

San Francisco Peaks, Flagstaff, AZ



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## EPILOGUE

*December, 1994*

Upon his return home, Downs collapses into bed and goes comatose for three days. He knows something is seriously wrong with his health because he does not feel like having a single martini for that entire period of time.

Eventually, the virus is overcome and allows him physical movement (At least it wasn't a fatal hemorrhagic virus such as Hanta or Ebola (what a fascinating blitzkrieg strategy for an organism). He recalls having heard secondhand stories about those who return from overseas, collapse into bed, and die.

The accumulated stack of mail is horrendous, as it contains requests for funding to assist poor Native American children, the homeless, the starving in Africa, global overpopulation, handgun control, intolerance, bigotry, racism, terrorism, political reform. It is overwhelming. It is also depressing to read that

there is no money in the world's richest nation to get the offensive spectre of abject poverty off the streets of the nation's cities because federal funds are being diverted to the suburbs of the more well to do.

He takes his cat for a walk in the woods, or at least allows her to lead him to her ancient fallen Ponderosa pine that she enjoys playing on. He sits under a tree appreciating the view of the San Francisco Peaks and contemplates upcoming projects in East and North Africa, Greenland, Pakistan, and continued work in China; the papers to complete, and the data that still requires processing and retrieving in his lab. These projects will occur in due time, there is no need to rush them. The cat climbs into his lap, curls up, and falls asleep.

For the moment, everything is just fine.

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## POSTSCRIPT

*March, 1995*

After his return from East Africa several months later, Downs is driving into work through the Coconino National Forest at 5:00 am, still half asleep and on "autopilot." His sixth sense suddenly startles him with warning lights in his brain flashing "Danger! Danger! Watch for deer!"

He shakes his head awake and scans the scene in perplexity to see nothing. He continues driving for a couple of miles further when the premonitions occur again, only more intensely this time. He slows down to 50 regardless of still seeing nothing in the vicinity, and rounds the next curve to suddenly notice two elk on his left, then two on his right, then a bull in full rack jumps out of the forest right in front of him frozen in the beams of the headlights. Two seconds to impact.

This creature is so fucking big it is looking down on him through the windshield of his not so small full sized truck. To hit this 700 lb. wall of muscle and sinew heading 50 mph at his windshield would be certain death. He slams the brakes putting four flat spots on the tires, and the truck goes into a four-wheel drift aligning it obliquely to the

monstrosity. No good, too much inertia and certain collision. Off brakes, turn the wheel slightly to the left, miss the bull by an inch, but now heading directly for a tree. A hard right to compensate nearly rolls the truck, which would have killed him a second time.

He continues into town now at 25 miles per hour no longer half asleep. If he were doing 60 instead of 50, he wouldn't have been able to thread the needle as he did. This is the third time in his life something has intervened to keep him from certain death, but this is the first time he has encountered a double-barreled scenario. That week there were three deaths on the Flagstaff highways attributed to encounters with elk and many more occurred for the continuing two months.

Something wants to keep him alive for the time being ... undoubtedly his creditors.



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