

The Watchman

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The night was cold, dark, and eerie. A light drizzle of rain fell upon the unflinching earth. The guard resented the fact that he had to be here on such a dismal eve. Maybe tonight he would see what he had been fearing for so long, maybe tonight he would come to realize the meaning behind the countless number of nightmares he had been experiencing. Joe felt a deadly certainty that it all was about to come out into the open.

It all started about a year ago when a man named Harry Jackson broke into the Zyton Technologies Corporation. Jackson had the computer identification cards needed to access his passage into the high-security areas of the plant. How he was able to attempt this much was quite a mystery to Joe, but even more amazing was how Jackson actually got away with his crime.

Joe had been working the monitor room on the eve of the Jackson break-in. He observed a gentleman drive up to the outer gates, expose his pass to the posted sentry, and drive on to the employee parking lot. It was very late for anyone to come to the plant at this hour and this made Joe even more suspicious that something might be wrong. In any case, the man later known as Harry Jackson had the appropriate card for each security gate he entered in the building, and not one warning alarm went off as Joe watched the man pass through every checkpoint with ease.

Jackson had been a weapons engineer with Zyton for three

years until he was laid off due to corporation cutbacks. His position was just another unneeded burden on the company's payroll. Because of his quick action to his termination notice, things went very smoothly for Jackson. He went through the gates while his identification cards were still active, therefore it was no big thing when Joe saw Jackson open the door leading to the high-security weapons design and files room.

Jackson went to a computer and began a sequence that would print out plans for the ZyCat-3000, a high-tech handgun that was being designed for military special forces agents. The ZyCat was extremely lightweight and highly effective in terms of accuracy. It could operate with an eighteen round magazine, or an ammunition belt could be worn around the soldier's waist.

The ZyCat-3000 used a bullet similar to a .22 caliber, but the penetration was totally high projectile -- when it hit an object it would virtually expand and destroy any material type as it impacted. Optimal accuracy was contributed to an infrared targeting device which helped to guide the bullet toward a human target. The type of chamber that the weapon had silenced any noise that might occur when the gun was fired. Though Jackson had no part in the ZyCat's initial design, he did contribute greatly to the innovation of its specialized bullet. With this in mind, one could contemplate that he wanted to take a part of his work with him before he was relieved of his duties as a weapons specialist.

On the night that Jackson was in the lab, he accessed the complete ZyCat-3000 Development File and copied the data onto a

computer disk. Highly detailed blueprints of the firearm were printed by the picture-perfect laser printer located in the design room. After this was completed, he logged out of the computer system and left the room exactly as he had found it. This process took about two hours.

Joe had taken a break at 3:30 a.m. on the morning of the Jackson incident to get a drink from the coffee machine down the hall. Since no alarms had gone off, the man whom he had seen enter the building at 1:20 was completely gone from his mind. As he turned the corner leading to the coffee machine, Joe ran directly into the man he later found out was Harry Jackson.

The man gasped and jumped back in surprise, spilling the paperwork he had been carrying all over the tiled floor which looked cold in the dark light of the overhead fluorescent. "I'm sorry," Joe said, also startled. He knelt down to assist the gentleman and started, "Let me help you with that."

"I can get it myself," the man replied sharply. The man was of moderate build, red hair, and a look in his eyes which shined with historical brilliance, though Joe thought he saw an expression of anger and hidden secrets as well.

As the man pulled himself up, he said, "Sorry for being so snappy." He took a good look at Joe and continued, "It sure is a bitch to have to come in for some unfinished work at such a shitty time in the morning."

"I know how that is," Joe replied. But at the same time, Joe felt that the man was avoiding conversation instead of making it. With

that Joe stated, "Well, I better let you get back to work, I'm on my break."

"I'm on my way out," the stranger replied. "Have a good evening," he paused and grinned, "or morning depending on how you look at it."

The rest of that night passed uneventfully at the Zyton Plant, but Joe kept remembering that look in the stranger's eyes.

The crime had been accomplished so neatly that it was only recently that questions had aroused. Internal intelligence agents with the Zyton Corporation were trying to analyze reports of a weapon which had been used in a select number of overseas crimes. The device appeared to have similar qualities as the ZyCat-3000. If the federal government could somehow tie in a connection with this company, they would be in real trouble and they knew it. Especially since the ZyCat-3000 was still under contract and in trial stage with the government.

On this notion, intelligence agents Chuck Sansworth and Lenny Wilson began an unofficial investigation of the company's computer records and employee files to see if anyone who was involved with the ZyCat project had made any unapproved removals or entries from the large database which stored the highly confidential military information. Hours and days were spent searching entries and it almost seemed that their task would come up empty-handed.

Every employee that had been at the plant during the life of the ZyCat project had been questioned. Of course, the questioners did

not expose anything that would endanger their project even more, they were just trying to find out something – anything that would help them out in their case.

It was when they were talking to Joe, the security guard, that something clicked in their case. They had been on a line of questions that said, "Do you think employees at Zyton are being treated fairly? Why or why not? And, Do you feel that the employees that you see come and go at normal times? . . ."

"Well, you know," Joe started, "I am always working at night and I hardly see anyone, except a few of the other guards on duty." Though it had been a long time ago, something made him recall the stranger incident, "Heck, you all should be questioning those diehard weapon's specialists that you have working for you at two o'clock in the morning."

"What!" Investigator Sansworth exclaimed. It was obvious that his number had been called. The look on his face was that anticipation that, just maybe, he might have found a very valuable lead in his case.

Joe noticed a similar expression on the face of the other as well. He also knew that he might be getting into a long, bloody line of interrogation if he didn't cover his tracks early on. "Hey, it was only one time."

"Mr. Lancer, none of our specialists work at that hour of the morning. Please tell us more."

Joe thought back for a moment. The entire incident was so very long ago and his encounter was very brief. Joe had a tough time

actually remembering all of the details. He started, "About a year ago, I saw a guy come into the complex. I was working monitors in the security room and I watched the man go through all of the coded areas of the plant. Now keep in mind that not one alarm went off; the man had all of the appropriate computer clearance passes to access the areas he was in." He paused and then added, "If one sensor warning went off, I assure you that I would have arrested him personally."

"Did you get a good look at this gentleman?" Wilson asked.

"Well," Joe had almost forgotten that he nearly ran the guy over in the hallway. "You know, I did see the man as he was leaving. I think he had red hair, but don't quote me, hell it's been about a year ago." As if to finish, Joe added, "The man said he had to do some extra work and that was about it."

"Are you sure that was that all?"

"Yes."

"You may go now Mr. Lancer."

Joe got up and left, wondering what all of this was about. He didn't ask questions, that was for the others to do. He just left, thinking about the nights to come.

As that particular day of the investigation continued, a man from the research department named Ray Halzabolt quickly caught on to what the questions were aiming at. He asked if there was a national defense problem at stake and neither Sansworth or Wilson would comment.

The problem was not necessarily in the theft itself, but rather in the events which took place after the questioning began. Sure enough, Chuck Sansworth saw the out-of-place time on the computer chart. The chart read:

10/11 Associate 00631--Jackson, Harry J.--Login: 01:22:03 Logout:
03:20:46

Now it was just a matter of putting the pieces of the puzzle together and building a case against Jackson – if, of course, Harry Jackson was the man that they were looking for.

Ray Halzabolt was trying to make a quick buck and went straight to the media before the company even mentioned their case to the district attorney. Ray stirred up the shit all right. Two evenings later, a tabloid news broadcast headlined "Zyton Fears A Leak In Top Secret Government Project." Though the report was very vague it went on to mention the names of the investigators and the type of weapon involved.

The evening after the first news broadcast, Chuck Sansworth was found dead in his Oakdale apartment. He was apparently shot in the back of the head while eating his supper. It appeared to be a shot, but the police experts couldn't tell for sure. His head had virtually exploded on his shoulders.

Chuck was a bachelor; Lenny, on the other hand, was a family man. He had a wife and one son. As a household rule, the wife would always be the first one up. She would go to the kitchen and

begin breakfast for her husband and child. She had just started frying some bacon when the telephone rang.

"Hello," she answered.

"Yes, is Lenny home?" the voice asked.

"Sure." She hesitated a moment and added, "May I ask who's calling."

"Just tell him his buddy from Zyton."

In a few seconds Lenny was on the phone. He did not recognize the voice. "Who is this?" he asked.

"Mr. Wilson, who I am does not concern you," the voice said in a deep and somewhat scary tone. "What does is the bogus investigation you are conducting."

"Mister, what are you talking about?"

"You know damn well what I am talking about and if you don't listen closely you'll end up like your friend Chucky."

At this point Lenny was getting a little worried. He had to ask, "What happened to Investigator Sansworth?"

"Let's just say he bought a ticket to the promised land. Now, what I am calling you about is very simple: just drop your investigation about the ZyCat and you will live. If you mention anything, and I mean anything at all, of this to your family, friends, the media, or the police, I swear to you I will kill you and your family." With that the phone went dead and Lenny just stood there holding the extention, unsure of what to do next.

Joe stood on his post, trembling in the cold night air. He had

never felt so alone. He began reminiscing of a time when he did not have this worry, this constant threat of a violent death. He remembered when he first started having the nightmares. It was when he discovered the dismembered body of Lenny Wilson in the biochemical cooling chamber in the basement of the plant.

Joe had gone to investigate an alarm which had gone off in the basement and when he got there, he found a note attached to the door leading into the biochemical lab. The note instructed the finder to check the cooling tank. Maybe it was the dark lighting, or maybe it was the hour, but when Joe pulled open the tank, he nearly screamed.

It appeared to be a pool of dark crimson with a hand sticking out of the murk. As if clockwork, a decapitated head rolled out of the water and "looked" up at Joe. Of course, Joe leaped back in a wave of terror and surprise and ran for the door. Whoever had been there had committed the act only minutes before Joe arrived and could still be waiting for another victim. Luckily, Joe was still alive when the police arrived twenty minutes later.

As Joe thought about the whole incident, it gave him chills. It wasn't just that, it was all of the killings that he uncovered afterward. No matter how many police were there, no matter how many people had been at the plant the day before, it was always Joe who discovered the grim mutilations.

A week and a half ago Joe uncovered a ghastly trunk of a body lying on the Zyton Administrator's desk. To this day, police have yet to identify who the victim actually was, or of course, who did it.

Now, Joe seemed to be more of the prime suspect than the infamous "Harry Jackson," whom the police questioned endlessly and came up blank. Though Joe knew that the investigators had something on him, it seemed as though their casework just *vanished* overnight. Since the police were initially uninformed about the ZyCat situation, they did not know the depth at which Jackson was involved and since it was Joe that was uncovering all of the bodies, the guard looked very suspicious indeed.

Though Joe needed the money, he felt that he would truly quit this gruesome job if it wasn't for the fact that if he did, he would definitely look as guilty as sin. As Joe looked out into the darkness, he could see the faint headlights of a car approaching in the distance.

He thought about sleep. He had never felt so drained. Joe would work throughout the night and sleep during the day. Lately though, his resting conscience had been plagued with nightmares unnaturally brought about by what had been going on. Every dream was the same. Joe would be walking aimlessly down the halls of the Zyton Technologies Plant. Its passageways were dark, wet, and weed-infested, giving off a crypt-like appearance. From the ceiling, there was always a constant dripping, not of water but of blood. Joe would try to run, but always he would slip on the blood-covered tiles and fall. As he landed on the filthy floor of the dream world he would turn to find that same head of Lenny Wilson looking up from within the wet surface of the floor and as always, Joe would wake up screaming from terror.

The car had finally made its way up to the front gate at which

Joe was posted. Through the dark and the rain it was hard to make out the features of the man as he rolled down his window to talk to Joe.

"Bad night isn't it?" the stranger said.

"Sure is. May I help you?"

"Yeah, is this the place where all of the killings are going on?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, my name is Harold Johnson and I am a reporter for *The Times*. I would like to know if I could take a look around and ask you a few questions if I could."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson – "

"Just call me Harry," the man interrupted.

"I'm sorry 'Harry' but I don't know anything that could really help you and besides, you will need to come back during the day if you wish to tour the plant."

"You're missing the point," the stranger insisted. "The killings have all occurred during the night. Just look at it this way: if I could get a scoop about the situation that the murderer worked with, I would have an edge on all of the other reporters."

"You would also have me out of a job," Joe said. He was becoming a little bit annoyed at the persistence of Mr. Johnson.

"Well, I would make sure that you were not incriminated, but I see your point." The stranger let out a sigh. "Would it be all right if I just turned around in your lot?"

Before Joe could stop him, the man drove up toward the main part of the building. Heedless of Joe's wishes, the man jumped out of

his car and ran in through the front door.

Joe picked up walkie-talkie and alerted the front desk. "Terry, this is Joe."

"Go ahead."

"There is some guy coming in your way. He claims to be a reporter, but don't trust him. If you can handle him great. If not call the police."

"It's all under control Joe," Terry said; "don't worry."

The stranger walked up to the front desk and announced himself. He pulled out a wicked-looking handgun and shot Terry right in the throat. Not a sound was heard.

The stranger walked behind the desk and destroyed the telephone switch box which connected all inner-office lines with those outside. He then headed across the lobby to a closed door which said,

Security Room -- Authorized Personnel Only

Fifteen minutes went by before Joe called Terry again. When he didn't get an answer, he announced a code-red unauthorized entry in the building with his walkie-talkie. Two watchmen responded that they were headed for the front lobby and three others were going to the high-security areas.

Joe tried to contact Sam Harrison, the guard on duty in the security room. When no response came on his walkie-talkie he picked up the phone and tried his extension; the phone was dead.

Joe stood for a silent moment starring at the receiver and wondered what to do next.

Jack Seeley, one of the watchmen that when to the front lobby called back to Joe, "Terry's been shot. Shit, man, Sammy's been shot too! Joe, get some police out here now!"

"The phone line's dead!" Joe answered back. "We have got to find this bastard before he finds us! Jack, sound an alarm!"

"I can't," Jack screamed back, "the entire security room's shot to hell! Joe, it's literally shot to hell!"

"I'm on my way in," Joe said.

As Joe stepped out of the guard booth and into the rain he almost left the grounds and its madness behind, but instead he walked slowly across the parking lot and toward the Zyton Plant.

Joe stood by the man's car for a moment and wrote his license number down. He was not sure if it would do any good, but he thought it couldn't hurt. Joe really didn't want to rush into the plant, for he was just security and the company did not pay him enough to risk his life for. He was still moping toward the front entrance when he heard a shrill scream coming from the front lobby.

As he ran in he saw Willie Dannis, the other security guard that had been with Jack Seeley, convulsing in a state of shock down upon the floor. His chest was completely gone and he was very near the point of death when Joe arrived.

"Help me..." Willie gasped, blood running from his mouth. "Jack's gone ... after him..." With that, the security guard died.

All of the sudden Joe felt extremely nauseated; in fact he almost threw up. This whole situation was much more than a normal person could take. This shit just wasn't real, it couldn't be happening. But it was and that was what made Joe run from the middle of the lobby where he would be a very easy target.

As Joe ran, Jack called back on the walkie-talkie. Joe nearly screamed when he heard the initial static coming from the instrument on his belt. "Attention, all units: I think the son-of-a-bitch is headed for the weapon's files room in the basement."

"I'm on my way," Joe replied with regret. He pushed through a door and headed down the fire escape. Joe felt that the stairs would be the best choice since this madman could cut the power on them at any time.

Even as Joe approached the basement floor, he still had quite a distance to go. The weapons files room was located on the far west wing of the plant, and the lobby where Joe was coming from was in the east. Joe secretly hoped that Jack and the other guards would have the situation under control when he arrived there, but he knew that would not be the case. The masque of death was upon them all and here was Joe trying to be a Prince Prospero -- moving from west to east, from blue to black, from normal to chaos.

As soon as Joe opened the fire-door, he heard shots coming from the hallway that sounded like World War III. He drew his .38 revolver and prepared for the worse.

Wesley Jonser, another security guard, caught up with Joe before he arrived at the location where the shots were coming from.

It was obvious that he was scared because he walked with a jumpy step and a sort of helpless expression was written across his face.

"Joe what the hell's going on down here?"

"Don't know."

"Man, he's killed Terry." He caught his breath and continued, "Joe, the two guys that were with me split as soon as they heard what had happened! They went to find a pay phone to call the police, but I can guarantee you that they won't be back."

"They were probably the smart ones," Joe said darkly. They were almost there. "It must be Jack doing all of the shooting down there. Sounds like Rambo."

"Believe me, that nut's firing back too."

"He has a silencer. No one heard the shot that killed Terry or the damage he did to the security room."

All of the sudden a shrill scream came from behind the doors where Wesley and Joe now stood. "You asshole. . .Shit, I'm out of ammo!"

As Joe pulled open the door he saw the room where the noises had been coming from. It looked as if a hurricane had just ripped through there. The walls were blown full of holes much too large to be made by some handgun. File cabinets were overturned and papers were scattered everywhere. Jack was lying on the floor, his shoulder severely wounded and his right leg blown off. Jack was a fighter, though, and he was still determined that this handful of guards still had a fighting chance against this person's high-tech weaponry.

A quick glance told them that the stranger had just left. "What

happened?" Joe asked, rushing to Jack's side.

"Man, don't worry about me – Get the son-of-a-bitch! Listen, he grabbed some files and is headed for the service elevator! Oh...," Jack moaned in pain.

"Listen," Joe said to Wesley, "stay with Jack, man he needs a doctor." He looked at the fallen guard "You hang in there now."

"Joe!" Jack screamed, "Watch yourself. That bastard's got one mean pistol!"

"You bet," Joe replied, but he still felt a dreadful uncertainty about running after this maniac. Joe took off for the service elevator.

They met in the west wing of the main floor. The assailant had taken the elevator and Joe had taken the stairs. Joe, of course, was somewhat winded when he caught up with him. Joe had actually caught him off guard, for he had his back turned when Joe saw him.

Because he was still a few yards away, Joe felt he could not sneak up on him any closer than what he already was. He pulled his revolver and steadily aimed it at his head. "Harry," Joe said in a commanding voice, "it's time for the interview."

The dark-haired figure did not turn around. He did not stick his hands in the air nor did he try to flee. He simply said, "Why didn't you leave. I gave you a chance."

"I couldn't let you come in here and kill everyone in cold blood."

"Aye," Harry said, "but you have before."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I must be frank with you. The name's Harry Jackson, not

Harold Johnson. Does that help you out any?"

"I...don't...know," Joe said slowly. For some odd reason he thought something was very wrong. Though his memory was vague, Joe did not think that the man he had encountered almost a year before was the same man that he was talking to now. Maybe it was his height or maybe it was his hair color, but of course he could not be sure because the man still had his back turned.

"I tell you what, why don't you let me walk on out of here and I won't breathe a word of this to anyone."

"Mister, you're not going anywhere. Just drop the gun and turn around nice and slow."

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Drop it!"

"Okay," Jackson spun around and let out a shot before Joe could react. The bullet struck the watchman in the stomach and then expanded. Joe had never felt a sensation of this nature before. A deep, rich pain encompassed his body and cried to be let out. He felt thousands of needles pierce his insides and project out through his skin.

Joe did not drop his gun though. He fired twice, hitting Jackson both times in the chest. Jackson fell but held on to his weapon. "Not a bad shot for a guard," he chaotically remarked.

The guard staggered over to Jackson and aimed the gun on him. Jackson grinned, "I'm not through yet!" He shot Joe again, this time in the chest.

Extreme shock was ripping like waves throughout Joe's entire

body. Before he fell he stuck the barrel of his .38 to the side of Jackson's head and pulled the trigger. "You are now," he said as the shot went off.

The night surrounded him now. Joe, the watchman, was alone. Soon the police would come. Soon the ambulances would arrive with sirens blaring. None of it seemed to matter now as Joe sank into the cold, dark, remoteness of the night.