

MISSION FILE:

SANDMAN

Source Code: 7b

There in the Jumbled Hills just below the Groom Mountains - and roughly a half-mile from Area 51's Northeast perimeter - a light westerly wind swept up the steep side of the tall sand dune. And though it had been several hours since the late afternoon sun had surrendered to twilight then darkness as nightfall set in, the chalky desert floor clung stubbornly to the blistering heat of this day, the Fourth of July.



For most of this late evening the air here had been still, and smelled faintly of sagebrush and mesquite. But now in the breeze moving in his direction, the CIA Operative atop this dune who was known only as "SANDMAN" (like the legendary giver of sleep in children's' fairy tales) sensed something new: the faint smell of rain.



He looked up and saw that on the Western horizon, but still miles away, a summer thunderstorm was on the rise. For a split-second lightning lit-up a high thundercloud there, and the crack and rumble of distant thunder soon rolled across the sky. With luck, it would remain clear overhead for a time. And the silvery full moon would continue to cast its radiant beams

out into the sky of midnight blue, now sprinkled with bright stars. |

SANDMAN had been lying there prone and roasting alive for more than an hour, and he was grateful for the cooling breeze now sweeping across his sweaty face. He scanned the area below, watchful for any sign of the rather frail-looking middle-aged civilian Computer Technologist who worked swing-shift, performing research for the Department of Defense somewhere inside the perimeter fence a couple of clicks to the west. There'd be no trouble spotting his no-frills white, U.S. Government fleet 4-door Ford Crown Victoria Sedan with a blue interior, even in darkness.

For the past week SANDMAN'S directives had been to passively probe the little man but take no action, just observe and report any changes in his behavior or activities. Yet nothing had seemed out of the ordinary with the typical routine of his drab existence: drive to-and-from work, sleep, then awaken and do it all over again.

Then three nights ago, his Handler had informed him that the latest situation report indicated a NI-ACT (night action) was required. And immediately, his routine Surveillance Assignment became one so sensitive that within the entire U.S. Intelligence Network, only these two Operatives would have knowledge of it:

Specifically, on one of three nights - July 2nd through the 4th, between 23:00 and 01:00 hrs. - the Tech-expert was expected to slip-away from his designated work site inside Area 51 and drive the Crown Vic to this location. He'd park by the dry ravine below and wait to rendezvous with an as-yet unknown Contact from Las Vegas. The task was now to prevent that meeting from ever taking place: the man he'd been shadowing was now his Target. And tonight, quite literally, he'd less than an hour to kill!

For a modicum of comfort he shifted his body in the sand, flicking twice a pestering insect way from his mouth. He remembered the first time he'd tailed the civilian to this spot, two twilights before...



He'd sped his custom-built Ducati racing 'cycle northeast out of Las Vegas on I-15, then up I-93 for slightly more than a hundred miles, tailing his Target from a safe distance. At Crystal Spring, he'd followed the white sedan west on Highway 375 (the State of Nevada has officially named it, "The Extraterrestrial Highway"), but dropped back as it swept through the low hills of the Pahrangat Valley.



Then at a juncture a few miles south of the village of Rachel, the sedan forked left onto the unpaved Groom Lake Road. For ten torturous miles he'd choked along in the thick cloud of dust the sedan raised while it sped across the broad playa toward these Jumbled Hills, Nature's wall that blocked the ground view of the surface facilities at Groom and Papoose Lakes. And, their painstakingly protected secrets...



Near the end of the journey, he'd momentarily lost sight of the Crown Vic as it disappeared 'round the dangerously sharp curve at the foot of this particular high dune which, ironically, he'd later prepared to serve as the OP-SITE for his task. Deep sand and loose gravel that had washed into the apex of the curve forced him to slow the big 'cycle nearly to a crawl. But about a quarter-mile farther ahead the dust cloud thinned somewhat, and he could then see the two high hills between there and Whitesides Mountain in the distance. There, he stopped the 'cycle abruptly and watched the sedan disappear through an opening in the barbed-wire perimeter fence. In the bright moonlight he could also see that atop each hill were posted armed private Security Guards (the locals call them "Camo-dudes") in unmarked white Jeep Cherokees, standing watch over the opening in the fence through which the Crown Vic had passed, on its way into the secret facilities beyond.



Since this installation's early beginnings decades ago, the Pentagon has staunchly denied its very existence. And yet at this boundary, a large and solitary sign of warning is posted in deep sand off the right shoulder of Groom Lake Road to discourage truth-seekers from nosing around a place that officially does not exist! He scanned this sign, the text of which contains an ominous threat in the bottom-left corner:



He turned his 'cycle about at the signpost, and then disappeared 'round the curve and returned to the eastern slope of this steep dune above the now familiar ravine. For him, it was a great stroke of luck that this particular sand hill was perfect for his purpose: it was completely hidden by the surrounding terrain, and would not be visible by line-of-sight to the men guarding the perimeter back there in the distance.

The buzzing, crackling insects had silenced themselves that first night while he parked the 'cycle well off the roadway there among the rocks and rough brush. He'd covered it with six-color camouflage netting, and then scrambled up the side of the dune facing the roadbed. There, he scooped-away just enough sand with a small folding military trench tool to lay prone,

to be unseen from the dirt road below. He piled a few large rocks on the downward slope to serve as a stable firing platform, and then retrieved two nylon tote bags from the 'cycle containing the necessary tools of his profession and carried them up to this small impression dug into the sand.



Next, he opened the smaller of the two bags and withdrew a shoulder holster bearing a .50 cal. Desert Eagle Magnum pistol, strapped the holster on and adjusted it slightly, then verified the pistol's readiness before tucking it back into the holster. Lastly, he unzipped the longer, combination soft rifle bag and foldout shooter's mat, and extracted the two halves of his hallmark .308 cal. Heckler and Koch PSG-1 marksman rifle equipped with a tripod rest...



With practiced hands, he quickly bolted them together and clipped a Darkstar 30,000+ light gain amplification infrared scope onto the rifle, then slipped a shell-holder containing six extra rounds onto left wrist and double-checked everything. Satisfied all was in order, he donned a desert sniper's face veil of micro-thin nylon mesh, then settled down onto the mat in the prone position.

For a moment, he looked up to the night sky, and couldn't help imagining it had probably been a night just about like this one under desert stars the first week in July, 1947, when the first disc crashed in a sandy arroyo about a thousand miles away near Roswell, New Mexico...

He'd been told of the dark secrets this place holds - what's out here, too, and what they do with those...things. And then there were the experiments... He shook off the mental images of "flying saucers" and "little gray men", and turned his left wrist to check the time displayed on the flat-black Luminex diver's watch - 00:10 hrs. Military Time. And there was *still* no sign of the predictably punctual little computer dweeb.

To calm himself, he tried closing his eyes and took in several deep breaths, holding the last one in momentarily. He released it slowly through pursed lips. And waited...

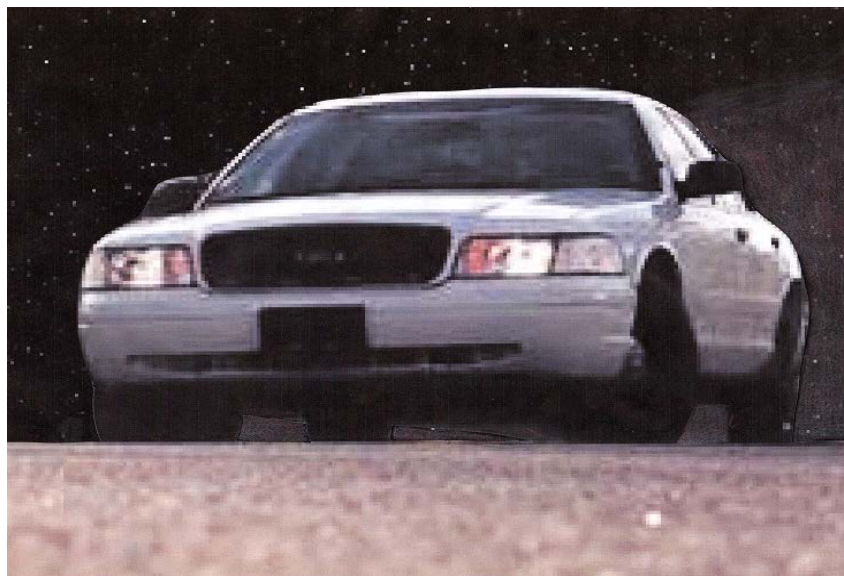


The low engine rumble and the scrunch of tires rolling over gravel on the road below made SANDMAN's pulse quicken! His body tensed too, as from the direction of Highway 375 a black '02 Corvette convertible grumbled around the curve and made a U-turn, then came to a stop on the right-hand side of the road by the ravine below!



The driver switched off the car's lights but left the engine idling, the low rumble of its exhaust keeping time with the powerful-sounding engine he guessed was a 350-horse, 5.7 liter V-8 under the hood. But this was not good: his Target's Contact wasn't supposed to arrive *first* on the scene. This reversal of the expected sequence of events could possibly complicate matters such that it might now be impossible to eliminate his Target without involving this potential witness to murder! *Aborting now could be disastrous*, he thought cautiously. *Just hafta wait 'n see how things develop...*

SANDMAN's eyes dilated widely and his nostrils flared, as the faint residual odor of burnt Hercules gunpowder rose up to meet them from the rifle's firing chamber! He switched on the infrared scope and squinted at the glowing, green figure of the driver...a woman in her thirties with long, dark hair and extremely attractive features. *Beauty and the Geek, huh?* He also made a mental note of the license plate number...



Seconds later the familiar white Crown Victoria came barreling out of the opening in the

fence nearby, drifted around the curve, and scrunched to a stop parallel with the 'Vette! The man at the wheel left its engine running as the two people began an animated discussion in tones so low he couldn't hear it through the open windows of the two cars. SANDMAN cursed the Mark under his breath for parking the Crown Vic at an angle that blocked a clear shot of his head! And now he appeared to be getting frantic about something, turning 'round frequently and flapping his scrawny arms in the direction of the hills through which he'd passed!

The little man reached out an arm fast, and handed the woman a small package. She examined it briefly and nodded her approval, but then seemed to become argumentative about something. That hand-off was all it took to compromise the entire assignment...

No choice now... It'll sure be a waste to smoke 'er, but I can't leave any witnesses - hafta take 'em both out! Two quick pops oughtta do it. He released the PSG-1's safety... Then all HELL broke loose!

The Crown Vic's engine began revving up, and the 'Vette growled back to life! Engine roaring and rear wheels spinning, the 'Vette kicked-up a cloud of sand and gravel and sped-off with lights ablaze in the direction of the highway!

"DAMMIT!" SANDMAN hissed vehemently as the dust-cloud rose up! Given another split-second he could have squeezed off a round at her, and now she was out of sight! He let her go, fully intending to catch up with her as soon as he dotted *this* Targets' eye. With his sleeve he hurriedly wiped-away the stinging trickles of sweat running into his eyes and again squinted into the infrared scope, feeling as he always did the adrenaline kick in the seconds just before a kill. *Look up, dammya...LOOK UP...* his thoughts commanded while he held his breath, ready to drill a hole through the man's left eye socket! *Now hold it right there, you sonuva...*

But in a heartbeat the Crown Vic spun 'round in a tight U-turn and fishtailed wildly away, careening more than a hundred feet in the darkness before its lights came on!

Then suddenly, into SANDMAN's eyes stabbed the blinding dagger of blue-white light flashing down through the torn curtain of dark blue sky!



He blinked several times in rapid succession. And as his vision cleared, without a sound a second beam and then a third appeared! Then three indistinct forms joined-up in a Delta

formation, the blue-white beams under their bellies scanning the terrain below them. There was no question they were heading in his direction, and he estimated their range to be roughly half a mile and closing-in on him fast!

SANDMAN sprang to his feet! He grabbed the two weapon bags, zippered the face veil and pistol pouch into the rifle tote, and scrambled down the side of the steep dune to the Ducati! There, he threw-off and stored the 'cycle's cover of camo-netting, and spent precious seconds securing the rifle bag alongside the seat with a bungee cord. Quickly, he donned his black Nolan N100 racing helmet and a light windbreaker, then straddled the big Supersport, thankful that it roared to life instantly with a single push of its electric starter button!

He flipped-down his face-shield and tore-off in pursuit of the two vehicles, thinking all the while, *As if things weren't goin' bad enough with the acquisition of a second Target, aerial phenomena I can't identify are chasin' us all now! The only way to salvage this thing's to move out fast, and try to get a crack at both of 'em between here and 'Vegas. And whatever those things up there are, I just hope they don't get to me first...*



With a quick glance over his left shoulder SANDMAN saw the trio pause and hover motionless in the sky over the hastily vacated dune and then descend. Taking advantage of this brief opportunity, he urged the big Ducati onward a little faster!

But now the dust in the air was becoming thicker, which meant the Crown Vic couldn't be too far ahead! In seconds, the first red traces of its taillights glimmered faintly through the choking dust-cloud, but his relief was short-lived: one of the aerial crafts rose-up from the formation, and flying lower now, swept its beam side-to-side over the roadbed as it again headed toward them! SANDMAN figured it might be pointless to try and hide from the things - even if he cut the 'cycle's lights, he might still remain visible if they were equipped with advanced technologies!

What the Hell ELSE can go wrong?! He wondered, hoping the things wouldn't come swooping down and vaporize him! An extra sense of urgency shot through him, and he cranked the Supersport's throttle wide-open - an exceedingly dangerous thing to do in the treacherous sand and gravel! But the road ahead was straight as an arrow from here to the highway, and he might be able to handle it... There was no other choice!

In another quarter-mile the white sedan came clearly into SANDMAN's view. It slowed down enough to make the right-angle turn onto Highway 375 toward 'Vegas, but still nearly fishtailed out of control! He looked left, then right, but saw no sign of the 'Vette. *Doesn't matter, I've gotta concentrate on catchin'-up to my primary Target in the Crown Vic...*

A mile farther down the highway SANDMAN noticed something else very odd: for some reason, the crafts were slowing the pace of their pursuit...

They coulda caught-up to me easily by now, but why haven't they? Couldn't have just lost interest...must be somethin' else. Whatever, I don't give a rat's furry ass as long as they stay busy back there!

He raced after the white sedan for several more tense moments. And as they entered the hills, canyons, and switchbacks of the Pahrangat Valley, the little man at the wheel of the Crown Vic set a furious pace, driving faster and faster despite the ever-increasing danger of losing control 'round a sharp curve! But SANDMAN increased his speed too, leaning hard into the tight curves at Hancock Summit, the highest elevation on the roadway in these badlands! The big Ducati wailed angrily along under his fierce acceleration and quickly closed the gap between them to seventy-five yards...fifty...then twenty... NOW!



SANDMAN down-gear'd the Supersport and again twisted its throttle wide-open! And with a tremendous howl, its front wheel rose-up from the pavement as it leaped forward, coming alongside the sedan on the left as if to pass! He drew the big Desert Eagle Magnum with his right hand and pointed it squarely into his Target's frantic and distorted little face, fully intent on unleashing with one squeeze of its trigger a ferocious blast of thunder, lightning, and lead!

The little computer man quickly glanced left, only to see the gaping maw of the firearm pointing directly at his left eye! Both his eyes bulged with stark terror, and his mouth opened-wide in a silent scream as instinctively, he stamped the brakes and wrenched the steering wheel over hard to the right! Instantly, the white sedan vanished from SANDMAN's view. And then came the screaming of tortured tires, and a horrific scrunch of steel and glass and splintering timber...



In frustration SANDMAN backed-off the 'cycle's throttle, and its front-end plunged back down onto the pavement. He let it decelerate on its own around the rest of the curve, then broke-right onto the highway's narrow shoulder and holstered the pistol. And then, PAWHOOMPFISH! SANDMAN looked quickly back over his shoulder...

A few hundred feet behind, a jet of steam belched high into the air from the Crown Victoria's crushed radiator, and a puddle of dark liquid began to spread out below the car's mangled remains! He whipped the 'cycle around hard and quickly covered the distance back to the wreckage at the side of the highway...



The sedan had smashed into the first solid pylon of the two-hundred-foot steel and wooden guardrail dead center, and plowed through a half-dozen more before finally coming to rest. Flames were already licking up the sides of the car. And the last vestiges of life were oozing from the horrible, glistening pulp trapped inside, roasting to a crisp!

Then above and only seconds away now - their light-beams blazing again - the trio in the sky reappeared...probing, searching...

Mad as Hell that *twice* he'd been cheated out of the split-second he needed to squeeze the trigger - *and consequently, his usual moment of glory* - SANDMAN got moving fast, pushing the Ducati through the canyon at nearly full throttle! In his rear-view mirrors he caught sight of the yellow-orange fireball of exploding gasoline leaked from the vehicle's ruptured fuel tank, and the heavy cloud of black smoke already mushrooming above it. And while abruptly the pursuing trio in the night sky froze and then hovered over the inferno, he concentrated on putting as much distance as he could between himself and them!



Once outside the badlands he continued to run the big 904 c.c. V-twin Supersport hard...135 mph...140...145...quickly establishing a cushion of about ten miles as he shot through Ash Springs, Crystal Spring, and then Alamo. And as he raced southbound on I-93 toward Las Vegas, the first few drops of rain began to spatter against his visor and streak off. He was thankful now for that rain, it cooled the air and cleared his thoughts...

Peering back, he still saw no sign of the unidentifiable objects in the sky. But neither in the distance ahead was there any sign of the Corvette. The latter seemed worrisome until he began to silently rationalize, *Maybe it's reachin', but the woman's escape could be entirely inconsequential to the outcome of this assignment. If anything ever comes of it, I've got 'er plate number and can take care of her later, on my own. But for now, I think it's healthier for me to keep quiet about this little glitch - just collect my cash and bonus for the extra trouble, and then lay low. And if I smell even a hint of anything out-of-the ordinary, I imagine Rio looks pretty good this time of year...*

SANDMAN continued to urge the big Ducati toward the distant glow above Las Vegas on the horizon. The fresh rain was evaporating quickly on the still-warm pavement, so it was not yet slick. But as a precaution, he reduced his speed anyway to a comfortable 70 mph, reminding himself that while he might have a few problems right then, should he invite a fistful of tickets from some rabid State Trooper for speeding or reckless driving, he'd be searched and likely arrested. And then he'd have *trouble*, too!

All things considered, he was greatly relieved that the main operational aspect of this assignment had finally ended. And though disappointed that the method to eliminate his Target was radically different from the usual this time - his signature head-shot, through the left eye - he recognized that the outcome was, nonetheless, the same.

As the danger began to subside, an expression of exhilaration slowly came over the taciturn face inside the black helmet. And then seeing things in a different light, he even allowed himself a rare grin...

Maybe I coulda saved myself a whole lotta sweat tonight if I'd only known one look at me'd scare the geek to death!

SANDMAN's grin broadened nearly ear-to-ear! He could almost see the Front Page Headline on the Las Vegas Review-Journal's Morning Edition: "ACCIDENT ON 375 NEAR RACHEL CLAIMS ONE."

Some 'accident'! This Hit was beautiful...a real 'Work of Art'!



SANDMAN had been closer to the truth than he'd thought... It actually had been a night just about like this one under desert stars the first week in July, 1947, when the first disc crashed in the sands near Roswell, New Mexico. And though the odds against it were almost inconceivable, the culmination of these two bizarre and seemingly unrelated occurrences - separated by more than half a century and roughly a thousand miles - had just upset some of the most secret and carefully orchestrated conspiracies of the governments of the world. And, more specifically, of the silent conspirators behind the scenes who wield absolute control over them.

