

“For History's Future”

By Tom Badrick

Nathan closed the decaying textbook before him and let forth a sigh only possible while one stares into the unblinking eyes of absolute defeat. The library would be closing in mere minutes, and he had still yet to reserve a single book from such a rare and marvelous collection. But what was the point? There was nothing new to be found in such a place, and, with another year coming to a cheerful but decadent close, he became increasingly convinced that there was nothing new of the sort to be found anywhere. Nothing to be gained. Not a single scrap of new information. That last ill-maintained tome he had skimmed through seemed the most promising: a dusty old volume of world events of the 19th century, itself printed in 2183. However, much like any electronic database of his modern time, the information, citations, quotes, names, and places were all the same. Now experiencing this fact in apathetic reality, his morale was at an all-time low, and rightly so. After all, he had waited months for this last useless batch of rotting papers, destroyed manuscripts, and corrupted data files. What was considered to be one of the greatest archives of human history remaining on the planet was now another shattered dream. High-brow colleges were often overrated, but were they ever this disappointingly so?

He wasn't, in actuality, a formal student at Rivers Cross University, having completed his graduate studies at the age of 19 at Princeton, but he was a determined life-long learner. In fact, his unending pestering of the student staff to acquire dated, old-fashioned textbooks, data disks, images, videos, and other evidence of the past began to carry with it a despicable reputation. He had recently become such a tiresome site that most would often avert their eyes from him, feign preoccupation, or go on an early break when they sensed he may be in need of some assistance. Every morning he would arrive (And it really was every morning.) at exactly 7:50am, ten minutes before the campus library's doors would open, patiently waiting for just that. Then, skipping a normal breakfast, lunch, and dinner, he would pour over books, documents and the patience of students and employees alike until 8:00pm, where he was then escorted to the exit by the night-shift staff

and the door locked behind him. From there, he would return to his one-room studio, summarize his daily studies, gorge himself on simple meals, and retire for the night. Such was his life in Somerton, Connecticut, since he had arrived seven months prior.

It was almost too easy to draw hasty conclusions concerning his appearance. Nathan's ice-blue eyes, long, thin limbs, and perpetually chalky 'indoor tan' recounted the life of a young man who was averse to most external activities. His thick, horn-rimmed glasses gave him a classic visage in a time when most folks who developed sight problems settled for simple corrective surgeries. His attire was casual but eccentric, and his frequent lack of matching colors made it blatantly evident that he was either colorblind or just didn't care enough to worry about his day-to-day presentation. He seldom spoke with anyone outside of research matters, and there were very few people in the region who knew more of him than his name and his profound lack of social interest. His stare carried with it a cold, ambitious fire that others could scarcely return. Fortunately for them, those icy, intense eyes were more often than not preoccupied with books and monitors. Despite his frail and lanky frame, he could almost be looked upon as intimidating.

As for his studies, history was equal parts his most time-consuming obsession and greatest joy. Nathan was a young man who quite literally lived in the past. His interest in dead heroes and civilizations began at an early age and grew alongside his penchant for brilliant analysis, perfect memory, and superhuman attention to detail. His genius had been discovered at an early age, and this coupled with his academic interests propelled him through standard education at a pace seldom imagined. At 15 years and having graduated from high school at the head of his class, his unending thirst for the secrets of the past led him to earning a bachelor's degree two years later from Princeton University, again at the head of his much older peers. His more recent master's degree panned out very much in the same manner. He was even offered a teaching position on the college faculty, but he had turned down that generous offer for the time being. At that point in his quest for knowledge, he had decided it best to be able to devote the entirety of his time and effort to a certain peculiar matter that had already left him scavenging the past tirelessly for nearly a year.

Nathan's true obsession began with his master's thesis, which was initially an academic train wreck. His proposed subject had been too

obscure, too lost in the ever-deepening creases of forgotten time itself. Perhaps it was even some fantastical error in the editing process: a whimsically fictional idea that somehow escaped the mind of an addled and overworked old scholar. It could have even been a typo, as the reference was only found in a single edition of a particular elementary school history textbook printed at the end of the 21st century.

Regardless of the countless rational explanations (And the overwhelming odds of said explanations being correct.) for such an isolated textual inconsistency, he was never in the mindset to write it off as such. Nathan wasn't the type of man to fall for the metaphysical malarkey of intuitions, premonitions, or gut feelings, but in regards to this conundrum, he couldn't find the confidence in himself to dismiss it without giving it at least one thorough look... or a hundred.

The root of this unearthly obsession was the context of a single sentence of history describing the acts of a moderately documented figure in early American history known as George Armstrong Custer. On an elementary level, any human with a decent memory would recall the name as a well-known American explorer who had worked for the early United States government and had an enormous hand in establishing an American foothold in the Dakota territories. He established settlements and implemented railway and mining operations to solidify control of the gold and other natural resources of the region. Perhaps to the common philistine, he was an altogether forgettable historical figure, but not to Nathan, who wholeheartedly believed that any past figure still written of today was of an astoundingly memorable caliber.

However, in this particular account of the highest point of Custer's career, there was a unique discrepancy revealed in a single sentence. The aforementioned sentence read as follows: "In 1873, Custer was assigned to the Dakota territories to protect railroad parties against the nearby Lakotas." To an uninterested layman, such a sentence would be skimmed over without so much as a second thought, but Nathan's mind was one that noticed everything, analyzed everything, and cataloged everything for future reference. And this was where the questions disturbingly arose. What were Lakotas? Why had the railroaders required protection from them? At the time, such a rare and forgotten fragment of the past seemed like a terrific yet challenging subject for a graduate study. Unfortunately, it proved too challenging, and right

before its deadline he conjured up a thesis far less interesting in the midst of a wild depression.

He had at first rationally assumed the inexplicably elusive Lakota to have been some breed of bear, wolf, or other dangerous animal, but he grew more and more puzzled when he could find no record of any species at all with a similar name anywhere on the planet. Then there was the North Dakota town named Lakota, but it wasn't founded until 1883, 7 years after Custer's funeral. A town from the future clearly was not a threat of any sort. Furthermore, all written records associated the alien term, 'Lakota', with an extinct breed of conifer that once grew in the area. Mr. Custer was assigned to protect a bunch of rail surveyors from trees? It just didn't make any sense, and, as the leads grew thinner, the puzzle became exponentially more overwhelming.

With its single cryptic sentence, that rudimentary child's history book had become his most prized possession, and he guarded it most peculiarly. When he traveled, it remained in a section of his book bag on which he had fastened a steel-cabled key lock. At home, it rested uncomfortably beneath his pillow as he slept. When conducting research, it came with him whenever biological imperatives required him leave his workstation, mandatory consumption and excretion alike. Both students and staff had noticed his strange behavior, but collectively decided not to question the gangly, blue-eyed, unshaven, mismatched oddball with a penchant for superhuman brilliance. Often, curious approaches were ignored or dismissed rudely, and over time their numbers always dwindled from one campus to the next.

The ancient, 19th century replica grandfather clock struck seven. He had an hour to go, but in his current emotional state he considered an act that was moments ago unthinkable: calling it a day early. He was a broken man; months upon months of diligent and tireless searching had come to a spirit-crushing dead-end. He could feel that same depression welling up inside he hadn't felt since graduate school. The resolution to solve this great mystery was all that had kept him going since. He had turned down countless faculty positions at some very esteemed locations, guaranteed tenure, huge financial compensation, and a stellar reputation for this wild goose chase, and it was finally over and he was still without the prized goose. It was impossible to return to academia; he'd be the laughing stock of the world. There was nothing left for him in a world in which so much of himself was sacrificed for nothing. He

had once thought of a position as program director at Dartmouth as settling for less. Instead, he settled for nothing, and that was all that he could ever expect. A tear of ultimate sadness and frustration fell down his left cheek.

A firm hand on his shoulder snapped him out of his over-exaggerated prediction of his tragic academic future. Nathan jerked his head up with a start and found himself staring at a figure who had seen better (and younger) days. He appeared to be in his late 70's, and his wrinkled skin was rosy-pink. The old man's sunken eyes were almost as cold and blue as his own, but this man's gaze carried the look of slight concern, and possibly something more. Normally, when Nathan was disturbed from his work, he became obviously annoyed, but in the face of total failure, he almost welcomed the contact. Perhaps what he finally needed was some interaction. Or, in the very least, it couldn't make him feel any worse.

"I think yer studyin' a lil' too hard there, youngster!" the man said through his bushy, ill-maintained mustache. He squinted his sunken eyes and gave a slight smile, "Is that some ol' hist'ry yer lookin' at? I go here all the time, look at all the books, but never seen that one there!"

Nathan felt a protective instinct spike inside of him. Even on the verge of giving up, he felt the need to defend his research. Perhaps he was afraid someone would find a breakthrough that he couldn't. Perhaps it was to keep people from knowing he was madly in pursuit of a follow-up to what was likely a printing error. But... what was the point anymore?

"It is, sir," he said politely, as he often was with his very, very elders or other historical objects, "I'm working on a thesis, and I really don't like to be disturbed." He tried to hide his emotions, but he couldn't control the waver in his voice. He was now wishing that he could dismiss the old codger quickly without being too forcefully rude.

"Well it looks like yer havin' a helluva time!" the man shot back, and then more quietly, with a finger to his left temple, "I got an old head on these shoulders. Maybe you got a question for me or two. They call those 'primary sources', youngin'."

Nathan felt insulted, but he was well-aware of just how young he was. Despite this fact, this old fool obviously didn't know who he was speaking to.

"I know what a primary source is sir," he said bitterly, "and unless

you're several hundred years old, I doubt you'd have anything new to tell me.”

The old man laughed loudly for some time as Nathan grew more irritated. He stood sharply from his desk and began to pack his things. Failure followed by mockery was too much for one day. He felt like he could go home and sleep forever, but, in reality, he knew he'd be lucky if he could doze off for fifteen minutes or so.

“No, don't leave yet, son,” the old man said between chuckles, calming down, “I ain't that old, but I'm sure you an' me have some things to talk about.”

Nathan turned towards the door but only managed to take a single step before he felt that old hand on his shoulder again, this time more forceful than the last. The old man's strength was clearly more impressive than appearances would dictate, and his grip was tight enough to sting a little. Nathan stopped and turned, ready to begin his best effort at a verbal tongue lashing, but the aged stranger spoke first, and what he said froze his blood.

“Maybe we could talk about the Lakota.”

Nathan stared, his jaw slack. It was all he could do. Did this old pile of bones before him actually have some knowledge to share? It was more likely that he had seen the page in question over his shoulder as he sagged in frustration. No, that was impossible; that book had been closed the whole time. Closed, out of sight, and locked in his bag. He hadn't touched it all evening. It was a strange thing to begin to break out in sweat over a minor matter of history, but this didn't stop Nathan from doing so. His adrenaline was flowing, either from anger or excitement. At that moment, he couldn't tell.

“Hist'ry's an ol' hobby of mine and my family,” the old man said with a smile, “This tired brain still knows a lil' bit e'ryone else forgot. Maybe you'd like to walk with me for a bit? It's dark an' I don't like headin' home by myself this late.”

As it turned out, Jacob Statler, last of his family line and with no children, only lived about a block-and-a-half away. As they walked, Nathan found himself spilling out every place he had been, every book he had read, and every historian he had consulted on his fruitless quest for knowledge. Jacob listened as he led the way, saying very little himself. Not surprisingly, Nathan began to feel better as he finally unloaded the very frustrations that had been plaguing him for what

seemed like forever. Maybe it was that he felt he finally found what he'd been looking for. Maybe he just didn't feel threatened by such a silly old man. Most likely, though, it came from making contact with another human being that clearly felt the same way about history that he did. Though the sun had set and the deepest winter chill had arrived, Nathan felt that his work day was just about to begin.

Jacob explained to Nathan that he had once been in charge of the history department there at Rivers Cross, and in his retirement, he was rewarded with a small apartment on campus free of charge. He had personally decided for it to be as close to the library as could be managed. History was in his blood, and his ancestors had all shared this feeling. His family had a driving ambition, he explained, to preserve the world's past as objectively as possible. It was an all-too-familiar understanding among historians that the writers of history are in truth those who pay to have the history recorded, not the actual participants of the given event or span of time. Accounting for human error alone made it very reasonable to assume that true history could quite possibly be nothing like the way it was written. For centuries, Jacob's family had kept a private archive with the intention to maintain a record of historical events as undistorted and with as little deliberate manipulation as possible. Now, however, he was the last in his line, and far too old to expect the conventions of love, marriage, and offspring. Through his tone, Nathan sensed a silent asking to continue his family tradition. As shocked as he felt at the moment in light of such revelation, he still felt beyond honored.

“So,” Jacob said as he entered through his front door and unbuttoned his jacket, “What would you like to hear about first? Will it be the Lakota tribe or will it be ol' Gen'ral Custer himself? Or maybe somethin' else?”

Nathan withheld from saying, 'everything', though such a thought was on his mind. Despite his excited condition, he had already begun drawing new conclusions based on the old man's words. The Lakota were a tribe; they must have been people. And as for Custer, what did he mean by 'general'? Was he really that generic of a figure? Maybe there was a 'specific' Custer that had escaped his knowledge? Finally, some new questions! After months of fruitless research, the clouds of defeat had finally begun to break.

“I'm being honest when I say I can barely contain my excitement,”

Nathan replied honestly as he remained standing in the doorway, hurriedly attempting to gather his questions into some sort of structure.

Nathan finally overcame his paralysis and followed Jacob into his home, which, from what he saw, seemed eccentrically cozy. Sure, it was a little dusty and a lot cluttered, much like the old fellow who lived within, but the antique shelves and tables, the almost too-high cathedral ceiling, the classical chandelier lighting, and the many, many books seemed to radiate an air of comfortable antiquity. Following Jacob across the hall into a large study, he almost felt at home there as he did in any actual library. Upon being gestured to take a seat on a worn sofa, he smiled and did so politely. He lapsed into a brief thought of just when it was he last made such a gesture, but he shook it off as Jacob presented a bottle of vintage port and poured two glasses. Then, crossing over to one of his many bookshelves, he removed a single dusty tome after very little searching, and met with Nathan beside the sofa.

“Gen'ral Custer?” he asked as he took a sip from his glass.

“Certainly,” Nathan replied as he did the same. He had never been much of a wine drinker, but he could appreciate the vintage of any bottle of which it was nearly impossible to still read the stamped label. The books, the furniture, the wine, the owner. Everything in this house was, well, excessively seasoned.

“Well, let's see here,” Jacob began to deftly (But still ever carefully.) thumb through the ancient volume he held, reading off significant bullets as he went, “Born in Ohio in December of 1839, died in Montana in June of 1876. Feller was a soldier. Got a lotta his reputation at the battle o' Bull Run, where he fought the Confederates durin' the Civil War. Once that mess got over with, he,” there was a pause, and then a lot more thumbing, “He did a buncha other stuff, too. Made his name pretty well known to his bosses, became a gen'ral. But the juicy stuff you want comes later when he was sent to fight those injuns out 'round the Dakotas. Beat up the Cheyennes pretty bad. Made the Sioux real mad, too. Oh, Lakota was just another name for 'em. Sioux, Lakota, both the same.” He closed his book and glanced up at his guest with a smile.

Nathan's head was swimming. More nonsense words and unknown concepts which to him held no meaning began to pour in one ear and out the other. Cheyenne? Sioux? Bull Run? Confederates? The last was

a familiar term, but the context made it feel odd. Civil war? It sounded like some form of psychological, inner conflict.

“Are you sure,” he stuttered as he began, “Are you sure this information is accurate? And the terminology? I've studied history all my life but you're speaking an alien tongue!” Was that ever the truth.

“All yer life hasn't been all that long, youngin’!”, Jacob replied with a devious grin and a half laugh, but then his expression grew more serious, “I think we're gonna have to start a lil' further back for any of this to make sense.”

He took a hefty gulp of wine and set the empty glass on a table. His mood seemed strange, almost sinister. Nathan felt nauseous but wasn't sure why. He, in turn, took a large gulp from his own glass. It did not help to settle his stomach, and he immediately regretted doing so.

“We'll hafta start with all those things they don't get to teach you no more.”

Jacob returned the textbook to its rightful spot as Nathan watched him silently cross the room. He couldn't understand why his knees were shaking. Nor could he explain the unwelcome presence of the gastrointestinal creepy-crawlies he was uncomfortably housing.

“Nathan,” Jacob spoke as he scuttled from shelf to shelf, scanning various old volumes, “You know how civ'lizations write hist'ry, right? Each one gets the story a lil' bit dif'rent, right? Makes 'em look the best?”

Eurocentrism. Americentrism. Afrocentrism. Of course. Everyone likes to think they are the cornerstone of everything.

“Yes, perspectives are always different. I'm aware of this.”

Jacob nodded slightly without interrupting his absent-minded searching.

“Well then 'course you know that the history we get is from those civ'lizations that are still 'round, right? How the ones that go don't tell their story their way no more?”

Assimilation. Amalgamation. One culture dies, but another is born. This was all academically elementary.

“Well, that goes with saying,” Nathan narrowed his eyes, a bit puzzled, “Where are you going with this?”

“Ok, ok. So we know the winner writes hist'ry, 's an old adage,” Jacob's tone changed from one listing boring facts to one revealing the twist ending of a campfire tale, “But there was a time some while ago

where there was only one winner left to write all that hist'ry.”

Nathan could see what he was getting at, and it was indeed an intriguing point. Amazing, even. That is, if the claim was even true. If one culture had ever been singularly dominant, then the entire world's past could be potentially rewritten in just a few generations. After all, those with any such interest grew fewer and fewer with each passing decade. It would actually have been easier than it sounded to pull down the blinds, repaint the Mona Lisa into a fluorescent dinosaur, raise the blinds again, and nobody would be the wiser. It was a depressing thought, but it was the truth in it that made it so depressing.

“So what you're saying,” Nathan logically formulated his conclusion, “is that there was a point in the past where history was only written from a single cultural perspective!”

Jacob clapped his hands and nodded, finally turning around to face his guest once again.

“That's right! That's 'zactly it!”

“So those words... Lakota, Sioux, Little Big Horn... those are terms that just happened to be forgotten, maybe culturally altered?” It made sense. A singular culture implied a condensation of obscure terminologies, and those heard that night were certainly obscure.

“Well, yer close,” Jacob replied. He returned to his seat near Nathan. He carried back with him no books. Only his own mind filled with dark secrets thought to be murdered centuries ago.

“What if I told you that this one culture *purposely rewrote hist'ry to erase some very, very bad things it and those others did?*”

The room grew cold as Jacob finished his question. Nathan's spine felt frosted. Something itched in the back of his brain that just felt wrong. At once, there was a glimmer of familiarity, but it immediately faded as soon as he tried to focus on it. The best way he could think to interpret such a feeling was that he had discovered something that his own mind was trying to hide from him, and, upon nearing discovery, it quickly re-hid the data elsewhere before he could figure out just what it was to begin with. The feeling was alien and uncomfortable.

Jacob furrowed his brow. A frown could be seen through his bushy mustache as he allowed Nathan the time for his proposition to fully aerate. Then, Nathan felt that same firmness of grip on his shoulder that he had back at the campus library. It still felt unnatural.

“Let me explain to you how changes were made back before me an'

you an' yer daddy's great-granddaddy were even an idea in some dirty lil' teenager's head.”

Nathan nodded slowly as Jacob carefully rose to his feet, balancing himself as he stood on the sofa's arm and Nathan's thigh respectively. He vanished for a moment into an adjoining room, promptly returning with a simple wooden box approximately the size of his own head. He gave his guest an odd smile and placed the box on the coffee table before him. Then, he gestured at Nathan with a wave of his hand, clearly an encouragement to open the wooden box now on the table.

Nathan cleared his throat nervously and leaned forward, carefully placing one hand on the dusty old lid and then the other. As gently as his eagerness would allow, he slowly lifted its upward. As its hinges creaked open, the ugly little box revealed within it one of the most exquisite pieces of decorative headgear he had ever seen. It was a crown, and one fit for ancient royalty. Its solid-gold frame glowed with a decadent light. Diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires all flashed desperately for his undivided attention. Then, standing proudly in the midst of it all was an unbelievably ornate Latin cross which radiated with the power of ultimate authority.

“Pretty, ain't it?” Jacob said in an inexplicably matter-of-fact tone. It was such an understatement. Nathan felt mesmerized by its beauty as well as its potential historic significance.

“It's incredible,” he replied in a dreamy tone, “How did you obtain such a specimen? What age is it from?” It appeared English in design, but he had no desire to blurt out such a blatant assumption in the presence of his most knowledgeable of peers. Jacob continued.

“Don't matter where it's from, that ain't the point. Back in that day, whoever had this crown was a leader, the boss of e'ryone, a king! Now lemme ask you, how did this crown go from one person to another?”

It seemed like a silly question. Transfer of leadership was common knowledge even in much earlier times. However, today was a strange day, and Nathan began to prepare himself for a less than obvious answer while playing his own response in the safe-zone of common knowledge.

“Elections were held, of course. Candidates stood before their people, presented their future plans, explained their direction, and the people selected who they felt was best for them socially and economically.”

The very moment Nathan finished his textbook answer Jacob burst into uncontrollable laughter. This time, however, Nathan wasn't so offended by this action. He patiently waited for the old scholar to finish his bout and eagerly anticipated the chance to learn of an earlier system in more detail. Jacob held his side as his laughing slowly began to sputter out.

“You have any idea,” he gasped between breaths, “how damned ridiculous that sounds? Elections fer how many thousands of years? I can't believe they got you kids believin' something so damn stupid! So sad it's damn funny!”

Jacob straightened himself out and returned to a serious demeanor. He began to pour himself another glass of wine.

“Back in the day, leaders didn't get picked,” he said, “They wanted that crown, they went up and took it! More people they wanted to lead, the more they had to take! You want that crown, you go on and take that thing! Once you got that, you got the world! Of course, you gotta keep it too. That just made things more complicated.”

Nathan was puzzled. How could leadership be 'taken' without popular support? Granted, there was nothing stopping him from walking into the president's office and claiming to now be in charge, but without the people on his side, it was a meaningless and silly gesture. How could it have possibly been different in the past? Now it seemed like Jacob was babbling. Had the wine gone to his head so early in the evening?

“I know. I know. It don't sound right one bit, but hear this. These people, there was somethin' that was in their heads, and that thing ain't there no more fer us. No, it's there. Just really hard to get to. You kinda hafta pull it out. And once you see it, it all makes sense. If one feller found it, and another don't find it, then that first feller is gonna be the new leader no matter what. Well, unless he don't want it. Like me.”

Feeling lost, Nathan no longer attempted to understand the old man's rambling, but it may have been due to a slight distraction. That eerie feeling of discovery was returning. It felt that he had once again glimpsed a piece of unknown data he was hiding from himself. Then, as it had done before, it vanished to deeper recesses of his mind and threw a dozen more obstacles in the way.

Jacob saw the conflicted expression on his new pupil's face and his eyes lit up. Seeing the time right, he changed his plan of attack.

“Ok,” he began, “That crown there rules the world, ok? All hypothetical. The sucker who got that crown rules the world. You wanna rule the world, ok? Problem is you don't got that crown. But you still wanna rule the world, and to do it you gotta *get* that crown. So,” he paused for a sip of wine before he unloaded a most curious question, “So how're you gonna get it?”

“Gain the support of the people, I guess. If a current ruler realizes that his subjects no longer support his regime, he has little choice aside from stepping down.” The back of his mind itched again. He knew now what he just said couldn't be true. But how did he know that? It was how it was taught to him. He steeled himself for another mental impact as Jacob jumped to his feet like a man half his age.

“Can't be more wrong! Don't need no people on your side if you got a big enough STICK! Got some FRIENDS with sticks, too!?! Even better! You just go an' WHACK that ol' king till he STOPS BREATHIN' and NOW you got yerself a CROWN! Now yer the BOSS! And anyone that don't agree? They can taste the stick, too!”

In the midst of his fury of words, Jacob snatched an umbrella that leaned delicately next to a nearby bookcase and rapped it several times against the wall to enforce certain important words, most violently so on 'stops' and 'breathing'. His wild gestures made Nathan feel ill in his stomach as well as his mind.

“The ol' trick was violence! But they made us forget it! That's how crowns were won! Back then things weren't so nice! They b'lieved bein' the boss was worth DYIN' for! Even more worth makin' other people die for! The real ruler was ALWAYS whoever could make the most people die! Took it outta the books! Took it outta our heads! Took it outta our INSTINCT! That's what the last people did! And that's why they're still our bosses!”

Jacob's breathing became labored. His condition was clearly too poor to maintain such exertion. He stood silently for a moment with one hand gently on his chest and the other digging the end of the umbrella hard into the ground. When he began to sway slightly, Nathan leaped to his feet and across the coffee table to stabilize his ailing mentor. Carefully, he guided Jacob into the recliner nearest the table and stood by his side.

At the exact same time, Nathan had finally dragged that hidden information from its clever hiding space, and after all the evasion,

blockading, running, and misdirecting were cast aside, revelations began crashing in like a tidal wave.

“And that,” Jacob gasped, “And that was when they rewrote our hist'ry,” His expression was soured with a powerful sadness. A defeated frown could be seen through his overgrown facial hair, “I guess it's been peaceful ever since.” Jacob finally caught his breath during the many minutes of silence the two shared after Nathan's walls of reality were shattered by a surreal sledgehammer of truth.

By the end of that night, Nathan knew everything. Jacob was right. The world was a peaceful place, but it was all a lie. In fact, now that he could fathom the opposite, Nathan had acquired a new (Or old.) meaning to what peace actually was. The conflicts, the bloodshed, the betrayals, assassinations and genocides. He and the rest of the world's population lived in a constructed fantasy land of a single imagination, and that imagination wasn't even very good. It was almost too much to handle, but at the same time it wasn't. Jacob had stirred something in Nathan that New Year's eve. Something that he had also stirred within himself years ago, but wisdom told him never to use.

In the days that followed, Nathan spent every waking hour alongside Jacob in his library. Slowly, but still faster than most, he sifted through the knowledge in his mind, replacing the lies with truths and gloomy confusion with defiant rage. Knowing that he once believed his textbooks when he read that George Washington was a lumberjack and baker who invented the cherry pie only made him more furious.

As studies continued, Nathan grew more and more appalled of the mutilation, fabrication, and outright deletion of hundreds upon hundreds of events, deeds, and heroes that should still be honored. History was brutally murdered, and he was the rookie on the forensics team. the anger continued to build, but whenever Jacob showed concern for the emotional well-being of his dear young friend, Nathan would smile and assure him that it was nothing to worry about. He knew now the secrets of kings and tyrants, and with all armies, military leaders, weapons, and knowledge of such things banished forever, it would be easy to obtain that metaphorical crown with a good club and a few followers. However, like Jacob before him, he wasn't nearly foolish enough to want that responsibility. He was a scholar after all, not a leader.

Or so he thought. Though brilliant beyond measure, Nathan was still

a young man with cold eyes and an ambitious fire within that burned hotter and grew more wild with every lie he disproved. Somebody needed to pay for this. Somebody needed to be held accountable.

Six months later, Jacob Statler was buried at the Holy Mother of Mercy Cemetary in a reserved plot that overlooked Rivers Cross. His aging frame had been victim to recent bouts of respiratory illness, but one final case of pneumonia was what reeled his essence back to wherever it goes after the body withers. Sole custody of his estate had been granted to one Nathan Singleton, as he was the sole benefactor in his will. It was a curious gesture to some, but not to the many college students and faculty who had seen them inseparably together for the past several months.

In his final days, Nathan had become as a son to him as well as a friend. During the daytime, he would walk with Jacob about campus, relax with him in the park, and would even take care of his basic errands and maintenance of his home. Then, in the evenings, they read, analyzed, cross-referenced, and studied together like the eccentric history fanatics they loved to be. Nathan had made Jacob's last few months the happiest of his life. They had found a bond with each other that they had both searched their entire lives for, and were the dearest of friends. Now, however, one was gone, and the other, the sole preserver of the truest history of the world, was emotionally shattered.

July in Connecticut is unpleasant to say the least. Though one might be deceived by it's geographical location into thinking that its mid-summer afternoons are not very noteworthy in regards to warm weather, said opinions did not stop the temperature from reaching 104 degrees that day. The crowd mingled in a familiar, melancholy manner as they wallowed in personal pools of irritable, sweat-soaked discomfort. Many students and faculty made time for the gloomy occasion, most of which hailed from the history department in one form or another. The dean of students was present, Dr. Benedict Aimerson, and he would be delivering the eulogy for the funeral. Nathan recognized many of the faces in the crowd from his days in the library. He knew they didn't like him. True to his demeanor before his friendship with the current guest of honor, he kept to himself and talked to nobody, jabbing ice-blue glares at anybody that may have looked his way.

Dr. Aimerson slowly made his way to the podium at the front of the

crowd, fanning himself with the speech in his hand. Nathan, upon seeing that this fool of a scholar had to stoop to prepared words to address the life of one of the greatest professors that Rivers Cross ever had the pleasure of gracing its faculty, felt disgusted.

“Students and fellow faculty members,” he began, “Thank you for coming together with me for such a sad but historic occasion.”

Historic. What did that fool know about anything historic?

“As many of you can attest, Dr. Jacob Statler is a name that is truly dear in all of our hearts.”

What a boob. Some of the faculty, sure, but the man retired 13 years ago; only a handful of the students here even know his name. Most of them are probably here for extra credit or are expecting free snacks with which to nurse their hangovers.

Nathan continued on by only half-listening to the old dean's eulogy; it was all he could do to prevent himself from ascending the steps before him and by force claiming the podium himself. His only friend and greatest teacher was not being done any degree of justice. He just knew it. He was growing increasingly furious, and he wasn't entirely sure why. It couldn't all be blamed on the terrible speech he was trying now his best to tune out. Perhaps attributing to it was the slack-jawed crowd of mindless gawkers, completely unaware of the true brilliance and diligence of the man they had come to wish a peaceful passing. And, if the world were to continue as it had the day before and the day before that, they never would.

All those heroes. All those momentous events. They would have died there as well if it were not for that one winter night. But then again, they were already dead, but unlike the mortal frame of Jacob Statler, a certain series of appropriate actions could lead to their resurrection.

“I liken my old friend to having lived like Socrates, giving all of himself so that the students of his age could move on to forge a better humanity. And, had not Socrates himself been childless the day he drowned in the strait of Gibraltar that spring of 1183, I would have believed Jacob to be one of his kin!”

That was all it took to cause Nathan's rage to explode out of the range of self-control. Like he had already seen it in his mind, he rapidly ascended the stairs to the podium. Then, while Dr. Aimerson was mid-sentence with another lie of a historical analogy, Nathan grabbed him by the throat and hurled him off the stage with a strength only possible

at the very apex of an adrenaline rush. He turned to the crowd with a furious snap, and cast his icy glare at anyone who dared to help the shaking wreck cast from the stage.

With a single inarticulate shout, he gained the attention of the at least two hundred pairs of eyes filled with horror and confusion. This also included the wide-eyed and trembling dean of students, whom aside from a severe emotional shock, seemed to still be physically well.

“Ladies and gentleman,” Nathan began between accelerated breaths. He wasn't one for impromptu speeches, but it was too late to be worrying about that, “I apologize wholeheartedly for such a shocking interruption, but there is a certain matter that my dearest friend Jacob Statler would have you know about Socrates, as would I. For starters, he didn't accidentally drown on a trade ship while crossing the Mediterranean as you were likely taught. He was...” he had to search for common terms his audience would know. Suicide, murder, and capital punishment would not be among them, “He was forced by authorities to die for corrupting the minds of the young! Against his will, he consumed a substance known very well to cause death in human beings! The powers that were had decided that his way of thinking was dangerous! Too dangerous because it upset their leadership!”

The crowd listened on, jaws still agape. Nobody attempted to remove him from causing such a horrible ruckus. It was just as Nathan expected, though. Why would they? They'd never seen a display of disobedience in their entire lives, be that in real life or in popular media. They stood their ground and looked on with the blankest of expressions. Nathan hoped beyond measure that they were indeed getting this.

“In times literally and deliberately forgotten, violence was a means of silencing dissenters, for back then, there were many such people. The true leaders held a monopoly on violence to use as they saw fit to maintain their positions of authority. True political change came not with elections, but with bloodshed!”

He was a nervous, agitated, sweating, rambling madman. Even he knew his rant wasn't making very much sense. But, somehow, his words still held the crowd. They appeared to be listening intently and, surprisingly, intelligently. It seemed like something was stirring in them, and Nathan felt a sense of eerie familiarity in their overt

bewilderment. The hidden instincts that allowed man to dominate weaker man for millennia. It began to feel like that fateful new year's eve when a now resting Jacob Statler used the forbidden key of sleeping knowledge to unlock secrets best left hidden from humans forever. Immediately, Nathan knew to clarify his angle.

“Dr. Aimerson,” he addressed his sacrificial lamb, “despite your terrible eulogy, you are right about one thing,” he returned his cold gaze outward to address the crowd as a whole, “Dr. Statler was more like Socrates than any of you realize. He confided in me a multitude of private lessons that every leader on this planet would declare dangerous. Lessons that, if they were aware were being taught, would have led to his untimely end as well. For divulging the secrets of a nation was considered the ultimate betrayal, and was punishable by death. We can all be thankful That our controllers have also forgotten such dark thoughts, and what was potentially life-saving for Jacob, rest his soul, will now be most advantageous for us.”

He couldn't believe he was doing it, but he couldn't stop now. Jacob Statler was a learned man and very wise. Nathan Singleton was equally learned, but brandished his reckless youth just as Jacob did his quiet reservation. The old man knew what he knew, but he chose not to use it. The young man now concluded that he chose poorly. The world would have its history back, and old heroes would be rightfully reborn. They would pay for their lies. He wasn't sure if the crowd would follow him or not, but he also remembered how just a handful of truths changed his life and devotions forever just six months prior.

As Nathan saw a dangerously familiar, conflicted expression on his new pupils' faces, his eyes lit up. Seeing the time right, he changed his plan of attack.

“I have a crucial lesson for you all that I must teach, but you have to humor this silly young historian for a quick moment,”

He clenched the podium with whitened knuckles. His next words fell like death itself.

“I would like you all to visit the woods behind us, and each of you find a good, strong stick.”