

BEST SELLER [Part One] by S.T. LORE

WHENEVER and WHEREVER he appears the obscenely large nose of Mr. Hans Albers (a Senior Executive with International Marketing Firm MANIFOLD DOCUMENTS GROUP) stabs forward in a V-shaped profile. His powerful genetic beak (featuring a slight hump and flared subterranean nostrils) is like a hunting arrow, like a stealth bomber, like a hawk at noon, directing his eyeballs on a sloping runway toward their latest objective.

For fifteen years now, Hans has successfully navigated the global advertising sector: jostling tenders, renewing contracts; dealing in a trade of business cards and shaking of hands. Press releases. Marketing dinners. ‘What are the latest figures on our sponsorship endorsement?’ But following the disappearance of his beloved mentor, he awaits the early warning signs ‘from a plague of occupational hazards’. After twenty-two years on the job his mentor suffered episodic memory loss, finally betrayed by a series of violent, shaking tremors. By all accounts, the contemporary landscape simply overwhelmed his ageing mind. To protect himself, Hans obeys the cosmic laws of his chosen profession *implementing them with all seriousness* by remaining anonymous and observing the details: be it parasite or nation, exotic bug or holy monk. Trends need not be chased. Slogans need not be invented. He pursues the homeless into a puddle of urine or enters a

government building under surveillance, preserving his acute sensory equipment by maintaining a somewhat inhuman emotional distance.

Exiting *Carriage 4* of the underground train, Hans is assaulted by warm, unearthly air tainted by brake dust. Under a cavalcade of billboard advertising (energy drinks, life insurance policies, two men fighting in a cage) he spies a hooded individual slumped on the otherwise deserted station. Approaching the man like referee views a boxer on the canvas: the man's eyes are open but his body does not react. A nearby beanie conceals an electrical item plugged into a light socket, and using the pointy end of his felt-tip pen, Hans flips the headwear open to depress a button on the man's phone. The cracked screen glows with the image of a religious temple. Tall minarets are carved with a complex maze-like design and bathed in the moon glow of what Hans deciphers is a mild Tunisian night. Crumpled under the man's phone is a scrap of paper — *'... the largest building in the world is a close contest between a Dutch flower Market and the US Pentagon ...'*

Tucking his train ticket under the man's phone Hans exits the station and confronts a light rain blanketing the city streets. Descending the gentle slope of a vacant city mall Hans detects a floral scent of significant magnitude, at odds with the makeshift homeless shelters: dome tents, tarpaulins, shopping trolleys under a café eave. On the far eastern corner, the dark glass façade of the Colonial State Centre looms into view (a place Hans

recognises as the location where *Morpheus* was tortured by *Agent Smith*). On either side of this haunting gothic building, two less impressive glass-curtain towers border the US Consulate, the 7SEVEN Network News and the triumphant Ionic granite column tower of the Commonwealth Bank.

Yanking up the collar of his coat, removing a folded printout from his pocket, underneath a circular logo of the hotel (a fascist graphic of three intersecting spheres) Hans reads the following instructions: 'To gain after hours access, collect an entry card key inside the MLC Centre.'

Zigzagging his luggage past a string of boutique fashion stores (Tiffany, Prada, and Rolex) Hans halts before the window display of a young model. Like an erotic sphinx wrapped in plastic film the dimensions of her 15-foot face dwarf his orthopedically challenged figure. Her grey eyes examine him closely, dispassionately, unscrupulously like an atavistic witness to his unknown future. This *PRADA* model draped in blue is the latest monument by humans (yet to appear on coins but paraded on pillars of monumental architecture). She does not move and will never look away, despite the tragedies she has witnessed. Hans is jolted by a resemblance to the daughter he has never met: with the same features as her mother he no longer speaks too. Distracted by her face, an *Ibis* stalks into place, curving its falcate beak past his luggage to snatch at the raw mince of a half-eaten hamburger.

In the light mist created by midnight summer rain a short, squat, UFO-shaped hotel appears to levitate above ground with its disc-shaped exterior streaked by gradients of purple light. Sheltering under Sydney's first official high-rise (on the extant site of *The Australia Hotel*) the place is featured heavily in rock music videos from the early 2000's, glossy magazine spreads for PRADA and for BENNETON, and as site of advertising exhibition *HARD BLACK* and the strange location is instantly tattooed on his brain.

Stabbing the door buzzer inward Hans revels in masochistic pleasure as the sound re-inflates a teenage clerk fallen asleep at his desk. With the tiled floor echoing with Hans' leather-soled steps the pimpled clerk automatically engages a robotic voice to recite a script previously rehearsed:

“Good evening Sir. The hotel has a bistro, a nighttime bar ... open until 3 AM ... and a Reading Room filled with plenty of hotel stationary. Breakfast is of course complimentary, but owing to the disturbance of the recent siege, all mobile phone and WiFi services have been temporarily blocked ...”

Deviating from the script, the kid leans forward and breaks his formal tone. In a whisper, he advises Hans: “hey, if you are stuck for coverage, down on the lower levels, you can sometimes steal some reception by holding up your phone near the air conditioner grates joining the FOOD COURT underneath.” Pushing a *Room Swipe Card Key* across the bench, he uses a

hand signal to indicate Hans directions: “Outside these doors, take a hard left at the alley and opposite the hamburger stand a lift will take you up to your 3rd floor suite.”

Using the swipe card key, the lift door opens onto a hotel interior paralysed in time. Under a portrait of the Queen, a rubber pot plant sits on a wooden bench supporting a circular map, a dial-up phone and a lockable glass cabinet. Scanning over various death notices and membership applications, Hans Albers presentation is scheduled for tomorrow morning at 8 AM.

‘Board meetings occur on the second Tuesday of every month. Please note: front doors lock automatically so if you require entry post these hours call +61 431 575 277. Non-attendance of any member is to be submitted in the week prior to the meeting. By ORDER of CTA Treasurer Mr G. Gillespie.

Above other lingering smells of extinguished cigarettes, cheap martinis, bitter pots of coffee and buckets of bleach, Hans prodigious nose twitches at a feminine fragrance defiantly at odds with his surroundings. The floral bouquet wrenches him into the olfactory equivalent of a tropical island. Plunged into a proto-hippie daydream of palm fronds and the riotous greenery of a foreign jungle, an elderly man and trio of almond-eyed women gesture for him to sit on a cream lounge chair shrouded in tobacco smoke ...