

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

HUSH HUSH

THE SLEEPERS SOURCEBOOK

24



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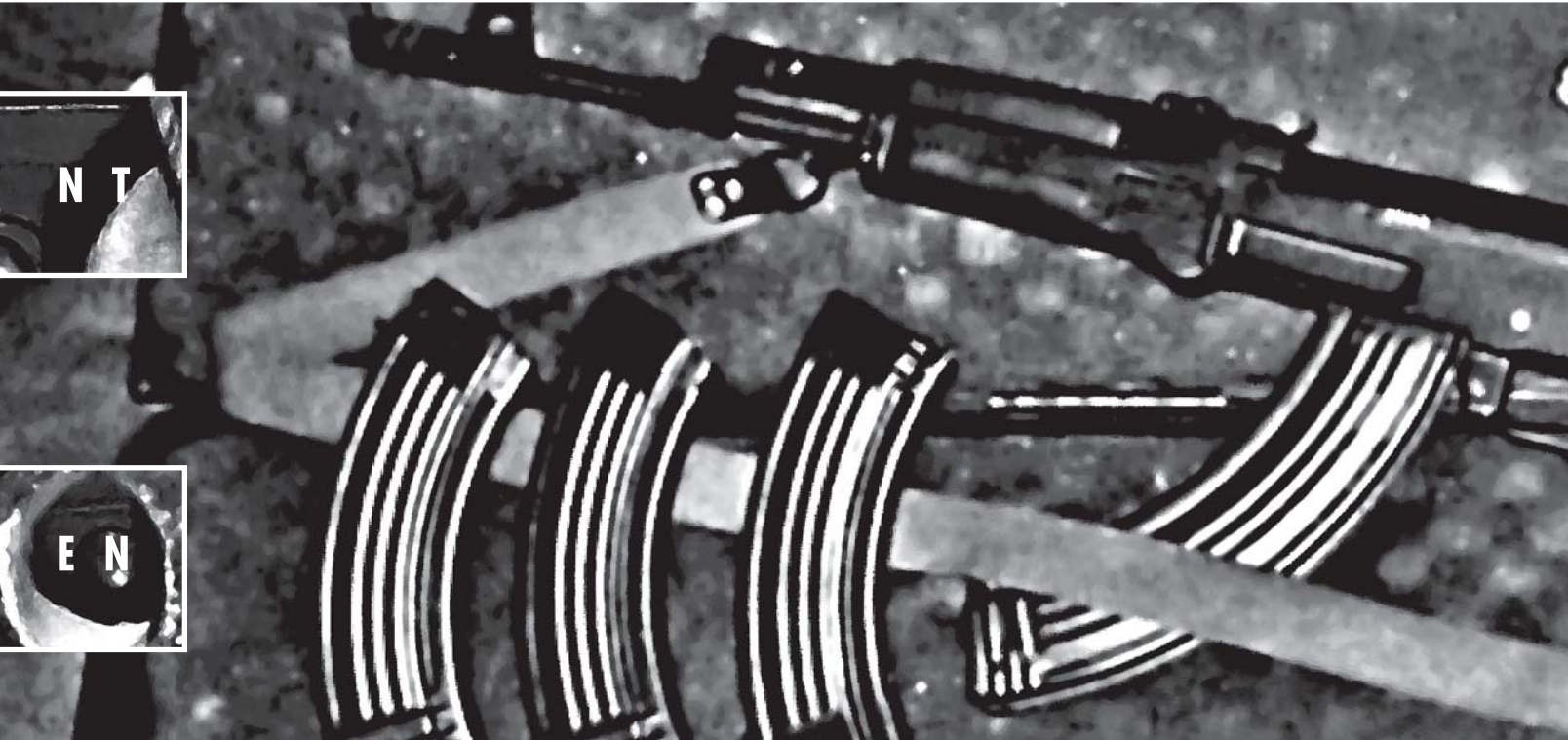
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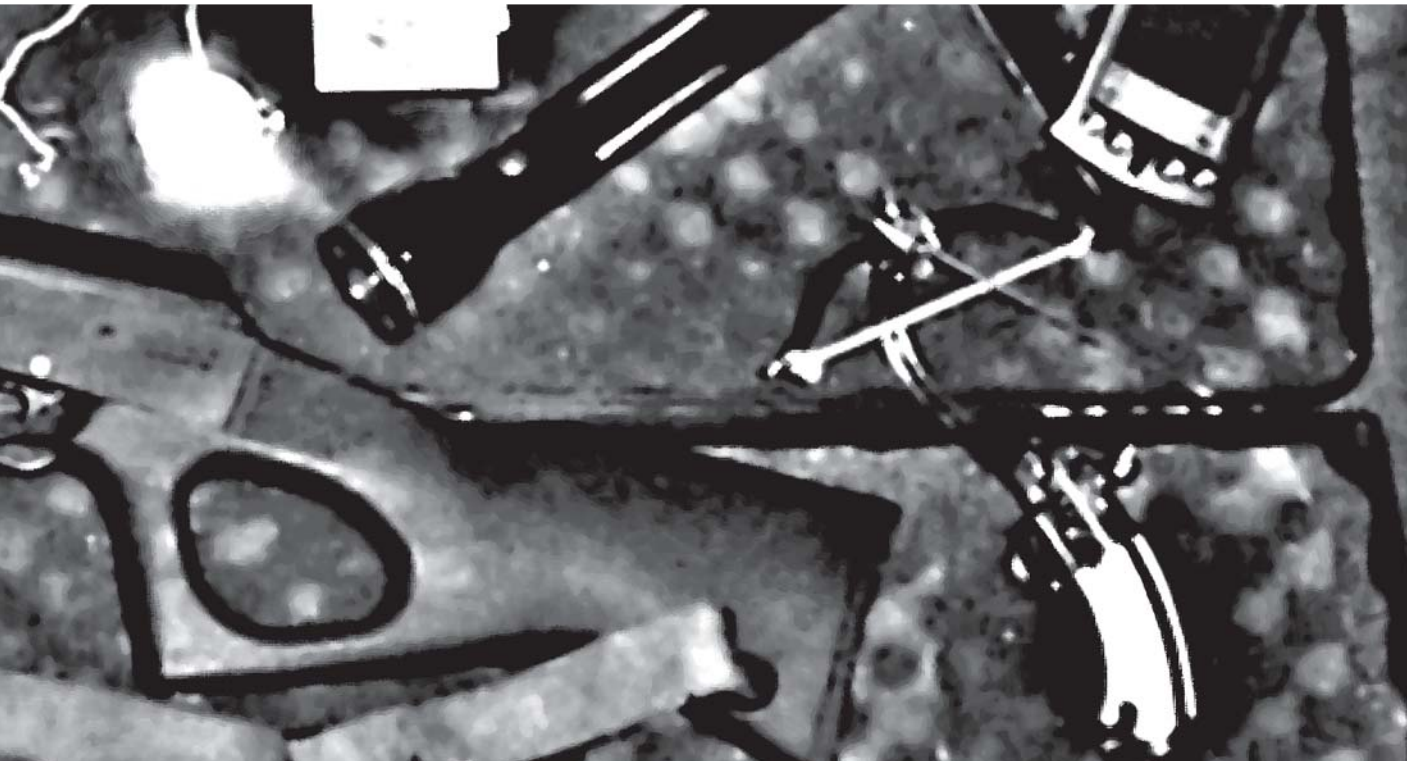
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THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

BY JOHN TYNES

THE HEDGE MAZE here at the Hamilton estate has two options but only one solution. The options are success or escape. The solution is to turn left at every intersection until you reach the center.

My jaws do not move when I speak out loud. This carcass I inhabit has few connections to the matter that contains my essence. Some tendons to tug, a skull to heft. My fur smells rank. The maids leave the room when I enter. Occasionally in summer I am infested by maggots.

I remember the first time I killed someone. I was in a different corpse then, that of a man. A criminal, I am told, hung upon the gallows. One of my first challenges was to make the head sit up straight lest I draw attention to my lord's work. He sent me out into the fields, through the woods, and across the river so that I might strangle a bishop in his nightgown. As I walked through the dark I clenched my fingers again and again, getting used to the sensation. When they found his throat there was no problem of operation. The fingers did as I commanded them, and soon the bishop ceased breathing and his tongue lolled from his mouth. In retrospect I would say that he looked like a dog. But at the time I did not know what a dog was.

I pad through the grass in springtime. Dew collects on my fur. I watch bees.

My lady Antoinette plays a game with me sometimes. She is blind. She tore out her eyes. Now she sees through mine. I go to the summer house at the center of the hedge maze and wait for her, staring at the final intersection. She wanders blind, navigating the maze by memory and touch. Finally, through my eyes, she sees herself reach the center and she smiles. She sits on a chair and I lie on the ground at her feet. Sometimes she reads a book that I lay between my paws. Sometimes she just listens while I recite a book I have read. Occasionally she asks me questions.

"Lucifuge?"

"Yes, my lady."

"What is the greatest marvel you have seen?"

"In 1648, Roger Hamilton commissioned an artisan from Poland to make a clockwork dragon for his daughter. It was the size of a horse and breathed fire on command, though it could not fly."

"Did you ever inhabit it?"

"I did."

"What happened to it?"

"In 1663 Roger Hamilton lost his wife and his mind. He bade me enter the dragon and destroy him with flames, and so I did. His daughter had the dragon dismantled. It appeared to upset her."

"I see."

Winter comes a caution. The carcass of the mastiff can stiffen in the cold, and so I must be careful. I stay indoors and lie by the fire, though I am told the stink is then worse.

Last month there was an intruder. He crept onto the estate by night. I saw him slinking across the grounds. I moved to intercept him. When he saw me approaching, he took a raw steak from his bag and threw it before me.

"Good dog," he said, smiling in a way that I believe signaled malicious intent. I am not the best judge of human emotions and facial expressions, but I have learned a few things in my time.

The steak had no interest for me. I made to sniff it, then looked up at the man. Somewhere within my mind, my lady Antoinette told me to kill him.

When an intruder must be dispatched, I find it helpful to chase him into the hedge maze so that we may transact our business in private, safely screened from the eyes of all but my lady Antoinette. Looking up at him, I saw that he appeared to be still eagerly thinking of the steak and the notion that I would eat it. Perhaps it was poisoned.

"Run," I said. "Run fast or I will catch you and kill you." Of course, I would kill him regardless. But intruders need incentive to employ the discretion of the hedge maze.

The man looked around sharply, trying to place the voice.

"Here, you fool," I said. "Now run."

The intruder stared at me, his mouth opening slowly.

I moved one of my forepaws forward and

growled. “Run.” Finally, he did. The look of panic on his face—it made my lady Antoinette laugh.

As the man ran, I followed. I chased him to and fro, guiding him ever towards the hedge maze. The night was cloudy and I do not believe he realized quite where he was going until he was well within the maze. For the better part of ten minutes I hunted him there. I know all the turns and twists, and even the secret ways. My lady Antoinette’s excitement was bright inside me, a hunger deep. Somewhere in the manor she was sitting up in bed, her empty eye sockets gazing on nothing. And at the same time she was with me, racing after our prey, playing a different sort of game.

Finally I drove him into the center of the maze, where the summer house sits. He ran wildly up the steps and banged furiously on the door, pleading and screaming for someone to save him. I walked up behind him slowly.

“There is no one in that house,” I said. “And you have not run fast enough to escape me. I have caught you.”

He started to say something then, but my lady Antoinette shot a bright spark of fury through my flesh. I leapt upon him and brought him down, then tore at his throat until he bled freely and could not breathe.

I killed the bishop five and a half centuries ago. Across my years I have slain four hundred and eighty-three men, including this one. The throat of a man is a tender place, ripe for the exposure of fluid and wind. Again and again, the kill is at the throat.

The following afternoon there is a meeting of the Cabinet. I am in attendance as always. I have been to every meeting since 1956 and I remember them all perfectly. Of course, my lady Antoinette watches the proceedings through my eyes from her bedroom. I know this annoys her brother Charles, but it is an argument he has never won.

I listen to their discussions and commit them to memory, but I do not pay attention. I have not been told to pay attention.

Instead I stare at a crack in the wall. Ants issue from it and meander to and fro. I stare at them because they are intruders, and therefore deserving of

notice, but I have sufficient judgement to know they are not a threat. Nevertheless I stare at the ants for the next two hours. Human voices drone on nearby, within my perception but beyond my concentration.

Finally—“Lucifuge?” It is Gerlinde who addresses me. I look away from the ants and stare at her instead. She is seated in an armchair. Around her are Charles, Wu, and Joao.

“Yes?”

“The matter we are discussing—we are at an impasse. What is your opinion?”

A moment ago I had none. Now I sift through my memories, nearly six centuries of violence and magick and secrets, ever glimpsed through these dead eyes. Something forms that could be called an opinion. Finally I speak.

“In my experience, fleshworkers are the most unstable and vicious of adepts. You have little to gain by trusting this one, and the mere fact that he is conversing with you means he knows too much. Kill him immediately.”

Gerlinde smiles and nods. I see Charles frown, and then I hear the laughter of my lady Antoinette across the aether that both divides us and joins us.

I know enough to understand that it is an odd thing for a creature such as I to have these arbitrary powers of life and death. Seventy-six of the men I have killed did not die beneath my slashing jaws. They died because someone asked me a question, and I gave an answer.

One day my lady Antoinette will die. Perhaps it will fall to me to kill her. Perhaps it will be a simple accident. Another lord or lady shall command me, shall order this mass of flesh and bone and fur to take form and thought, shall send me into the night to savage our foes.

It matters not to me. I do as I am told. Killing and living, death and life, all are as one. My existence is a serial of carrion that contains and defines me.

I am Lucifuge, the Hanged Man.

I am Lucifuge, the Empty Child.

I am Lucifuge, the Brass Dragon.

I am Lucifuge, the Black Dog.

I am at your service, master.

Now and forever.

Amen.

