

The Mark of the Master

Thompson sank into one of the soft leather chairs in the Director's office. "Dr. Corin, I think I know why we're making such slow progress on the microscope."

The Director, a small, thin man in his sixties, took a seat behind his huge desk.

"Your timing is excellent, Thompson, because I was about to ask you that very question. I'm all ears."

Thompson removed his glasses and put them in his pocket. "Patmosian is slowing up the works with some wildly unprofessional ideas."

Corin traced an imaginary line on the polished surface of his desk. "Patmosian is the best assistant we could give you. Are you two having personality conflicts?"

"That's not it, sir. I realize I've had such problems in the past with other assistants, but that's not what's happening here. As far as his capabilities are concerned, he's first-rate. It's his attitude toward the project that disturbs me. He's been babbling something about it being against God's will that we finish the microscope."

Corin sat back in his chair. "God's will? What has he said?"

"Well, today, when I asked him why this microscope could possibly concern God, he said the Bible teaches that man is punished when he shows irreverence. He mentioned that in the ancient days, the temple of God had an inner chamber, a holy of holies, which could only be entered safely when entered according to God's command. Anyone who entered improperly was cursed. This is the kind of tripe I've been hearing from him. Dr. Corin, Patmosian's attitude is unprofessional and a threat to the timely completion of this project. I'm telling you something must be done."

"Getting rid of him would be difficult because he does good work. I'm afraid it wouldn't look good to the trustees if we changed project staff at this late date. Right now I just don't have anything to go on. You'll just have to make the best of things for the time being, Thompson."

"Yes sir," Thompson said as politely as it is possible to say so through clenched teeth. He hurried out of the Director's office, walked past Patmosian without a word, and went for a long drive.

Thompson returned to the lab late that night with an idea. In an hour or so, everything was in place. He powered up the device, and made a few adjustments. As he did, he kept a tape-recorded log of his work. Finally he trapped a single particle in a field and focused upon it. The particle resembled an icosahedron, each face of which was a pentagon. He saw a bright dot-like marking at the exact center of each of the faces, and zoomed in on one of them. He spoke for the log.

"Very peculiar. The dot is recognizable as ..."

Suddenly he lurched backward from the eyepiece, clutching his eyes, and screaming. He staggered to the door and down the hallway, where he collapsed. From the lab were heard sounds of electrical sparking.

Patmosian sat beside the hospital bed. He was the only visitor. Thompson slept fitfully for a while, and then awoke suddenly. He groped at the eye bandages, and before Patmosian could stop him, he tore them off. He began to sob.

A doctor entered the room to check on the patient, saw that the bandages were off, and left to call the nurse to replace them. Patmosian followed him into the hallway.

"Excuse me, Doctor. Is Dr. Thompson your patient?" The doctor managed a weak smile. "That's right. Who are you?"

"I'm Michael Patmosian. Thompson and I are research associates at Sterchen."

"Good to meet you. Uh, how can I help you?"

"What are the results of your examination of Thompson?"

"He is totally blind. His retinas are strangely inactive with no nerve function whatever. I've never seen or heard of such a case."

"Can it be treated?"

The doctor stiffened, then relaxed with an effort. "We are still completing some further testing of his condition. It is too early for me to answer that question. Excuse me."

Patmosian returned to the hospital room, where Thompson lay quietly. He had stopped weeping, and was still except for his hands, with which he traced a pattern on the bed sheet. The pattern seemed vaguely familiar to Patmosian.

"You told me something yesterday, something about reverence for God's creation." Thompson's voice cracked. "Patmosian, I have unworthily entered that holy of holies, and this blindness is punishment from God for my impudence."

Not knowing how to respond, Patmosian changed the subject. "I reviewed the computer log. It proceeds to the point where you were about to describe the magnified dot. You cried out, and then the log contains the sound of electrical sparking. Finally, another voice can be heard saying, "Patmosian, open this man's eyes."

Thompson started. "I heard no voice!"

"The voice is on the log, and the lab staff is accusing me of leaving the scene of the accident. But we both know I wasn't there. I was home in bed, having a dream."

Thompson sat up suddenly. "About what?"

Patmosian stood and walked to the window. He opened the drapes and looked west toward the river in the distance. The sun was setting and its reflection made the river look like molten gold flowed through it.

"I'm not sure this is a good time to talk about this. You need rest..."

"Tell me about the dream!" Thompson nearly screamed it. "I must understand!"

Patmosian turned, alarmed at the desperation in Thompson's voice. He walked back to Thompson's side and sat down.

"In the dream an angel told me to visit you and to read a certain verse." He reached for the Bible on the bed stand and turned to Revelation 21:6.

"And he said unto me, it is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Thompson sighed and sank back on his pillow. "I saw that," he said quietly.

"You saw what, Thompson? What did you see?" Patmosian searched his pale face.

"I saw the letters alpha and omega! I saw the signature of the Creator!" Suddenly Thompson lifted his hands to his eyes. "What was that?", he exclaimed.

"What was what?"

"That...that flash."

"I didn't see any..."

Thompson tore at the bandages, pulling bits of skin and eyebrow with them. "Oh my God, my God!"

Patmosian rushed out of the room. When he returned with the doctor, Thompson was standing at the window. The sun was setting, and the sky shone with a brilliant red. The bandages lay in a mess on the bed.

"It's beautiful. The sunset, I mean. I feel as though I've never seen one before tonight."