

On the Verge of Madness Book Excerpt

Tales of the Supernatural

By GEORGE WILHITE

Tales of the Fractured Realms

The eleven known realms once were sealed

Until the fractures were revealed

Now, portals and fissures provide the way

For those who strive their further decay

Humans as they are, as they were, and as they may become

Collide in new Between Realms, undone

And Those Who Should Not Pass

Embark on journeys of chaos and disunity

They desire the Unmaking and

Their greatest defense is our disbelief

Ages come and go, legends fade

And most die away in time

But we must take heed of the

Tales of the Fractured Realms

For in them lies the key to our survival

Victor Chaldean and the Portal

A Tale of the Fractured Realms

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place

Near no accustomed hand;

And they had nailed the boards above her face,

The peasants of that land,

“A Dream of Death”

William Butler Yeats

Prologue

My name is Arthur Chaldeon, and the narrative I offer here is the journal of my nephew Victor. His own disappearance occurred nearly three years after that of his wife. She was presumed dead but never found, and that event set into motion the bizarre series of circumstances related in Victor’s journal. I will let the story be told primarily by that journal, nearly word for word. It seems to be dated, based on its contents, about a year before he vanished.

The events following his wife’s death, as you will see, caused him to be largely a stranger to most of us. When we did hear from him occasionally, frankly, it seemed he might be losing his mind. Initially, this journal only furthered that judgment of his character. However, after speaking to certain parties mentioned in the journal--and being a lawyer I usually know when one is lying or delusional--it appears that the events described certainly have at least some basis in fact, even if they may be somewhat far-fetched. After much deliberation, I have decided to publish this work and allow its readers to be the final judge of its authenticity.

I will now provide a brief account of how I came into possession of the collection of notebooks comprising Victor’s journal.

I had not heard anything from Victor in over six months. I knew he had moved to another town. I am Victor’s lawyer, and his only living relative within a hundred, perhaps even a thousand miles—the Chaldeons are spread all about the earth—so it was

natural enough that Victor placed me in charge of selling his house and any other issues that may arise from his prompt and unexplained exit from the city. Thus, I was one of very few people, perhaps even the only person, with his phone number. He made it clear, as he hastily gave me full power of attorney of all his affairs that his phone number was to be considered confidential. He obviously did not want to be found or bothered, but I chose to keep in touch, and when my last contact with him aged six months I decided to call him.

The phone rang and rang the first four times I called, at various times throughout the day. The fifth attempt was made at quarter past ten at night, and finally the phone was answered, though not by Victor.

“Hello,” whispered a distant, croaking voice. The word was intoned more as a question than a statement, almost as though the speaker did not know how to use a phone.

“Is Victor there?”

A long pause. “Who are you? This number is—“

“Oh, yes. My apologies, Madame. Arthur Chaldeon. To my knowledge, I am still the only person who has this number. Others have asked, but I do know how to keep one’s confidence. It’s my job. Is this Peggy?”

“Yeah,” she said, exhaling a long sigh. “Arthur. Please don’t be offended, but it will be better if you just hang up and forget about us.”

“I will do nothing of the kind, Peggy. Where is Victor?”

“I don’t know.” Another long silence. Something in the sound of her voice told me to keep my mouth shut for a change, stop being a lawyer for a moment. Then, finally, one more word. “Gone.”

“Gone? You’re saying he left you?”

“No, nothing as simple as that.” Then, she began to whisper again. “It’s them I tell you.”

“Who? Is Victor in some sort of trouble?”

“I think they took him.”

“I’m coming to see you. You can tell me then.”

Though highly agitated and not making a lot of sense, Peggy settled down enough to give me directions to their hideaway in a town about a hundred and fifty miles from my

residence. I informed my wife and business colleagues of my need to travel suddenly, not mentioning Victor at all, and was on my way within a couple of hours.

As I drove, I thought of Peggy. I had only met her once before she and Victor moved away together. I was initially shocked to find out that Victor was moving in with a woman so soon after becoming a widower, but he and Peggy had certainly met under bizarre circumstances. It wasn't like he decided to date right away, rather they had become friends and bonded as they worked together to find out what happened to Rita. But I don't want to jump ahead—you will learn all of this directly from Victor.

I only need mention having met Peggy before so I can explain my shock when she opened the door and let me into their townhouse. The woman standing before me had the same long dark blonde hair and blue eyes, and her basic features seemed to indicate she was the same person. However, she looked not months, but several years older, weary, not at all the spirited attractive woman at Victor's side the night he signed his life over to me.

Had the pressures in Victor's life caused similar severe changes in his appearance as well in so short a time period? Victor was a tall, broadly built man, and I am sure most middle aged women would say he was handsome. Since insurance was his trade, and thus all his work done inside, he had always tried to remain active and conscious of his health. Now, after seeing Peggy, I wondered if he had let that all go in light of whatever was going on in this household.

We sat in the living room and Peggy brought me some coffee. This was certainly a scaled down living situation for Victor. The house and accompanying lot I helped him sell was worth easily ten times what he had reinvested in this quaint modest condominium. It is like he was starting over, except with a tidy sum of money in the bank this time around.

Peggy was no less upset than she was hours earlier. She just kept speaking in nondescript pronouns, saying: "they" had taken "him," that "they" were everywhere now and it was all "our" fault. She shook as she spoke, and kept whispering as though there was someone else in the room that might overhear our conversation. She seemed only a few loose strands away from crazy, but I knew better. Even though I did not know everything that happened at the place where she and Victor had met, I knew understanding it was far more complex than just writing them off as crazy.

She left the room, leaving me in utter confusion, and returned with a large stack of notebooks of all types and colors. All of them appeared to be written by Victor. Some were thumbed through, dog-eared, and even had pages torn out from somewhere else and then placed inside between other pages. However, despite the disheveled state of much of the stack there were three bound composition books with uninterrupted writing, as though they were some sort of cohesive draft compiled from all the other material.

“Victor has been having a lot of physical problems lately and rarely sleeps,” she said as I flipped through some of the pages. There were also crude drawings and charts among the writing, as though Victor saw the need to illustrate what he could not describe with mere words. “He has become obsessed with writing it all down. He needs to do this, and I am not going to tell him not to, but I have been trying to explain to him that nobody is going to believe any of it.”

I had to admit that, browsing through some of the written passages and looking at those pictures, I felt I was intruding on the privacy of an aspiring science fiction writer rather than reading a supposed journal. “That is one of them,” Peggy whispered as I looked at one of the drawings.

I am not a psychiatrist, but I can only imagine the impressions these illustrations provided were similar to those one often saw in the ravings of lunatics that are convinced of their own sanity. Victor was no artist, so there was only crude detail provided in his attempts to create “them” on paper. The best I can say is it looked like what he had drawn was a cross between some formless blob like a jellyfish and another creature with multiple tentacles and several eyes. Below this, Victor had written: “BUT NOT THEIR TRUE FORM—ANOTHER LIE!”

I swallowed hard, trying to maintain my objectivity in the face of such material. But if Victor was insane he had not gone there alone, for Peggy sat before me, seeming nearly catatonic, wide-eyed, watching me work my way through the notebooks.

“Take these notebooks,” she said. “I can’t live in fear of them. They can no longer influence my every move. Victor speaks a lot about will. That is our greatest defense. I must fight. Take these and read, and then we will talk.”

“What about Victor?”

“You can’t possibly be any help to us unless you read it all. At least those three books where he has written it out, like a story, leaving out some important stuff in my opinion, but still, it will tell you what you’re in for if--” She stopped and looked around the room again and then whispered, “if you decide to help us.”

“Okay, I will read all this. But I want to stay here, in your town, until I’m done. I’m not just going to leave you like this.”

“Suit yourself. I’m okay, no matter what you might think by looking at me. I have been through worse. Perhaps I’m wrong, and he’ll walk through the door any minute now with an explanation. But it’s been six days.”

Since I had come here not having heard anything from Victor in months, I was relieved to find out his disappearance was a more recent event, but I understood six days was still a long time to have no contact with someone living with you. I left on that note, telling Peggy I would give her my number once I knew where I was staying.

Once I had checked into a nearby motel, and called Peggy and my family, I turned immediately to Victor's notebooks. It took me from five that evening until four the next morning to read straight through it all. I offer it to you now as I found it, from those three composition books. It will be necessary for me, once or twice, to intervene and narrate events from a slightly different point of view, based on subsequent interviews with other parties involved, but I have not altered Victor's own writing in any way.

The Narrative of Victor Chaldeon

The First Notebook

(Note: The first composition book jumps right in without any sense of when he began writing, as though Victor thought it more important to relay his frame of mind rather than placing himself in a chronological context. None of the entries are dated. We can only deduce a rough timeline. – AC)

Once again tonight I woke up screaming.

Night--that profound period of silence and darkness that spans from dusk until dawn, a time of passion, love and mystery for many, has become for me a torturous and slow moving abyss of pain and fear.

Those long hours are not merely filled with nightmares and restless sleep. The intensity of mental anguish is far beyond that of a mere insomniac—for now, every night—They are always with me.

Where others see only darkness, I see Them.

While others may relax, pray, make love, reflect on the day's events as they lie awake in bed, all I experience is Their shrieking.

They haunt my dreams and invade my space wherever I roam.

Soaked in sweat, my pulse racing, giving in to one more wasted night's attempts to rest, I rise and head for the living room. I turn on every light in the room and then the reading lamp by the recliner I flop into for good measure. All this light floods the room and, while I am not naïve enough to believe They are gone, at least the light makes Them easier to deal with.

I have held my silence far too long. The events of the last few months demand that I now write it all out, hoping that someone somewhere will believe me and offer some

help. But even if there is no help, and nobody believes a word of it, I will at least get it all out.

Perhaps I can write myself sane. Perhaps I can write Them out of all the fibers of my being They desire to possess. My will is stronger than Theirs—this I have proven over and over—but They still seem determined to at least torment me if They can't have me.

For it to make sense I must start at the beginning—or at least at a beginning.

My wife is a missing person and presumed dead, and if it was murder the case is cold. So ends the official story. Though the truth was far more complicated, I chose to remain silent until now. While I will stick to the facts, my story is not one that would be traditionally referred to as black and white. This story is constructed largely of gray areas. I now understand, hopefully not too late, that much of our existence resides not in absolutes, but rather in these shades of gray.

The police, of course, feel entirely the opposite. There is simply right or wrong, guilty or innocent, hence black or white. The ideal candidates for their ranks are cynical individuals with enough intelligence and imagination to be dangerous. They scoff at the concept of gray areas. Indeed, our country's legal system, their frequent adversary, thrives on shades of gray, blurring right and wrong, raising doubt and uncertainty. Thus, they lose cases, and in their minds this makes our world less safe.

This was the paradox for the police in the situation I am presenting. Since in my conversations with them I assured them there was no reason Rita would make herself vanish, Rita had to be considered dead simply because she was no longer considered to be alive. Logical enough, I suppose. So once they realized they had no case for homicide they filed it with all their other unsolved cases and moved on.

The old “get back to us if you think of anything else that might help us” routine. Gee, thanks. I thought it was their job to think of new possibilities.

I consider myself rational, though slightly more open minded than the best police officers I met through this ordeal, but now I am stuck with the gray areas, and for the duration of my tale you will have to agree to explore them as well. If you pronounce me mad after hearing me out, it will come as no surprise nor will it offend my sensibilities, for I have already lived among madmen.

So what we have here is a largely a tale of grey areas and matters of the heart, and for these I make no apology. I cannot present these facts in a cold and distant voice, for they involve the loss of all that was important to me. You must experience it all through my eyes, and take for granted that I am telling you the truth, as hard as some of it may be to believe.

Ah, that brings us to faith, another term I scoffed at before all this lunacy unraveled. Believing in what cannot be proven, that the air we breathe is there even though

invisible, this was a struggle for me as well, but I must ask you to suspend your disbelief and have faith in me, just once through this journal, before you pronounce judgment.

The night of Rita's disappearance, I came home to an empty house. This alone was no great surprise. I assumed Rita was shopping, and my daughter, Amanda, was out more often than home. She and Rita's relationship had always been rough, but at that time it was particularly strained, largely due to Amanda's choice of boyfriend.

Doctor Radford Strather was twenty years older than Amanda, and Rita assumed he had one thing on his mind when he began dating our twenty two year old daughter. I didn't care for Strather much either, but when I saw the two of them together they seemed to have a little more in common than simply both having human bodies. I didn't completely agree with Rita, but I didn't like Amanda's psychology professor enough to side with him either.

Rita and Amanda's mutual need for avoidance, then, was the most likely reason the house was empty. I saw no reason for alarm when I arrived there after work at six thirty. And by eight, when I had called most of Rita's close friends, my curiosity had risen no higher than concern. I was a bit irritated not to hear from her, but assumed she had her reasons. By ten, I was officially worried, and was annoying more of our acquaintances by disturbing them at that late hour. At midnight I called the police. They told me to wait forty-eight hours, and then file a missing person report. I then drank my seventh scotch and stayed up all night thinking of all the possibilities. None of them were comforting.

Forty-eight hours later, my wife Rita was officially a missing person. Amanda and I began an organized campaign to find her, with the aid of a local group that posts signs around town and puts missing persons' faces on milk cartons and flyers sent in the mail. The police opened a worthless investigation, for there were too many Ritas in the world for them to get too worked up over the situation.

I realize this kind of situation has become all too common in America. I know many Americans have lost their wives or children, never to find them again, and have told their story much better than I could. But this isn't that kind of story either. I have found my wife, and it is the place I found her that makes this story unique. All those other people haven't met their loved ones again, as I have, and if they receive that opportunity I would advise against it.

Sorry, jumping ahead again. This is the place where I lay it out for you, slow and steady.

Rita's disappearance certainly started the whole chain of events into motion that eventually landed me in the so-called "nut house," but it wasn't that alone that drove me to the brink. Several far more harrowing events were to occur that could not be rationally explained. In short, my madness began to germinate along with the haunting.