
WILDERNESS OUTTAKE

This excerpt from the forthcoming novel

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

by **Nicholas Hallum**

has not been approved for publication.

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STORY NOTES

ABOUT CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM E. COLBY

William Egan Colby (January 4, 1920 – April 27, 1996) was an American intelligence officer who served as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from September 1973 to January 1976. He was known as the “CIA Spy Master.” During World War II Colby served with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). In the 1960s, Colby supervised the CIA’s involvement in the Vietnam War as Southeast Asia Station Chief and ran the infamous Phoenix Program in Vietnam. The CIA’s 10th director was best known for revealing the “family jewels” in 1975 — a compilation of the agency’s assassination attempts, drug testing on unwitting humans and eavesdropping on war protesters. The disclosures made Colby a pariah to CIA officers who believed such transparency imperiled the agency’s mission. He died in mysterious circumstances – possibly murder – in April 1996, at his summer house in Maryland. The circumstances of his death, as described by Mahmoud, are accurate to the known history, although without supernatural involvement (*as far as we can assess with current instrumentation*). He was a fervent Catholic.

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ALTERNATE SECTION
IRAQI DESERT – COLBY’S DEMISE

2002 + 1996

2002

IRAQI DESERT
SECURE OPERATION

Night in the Iraqi desert was a familiar thing for Peter. It was an enormous shroud that wrapped the world around, painting black every signal, muffling every sensory input. Peter shivered: his mind had made the night too much like a grave. There was life here, there were lights. He glanced upward at the great belt of stars that filled the empty night, and he remembered the great telescope tubes that he had used with Sū Lín at Yale – the movement tracking a single galaxy, light-years away. The stars above them now were solid though, not trembling with interference in the upper atmosphere. There were no shifts in them, *please God*, no trembling unrealities between them and the empty night sky.

The fire on the desert floor flickered before them, and he could see in relief now the faces of the Bedouin men on the other side of the fire. They spoke to each other in low poetic syllables, a comfortable conversation borne of long familiarity. Someone raised a voice in a high-pitched mocking tone, and the rest of them laughed. A joke. Peter was envious of them: any friends he grew close to inevitably came to grief.

“You have done this many times before, *sadiqi*,” said Mahmoud.

Peter thought of the face of his Tibetan guide in china, dying hopeless on the mountainside, his flesh and his eyes covering slowly in frost. One more friend he’d lost.

“Yes,” he admitted. “But never have we had control. I do not know if any of our goals have truly been accomplished. Our work is always twisted by the *djinn* to their own purposes.”

Mahmoud gave a short barking laugh. “So with my attempt in 1991. It did not work. No control over this thing. So this attempt may come to nothing as well.”

“But it may succeed after all,” said Peter.

“True. I am not sure of failure. Because in 1996, they tried again. They asked me to take an action. And that time, it was easier for me to ask the entity to act – it is easier when you already have a captive one, to call one with the other’s voice.”

“What did they have you do?”

Mahmoud looked him in the eye. “I did not do it alone, you know. I was not the only one responsible.”

Peter changed his question then. “What hold do they have on you?”

Mahmoud’s face darkened. “I did it because I believed it was a right thing, that was the only way I would do it. And now they hold it over me, over my family.”

The fire hissed between them. After a long silence, Peter spoke. “I have no family left now.”

“Then you should count yourself lucky,” said Mahmoud. “For they are the threat to me. See, the OSS office, they convinced me to do this because he was a bad man – a man who must be killed, not only because of his knowledge, but of what he had done with that knowledge, and what he might be about to reveal to the world.”

“He was an old man,” continued Mahmoud. “A man who had once been powerful. In the Water-Gating era, at the time of the American War of Aggression on the Vietnamese.”

“That is not what we call it – it was for us the war to liberate Vietnam.”

Mahmoud shrugged. He did not care what Americans called the war.

“I was told I must find a way that he could be removed before he revealed what he knew of the powers that worked in the country, the powers that were called down under his watch. This man, he was called Nixon’s architect of the *Amerikaneer* War, before he lost?”

Peter’s mouth went dry. He knew who this might be: William Colby himself. Architect of the war. It could only be Colby.

“*Sadiqi*, it took time to do this thing,” Mahmoud explained. “You see, I was forced to watch this old and evil CIA man for many days with *durbun* from across the water. I waited on an island, in a place called Neale Sound, you know of it?”

“Yes,” said Peter, his heart sick at the story. “*Durbun*. You watched the old man with binoculars, is that what you mean?”

Peter thought of the bespectacled old professorial Director, alone at his Maryland cabin. The man Mahmoud had killed had been ostensible executive director even while Robinson Gale pulled the strings on his departure from Hong Kong.

William Colby, the genial man Peter had interviewed with before he left the States, the man whose suspicious death by drowning had never quite been solved to the satisfaction of any serving CIA officer.

Mahmoud nodded. “In a dark room, I was like to *djinn* myself, I was hidden. Thus, with the long-distance *bino-culars*, I watched the old man, in his beach house, as he fixed his boat, as he made his dinner. And I found that at nearly every day, at the time of *maghreb*, he would go in his small boat – his canoe.”

Maghreb, thought Peter. Evening prayer.

“But this twilight time is a dangerous time of day on the water, for a man of seventy-six years old, especially for one who was known to the *afrit*. For all know that at that hour, their power is the greatest, their ability to see the future opens in the hour of doors opening, of gates being shut and opened. This is the hour I chose, *Peace be upon him, In’shallah*.” Mahmoud sighed.

Peter had the impression that Mahmoud had invoked Allah’s name at the end as a kind of blessing on his action, much as a Christian would cross himself in sadness or chagrin after an act they were ashamed to admit.

“You brought down on him the power of the Twin Towers?” said Peter, his voice rising. “How would you do such a thing to an old man?”

“*Lā*,” said Mahmoud, correcting him. No. “I was not able to use the ones in the Towers, and this almost destroyed my mission.”

Peter gave him a quizzical look, and Mahmoud looked away quickly then. Peter belatedly remembered that to look away when one speaks was a sign of politeness in the Arab world. Mahmoud cared about his feelings.

“You see, despite the fact that this old man had no locks worth the speaking of on the door of his house or any firearm upon him, he did have such protection as could be found from those entombed in the Towers. His powerlessness was but a falsity.”

“He was not as helpless as he first appeared. You’re saying he did have protection.”

Peter recalled now that Colby had known all the intricacies of this present battle in the centuries-long conflict. He had known, but he had tried to avoid its complications. In fact, Colby had tried to question him about it, tried to extract a promise from him – he had even fired Angleton at the height of the Tower project, just as the goals of that occult project were accomplished, because Colby hated the idea of the *djinn* being part of their war-game planning, and he’d never wanted their soil polluted by that stench.

Peter had even known OSS and CIA officers who called Colby the “warrior priest” – for Colby had taken every measure he could to protect his family from the consequences of the OSS investigations. He was Catholic, and he had his daughters’ first communion take place in the holy of holies itself – in St. Peter’s Basilica, the Holies of Holies for Catholics. Of course, with what Peter knew now, he doubted that act of religious sanction provided much protection at all.

Did any of them have any protection, anything that would keep them from the action of men like themselves, men who were fed lies and who controlled the hidden ones, the *djinn*? Peter shook his head. What lies were they being told now, about Şaddām? What truths had been kept from them?

“He had protection,” Mahmoud said again. “*Na’am*. The power in New York was unable to act against him. He had dipped himself in the blood sacrificed to them in Asia. So I had to turn to an older power, the power brought to your country by your War Between States. This was the only recourse I had to do the assignment given me.”

Peter sighed, a final sound. “You killed Bill Colby.”

Mahmoud shook his head. “I do not know what his name might be.”

“But you killed that old man, at Neale Sound, in the end. The man in the canoe.”

“*Lā*.” Mahmoud shook his head. “No, I merely used the spirit to force the idea of going in the small boat into his head – a natural thing – but later than his usual hour. And then the spirit made his hands sleep, so that they would not work as he desired. So that his body was helpless as he floated on the water, in his canoe, *alay-hi wa-sallam*.”

“That was all it took to kill him?”

“There was more,” said Mahmoud. “The spirit then brought sand billowing up inside the boat, the sand filled the boat until it sank. I could see it happen, a whirlwind of sand, I watched it with my *durbun*, bino-culars, from across the water.”

Peter imagined the old man, paralyzed, sitting in the boat, watching sand slowly well up from nothingness, spontaneously filling the floor of the canoe as it floated on the water. Strange sand, sand from the Arabian plains, sand that would sink the boat, leaving Colby helplessly sinking down into the depths.

“And then the spirit held him,” said Mahmoud. “At the bottom of the channel, for seven days, as is tradition for such spirits.”

Peter felt a chill. Mahmoud had to be telling the truth. He remembered the search – they had only found Colby’s body nine days later, remarkably un-decayed. And the canoe itself had been found full of unlikely sand of unknown origin.

“I was told he was an evil man,” said Mahmoud apologetically. “A man who would do much more that was evil in the world. A killer of children, of women, of all who are helpless. He killed them with fire. He must be stopped, I was told. I did what I was told.”

Peter knew that Colby had forcibly retired Angleton, in the hope that such an action would bring the secret OSS activities to a halt, that would stop the momentum of the United States to embrace the occultic power that lurked at its core. Colby had always felt that such a power would corrupt them from inside, was a means that would subvert all good ends.

Just before his death, Peter now suspected that Colby had finally discovered that Angleton’s continued OSS network had kept alive and grown the great project to shackle such powers to the will of the United States, and to preserve the reins of such power so that men who had no Congressional oversight, and had few moral qualms – men like Dick Cheney – could seize and use such powers when the time came. Perhaps the final straw was Colby learning the truth of the existence of such entities on the soil of the United States, brought there and fed by the OSS over the years.

No doubt, Colby was again willing to come clean – willing to tell the Senate Oversight Committee, once again, of the hard truths he knew.

Peter shook his head, nausea filling his belly. The gentle Catholic family man, Colby, had been killed to prevent the Skyrise program from being shut down, to keep in place that seeping power corrupting the foundation of the United States.

Colby had always done what he considered to be right. And the gentle thoughtful scholar beside him now – Mahmoud – had killed that man. All it took to kill Colby was a lie to someone – to this equally gentle family man next to him – who didn’t know the other man, who had the power and the knowledge to kill him. What had Peter been told to do? What lies had been fed to him in Hong Kong? And in turn, what lies had he told Sū Lín?

The fire guttered red and blue and threatened to go out: dried camel droppings and old date branches were thin fuel. Momentarily, the starlight and moonlight above them was brighter than the fire. In that wan luminescence, Peter could see the planes and hollows in the men’s faces, the movement of their jaws in shadow as they spoke.

Unbidden, a memory came to Peter now from nearly twenty years ago. May of 1976. It was after an OSS training run in the Mojave desert, working with that injured entity encased in the

tall BREN desert tower. After the Skyrise experiment was done, they sat around a campfire in the small hours of the morning. Angleton was there, and Gale. Along with Peter and several other trainees.

At such times, James Angleton loved poetry. Peter looked away from the dying fire, into the depths of the pathless wasteland. He recalled when Angleton took out a small book of poetry by a fire in the Mojave, and read to them, declaiming the words from T.S. Eliot's *Hollow Men*:

*This is the dead land
This is the cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.*

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