

OUTPOST 77

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An ADVENT Story

Outpost 77

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PHOTON BOOKS



OUTPOST 77

The isolated desert landscape of New Mexico looked like another world as the sun set behind the rugged, mountainous horizon. Trent Porter gazed out at it through a window of the RV while eating his dinner. Before he could finish, the sound of the alert jolted him from his deep reflection.

Trent turned to see a flashing light on one of the computer screens of the work station on the opposite side of the RV. His three year old German shepherd Chase raised his head, lying nearby. Trent sat his fork down and went to take a closer look.

The advanced technology stationed to the top of the vehicle detected the presence of an elevated electromagnetic signal less than a mile away, scanning the region in every direction.

“Another one,” Trent confirmed, studying a series of numbers on the monitor before adjusting the instrumentation to get a

more precise reading.

The signal was solid.

Trent picked up the communicator and pressed the primary button.

“This is Outpost 77. I’m detecting a heightened reading,” he announced, transmitting back to the network headquarters in the Pacific northwest.

“We read you, 77,” a man responded. “Maintain observance.”

“Copy,” Trent said.

The thirty-two-year-old African-American man opened the door of the RV, descended the steps and walked out several feet onto the rocky ground. Chase followed him out as was his nature, remaining close to his master.

The warm desert temperatures from earlier had dropped in the evening hour as night rapidly approached.

Trent scanned the horizon in every direction, seeing only red rock and dirt for as far as his vision extended. He glanced up at the antennas and satellites stationed to the top of the RV, next to the solar panels.

Before going back inside the vehicle, Trent noticed a strange purple illumination in the darkening sky, bathing it in an unnatural hue. He retrieved a pair of binoculars and took a closer look.

Trent remained outside for several

minutes, basking in the rugged landscape that made him feel disconnected from all his problems and part of nature at the same time.

He had been stationed at the outpost for over three weeks. Other than seeing a series of mysterious lights in the night sky, he failed to see why the area was considered to be a hotbed of unexplained occurrences.

The outpost was only one of over a hundred regions throughout the world known to exhibit anomalous activity. Though spread out in various countries across the world, the mission was three-fold; collect atmospheric data, monitor the region and report back to headquarters at least three times a day.

Trent had been recruited to join the group by a longtime friend who had now become one of the leaders. In his three years of employment, Trent had become convinced that the work the group was doing was important. Even necessary.

He believed wholeheartedly in the overall mission. Ultimately, the clandestine organization committed themselves to liberating humanity from international deception and defeating evil believed to be lurking behind the scenes; dark, shadowy, non-human forces that had been on earth for thousands of years, deceiving mankind through the ages and attempting to destroy all that was good.

Trent wasn't the most religious person in the world but his faith had increased exponentially since working for the group.

He had spent the majority of his employment at the undisclosed headquarters in the Pacific Northwest, but volunteered for an outpost position following a painful divorce several months back. Trent needed the change. Something to distract him from the painful dissolution of his marriage.

The requirements of the outpost involved long periods of waiting. Many hours of non-activity, which wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Trent had been encouraged to bring plenty of things to occupy his time on the deployment. As such, he had brought a large box of books.

Trent had already finished the majority of them and wondered how he would occupy himself once the others were read.

I'll cross that bridge when I come to it, he silently assessed. *IF I come to it.*

Trent had less than a week left before being relieved by another worker and returning to headquarters.

The following day shortly after lunch, Trent heard the sound of something approaching. He stepped out of the RV to see an old, blue pickup truck riding down the dirt road towards him. It pulled up next to the RV and parked.

Chase barked as a tall, middle-aged, Navajo Indian with long braided hair, wearing a black cowboy hat and plaid shirt got out. Trent called out the dogs name in a reprimand, and Chase laid down.

“Hello,” the Native American man said with a smile.

“Hello,” Trent replied, walking out to meet him.

The man walked over and shook Trent's hand. “I'm Atsa, but the locals call me William.”

“Nice to meet you. I'm Trent.”

“Trent,” William repeated before looking at Chase. Beautiful dog.”

“Thanks. Don't worry, he won't bite.”

“I know. Dogs are great protectors, and very loyal.”

“Yes, they are.”

William removed his hat. “I apologize for not coming out to meet you sooner. My daughter recently had a baby and I've been helping.”

“Congratulations. If you don't mind me asking, how did you know I was even out here?”

“My people always know when someone new arrives.”

“I see,” Trent responded.

“You're not the first of your group to come here.”

“You know about my group?”

“I know that several men like yourself have come here to study this place,” William explained, motioning to the instruments on top of the RV.

“Yeah. We trade off and come here for a few weeks at a time.”

“How do you like it?”

“It's peaceful,” Trent explained.

“Beautiful, too.”

“And cursed,” William added.

“How's that?”

“That's what many of my people believe, anyway.”

“I see.”

“Have you seen anything since you've been here?”

“Like what?” Trent asked.

“Anything not in the textbooks of the white man,” William responded.

Trent chuckled. “A little. Lights in the sky, that sort of thing.”

“The things that occur here are not understood by most and are dangerous. I'd be cautious if I were you,” William warned. “Yee naaldlooshii abides here. The evil that walks on all fours.”

“I'm familiar with the legends of the skinwalker, the wendigo and other things that your people believe.”

“They're more than just legends.”

“You've seen one before?” Trent asked.

“Yes. Many times in various forms. And if you remain out here for long enough, so will you,” William declared with certainty.

“If you're trying to scare me off, you're wasting your time. I don't get easily spooked.”

“That's good. That will help you during the dark hours. But I would still be cautious and respectful of that which you don't fully understand.”

“I'll do my best,” Trent said. “But I'm pretty certain I have everything under control.”

“You're a fool if you think that. Don't underestimate the land, it's history and the unseen things that dwell here, especially being out here alone. The evil can prey on those in isolation. Deceive your senses, even your very eyes.”

“Thanks for the warning, William.”

The Navajo man placed the black hat back on his head. “Good day. And welcome here. I hope to see you again.”

Trent gave a nod before William got back into his truck and departed. Trent was left pondering the Native American's words as he watched the old pickup kick up a trail of dust as it returned to the main road.

Trent looked down at the dog. “What do you think, Chase? Is he crazy?”

The German shepherd leaned his head to

one side with a curious expression.

Trent quickly shook off the conversation, deciding not to over-analyze it. He had more important matters to attend to. Trent went back into the RV and resumed his daily work, performing a series of tests on all the equipment to make sure everything was performing at optimal levels.

His work continued without incident for the remainder of the day as well as the following one.

Trent laid down to go to bed before 10:30. He needed to be up at 6 am to exercise before beginning his daily work, never deviating from his rigid routine. The self-discipline Trent maintained worked in his favor, whether at home or on assignments.

After reading a few chapters of the current book, Trent sat it aside and turned out the light.

“Good night, buddy,” he told Chase, who lay on the floor next to the bed.

Trent had only been asleep for what seemed like an hour tops when the heightened electromagnetic alert awoke Trent from a sound slumber. He quickly sat up, surprised to learn it was 3:22 am.

“You've got to be kidding,” Trent mumbled before getting up and stumbling over to the computer.

He studied the screen to see an elevated electromagnetic reading. The numbers fluctuated wildly before Trent heard what sounded like strong wind blow outside.

The RV was hit on one side and shook, causing Chase to stand up and bark.

Trent wondered if the RV had been struck by a sandstorm. He looked out one of the windows, but neither saw nor heard anything. Everything appeared calm. Trent put on his shoes and unlocked the door.

Chase moved to follow him outside before Trent pointed.

“Stay,” he instructed the dog.

Chase whined, then sat down in obedience.

Trent opened the door and stepped down onto the ground. He looked up into the sky to see a colorful glow in the sky similar to the one he'd witness previously.

The illumination almost seemed to pulsate.

Trent shifted his eyes. He scanned the surrounding darkness, hearing nothing but an eerie stillness; a strange silence that seemed to have washed over the area like a immaterial ocean, drowning out every other natural sound of the desert.

The hair on the back of Trent's neck stood up as he stood listening for several long

moments.

“Just like I thought,” he eventually told himself.

Trent glanced up at the sky again to see that the glow had nearly dissipated. He took a step to go back into the RV when he heard what sounded like falling rocks from nearby. Trent turned back around and listened.

Silence.

He took another step up into the RV and heard the same noise again.

“Hello!” Trent called out.

Nothing.

He quickly opened the door of the RV, reached in and grabbed a flashlight, then turned it on and shined it in the direction of the sound. The beam of light captured only the familiar rocky, desert terrain.

The noise suddenly rang out again. This time, the sound originated from behind Trent. He turned quickly and shifted his light to expose the source of the noise.

Trent moved the flashlight in a steady motion from left to right, carefully scanning the surroundings. Trent had nearly completed a circle when the noise sounded once again.

Louder than before.

Trent quickly moved the light, which revealed what appeared to be a coyote. He could hear Chase barking inside the RV before the

coyote scurried away and ran off into the night.

Trent rubbed the back of his head, chuckled, then went back into the RV and went to sleep.

The next few days passed without incident. Trent reported the lack of activity to headquarters, beginning to feel like he was wasting his time at the outpost. However, each night brought the same strong winds that struck the RV at almost the exact time, like clock work.

The activity eventually set off the instrumentation, which resulted in Trent going outside to check it out. He spotted what he believed was the same coyote as before, which ran off just as before. The next thing Trent saw was a fox, followed by a wolf.

One by one, each animal appeared, then vanished into the darkness.

Trent reported it to headquarters, but felt like a fool for doing so. He prepared to go to sleep one night before hearing a strange crashing sound outside. The electromagnetic alert sounded and Chase began to bark as usual.

This again?

Trent reluctantly sat up, slipped his shoes on and went to the computer. He studied the readings to see a heightened signal containing stronger harmonics than the previous times. Trent let out a deep breath and grabbed the communicator to notify headquarters but

stopped himself.

He remained in a state of indecision for several moments, then placed the handheld device down. The last thing Trent wanted to do was overreact and report something of little to no importance.

Just then, he heard something on the roof of the RV. He muted the volume to the computer speakers. The sound of animal footsteps moved slowly across the roof.

Chase growled before releasing a loud series of barks, looking up towards the noise.

“Chase!!” Trent yelled out.

The dog quieted down, trading his bark for a whine.

Trent tracked the sound of the footsteps on the roof with his eyes as they moved from one end of the RV to the other. Trent quietly went to one of the seats, lifted up the cushion to reveal a hidden storage space. He removed a semi-automatic rifle, checked to make sure the cartridge was loaded, then pulled the trigger to cock the firing mechanism.

The sound of the animal steps ceased. Moments later, another crashing sound occurred from outside the vehicle. Chase got to his feet and barked again.

“Hush!” Trent said loudly, causing the German shepherd to sit down in reluctant obedience. “I’m going to check it out. You stay

here.”

The dog whined again as Trent turned on a light attached to the barrel of the rifle. He exited the RV and emerged on the rocky ground, then walked out away from the vehicle.

Trent slowly backed away from the RV and shined the light onto the roof. Nothing. He turned and waved the weapon around in multiple directions, ready to fire without hesitation.

“Alright. Where are you?!” Trent called out.

Silence.

“Show yourself!”

Nothing.

“I'm not going to play this game with you!” Trent declared before a strange noise erupted nearby, echoing all around him.

Trent quickly turned and shined the light of the gun in multiple directions in an attempt to locate the source. He took several more steps, moving farther away from the RV as Chase barked again inside.

Just then Trent caught a glimpse of two yellow, glowing eyes in the distance. He quickly moved his gun, which shined the light to see a larger animal than the ones from previous nights.

The beast moved slowly at least a hundred feet away, looking like a cross between

a wolf and something else entirely. Something Trent had never seen.

He steadied his light on the strange animal before it stood upright on its hind legs, appearing to alter in form. Trent could hardly believe his eyes.

Chase could still be heard barking aggressively inside the RV as the beast took on a more human form, having freakishly long antlers on top of its head. The beast's yellow eyes locked onto Trent.

It several steps toward him, somehow growing taller before releasing a bloodcurdling noise that echoed through the region.

It chilled Trent to the core and pierced his eardrums.

He took aim and opened fire on the beast, unloading several rounds before taking a few steps and realizing the animal was no longer there. Trent moved the rifle left and right, sweeping the area as the light shined onto the rocky terrain.

The beast was nowhere to be seen.

Trent cautiously moved towards the direction the creature had been seconds before, then heard a deep growl.

Glowing eyes suddenly appeared to Trent's left, several feet away. Trent quickly turned and fired the gun again, releasing round after round until the clip had been depleted.

The light on the weapon suddenly went out, leaving Trent in the dark. He heard the monstrous growl again. Trent threw the rifle as hard as he could towards the beast, then broke out in a run and retreated back to the RV.

Trent tore open the door and Chase came bolting out, barking wildly. It landed on the rocky ground and took off running.

“Chase! Stop!!” Trent yelled out, but it was too late. “Chase!”

The dog ran into the darkness, towards the direction of the beast. Moment's later, Trent heard Chase whimper.

“Chase! No!!”

Trent quickly rushed back inside the RV, went to the hidden storage and took out a 45 caliber handgun. Trent checked the magazine to confirm it was loaded, turned the safety off and emerged outside once again.

His heart pounded within his chest, his breathing heavy as drops perspiration covered his dark skin.

“Chase!!”

Silence.

Trent looked blindly into the surrounding darkness and took a step. He walked slowly around the RV, circling it with his finger on the trigger but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Trent moved in the direction where Chase had gone before stopping.

Unable to see anything and at a disadvantage, Trent cursed under his breath, then went back to the RV. He locked himself inside and paced the floor for several minutes, trying to decide what to do before hearing a howling outside that shattered the silence.

Trent went to one of the windows. He slowly pulled one edge of the curtain back and peeked out but saw only darkness. Trent walked to the computer station to see the alert had ceased and all readings had frozen. He took a seat, sat the handgun down and attempted to reconfigure the settings.

Several minutes later, Trent heard his name called by a familiar female voice.

“Trent,” his ex-wife Audra said quietly.

Trent closed his eyes, convinced he had imagined it until the voice repeated. Louder this time.

“It can't be,” Trent whispered, hitting himself in the head to make sure he was awake.

“Trent, I'm here,” the voice added.

“Audra?” Trent responded, now certain he had heard it.

“It's my fault,” the voice responded. “Everything's my fault and I'm sorry. I love you.”

Trent, unable to resist any longer, rushed to the door. He unlocked it and rapidly descended the steps, leaving the door open.

“Audra?” Trent called out, looking all around and expecting to see his ex-wife but seeing nothing but darkness. “Where are you?”

No response.

Trent walked out several feet from the RV.

“Audra?” He called out with greater volume.

The wind and all desert noises had ceased completely, leaving the area in an unexpected state of silence. Trent ventured farther out from the RV, attempting to see into the dark desert surroundings once again but unable.

What sounded like thunder suddenly struck nearby, causing Trent to jump. The sky then lit up with a purplish glow, illuminating the landscape all around for several moments.

Trent gazed up to see a strange dark form materialize in the sky. The object grew and morphed into a circular shape, then began to rotate. Trent could hear the alert sound once again from the computer inside the RV, which beeped in regular intervals.

The black shape in the sky broke apart and divided into three smaller ones, which increased in size and rotated.

Trent remained frozen in place as the winds kicked up all around him, then a shape appeared in the dark before him. Trent lowered

his eyes, barely able to make out a person before Audra came clearly into view.

“Audra,” Trent called out before taking off and running to her.

Trent reached out to embrace Audra as he drew near, then came to a grinding stop as her form changed into a terrifying humanoid creature at least seven feet tall. Trent stared into the hollowed eyes of its skull-like face with gray, leathery skin.

Trent fell backwards onto the ground as fear gripped his heart.

The horrifying, horned beast glared down at Trent and opened its fanged mouth, releasing a frightening screech that penetrated his eardrums.

Before Trent could stand, a sudden gust of unnaturally frigid wind blasted him out of nowhere. The glacial air cut through him, stinging his skin and nearly paralyzing his muscles.

Trent scrambled backwards, kicking dirt as he returned to his feet, raced back to the RV and locked the door.

A loud knock pounded on the outside of the door unceasingly, threatening to break it down. Trent picked up the handgun, aimed it at the door and fired multiple rounds until the clip was empty.

He fell onto his back before seeing

multiple blue-white lights through the windows of the RV. The lights circled above the vehicle and picked up velocity.

Trent rushed over to the computer as the alert continued to blare. He pressed the main button on the communicator.

“This is Trent at Outpost 77,” Trent announced. “Something's happening here. I'm under attack by a powerful entity! Repeat, I'm under attack! I need -”

Before Trent could finish, all the power in the RV went out. The lights circling the vehicle intensified, bathing the interior of the vehicle with blinding illumination. Trent covered his eyes with one arm in a desperate attempt to shield himself as strong wind pounded the outside of the RV from different directions, shaking it violently.

Trent was certain the vehicle would be lifted off the ground at any moment and torn asunder. He remained on the floor in a fetal position, praying the chaos would stop before losing all awareness and fading into a state of unconsciousness.

Sometime later, Trent felt warmth on his skin.

He slowly opened his eyes to see bright morning sunlight piercing through one of the broken RV windows. Trent heard his name called several times, which grew more distinct

as he regained awareness and realized it was real.

“Trent, can you hear me?” A man asked before Trent recognized the face of Kyle Jordan, one of the group leaders. Two other members - Alan and a young Pakistani man named Javier - stood behind him.

Trent blocked the sunlight from his eyes and looked up at him. “Kyle? But how -?”

“The group received your transmission but couldn't get a response. We were the closest to you, just a few hours away,” Kyle explained as Trent sat up.

“Yeah,” he mumbled, looking around to see the inside of the RV had been nearly destroyed. Several of the windows were broken and the computer had been destroyed. Finally, Trent noticed the empty handgun and rifle lying nearby.

Kyle motioned to the collection of bullet holes in the door. “What happened?”

Trent shook his head, noticing the empty handgun lying a few feet away. “There was something out there. I thought it was just an animal at first, then it changed shapes.”

“A skinwalker?” Kyle asked.

“I thought so at first, but it was more powerful. Some kind of ancient evil.”

“We can't get the engine started,” Alan announced.

“Alright. Collect the computer and electronics,” Kyle instructed. “We’ll send someone out here to retrieve it later.”

Alan responded with a nod before he and Javier began disconnecting components from the computer station. Trent examined his arms, legs and torso, but didn't see any blood.

“I don't know what happened,” he confessed. “I thought it was the end. That I was a goner.”

“Can you stand?” Kyle asked.

“I think so.” Trent slowly got to his feet. “What now?”

“We're all leaving and going back to the base. You can explain everything that you remember along the way.”

“People needs to know what's out here,” Trent said. “Whoever comes here next.”

“I know,” Kyle affirmed.

“Chase,” Trent said, before quickly getting to his feet and running outside.

“Trent!” Kyle called out, following him outside. “What are you doing?”

“My dog.” Trent sprinted in the direction Chase had run the previous night. He came to the rifle lying on the ground where he'd thrown it and kept walking until seeing the lifeless form of a four-legged animal. “Chase!”

Trent ran over to find his mutilated dog. The ripped open animal carcass nearly made

Trent throw up before he knelt down over the remains of his beloved pet. He wiped away tears as guilt tore threw him.

“I'm sorry,” Kyle said, standing a short distance away. “We had no idea what was out here. If we had, you never should've been stationed here alone.”

“No,” Trent replied. “It's my fault. I was warned, but I didn't listen. I didn't want to believe.”

The most important electronics were collected, along with Trent's personal belongings before the men departed the location.

Kyle drove while Trent sat up front in the passenger seat and the other two men were in the back. Trent rode in silence, looking into the rear view-mirror at the abandoned RV in the middle of the desert as he traveled farther and farther away.

The story continues in **ADVENT**, available now from Photon Books!