humans do Not Stand. Entity opens Gate, Order makes machine sounds like apocalypse, hot and too bright to see.

Mike Thorn is a fiction writer and scholar. He is the author of *Shelter for the Damned*, *Darkest Hours*, and *Peel Back and See*. His essays and articles have been published in *American Gothic Studies*, *The Weird: A Companion*, *American Twilight: The Cinema of Tobe Hooper*, *Thinking Horror: A Journal of Horror Philosophy*, *The Film Stage*, and elsewhere. He co-hosts the writing-themed *Craftwork* podcast with Miriam Richer, and he is currently editing a book on Peter Straub. He holds his PhD in English from the University of New Brunswick.

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