



I guess I was about twelve when I first heard of the Sons of Thor. Recently I'd been let in on the family secret. Back in our old hometown my dad had been the most wanted man in the region. That's while he secretly helped put criminals out of business. I also learned that some of my honorary Uncles who stayed at our former dude ranch's guest cabins had also been in "the business." Some called them Independent Operators.

Now that I was "in the know" I was allowed to sit later around the campfires, or watching the star drenched sky from outside the light pollution of Grand Forks, North Dakota. And that's when incredible stories would be told.

One night we sat waiting for one of the Gemini spacecraft to pass overhead. My honorary Uncle Dick remarked that he'd flown an open topped bi-plane with stars out like this once in France, during World War 1.

"That day was the first time I fought the Sons of Thor," he remarked quietly.

"There's no record of Americans fighting the Sons during that war," came my dad's voice out of the darkness.

"Don't I know it," replied Uncle Dick. "Happened like this..."

His son, Curtis, and I forgot all about the spaceship as we listened. With dad's help Curt and I caged the story of his first 1930's encounter with the Sons out of him the next night.

But I thought there must be more about the Sons of Thor.

The day he left Uncle Dick told me, "If you want to know more, ask your big Uncle Jim and Uncle Tony.

I did.

Want to read the two stories Uncle Dick (a/k/a The Phantom Detective) told? The Sons of Thor are in "Pro Se Presents" #9.

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Spring 1990

In full combat rig, I quietly picked the lock. I'd gassed three guard dogs and one human on the way in to the remote hunting lodge. I still felt like I was chasing the Boogie Man. A very deadly group of Boogie Men. The Sons of Thor.

The Soviets were supposed to have wiped out the Sons' last enclave in about 1955. Or so the story went. Unlike the garden variety Nazi, their cause tied in with their sacred land. They couldn't relocate to Argentina, or where-ever. Stalin, and his successors tolerated no counter-revolutionaries.

I'd never heard word of them on the street until two weeks ago. Then somebody stole all the information about the Sons from locked archives of the local University. And left a dead security guard behind. Sure, some of the material was valuable, but I had a hunch there was more to it.

My childhood friend Curt Van Loan says I have a gift for finding the unusual. I faxed a copy of the missing items to him at Havens International Media. He called me back before the final page finished transmitting.

"Ol' buddy," he drawled, "you just rang the bell. Big time! I didn't even know some of this stuff still existed. Much less on this side of the Atlantic. Well, outside of maybe Langley C.I.A. archives. How did the university get it?"

"A lot of it came from the Ashton-Kirk estate," I replied. "Those boxes were to remain sealed until 2001. The rest appears to have been collected for a doctoral dissertation on splinter religious groups. The

candidate vanished a few months ago. Curt, am I right? The material covers the Sons of Thor?"

"Covers? Pal, you could open a new chapter of the Sons with that stuff. All you'd need were people willing to barter their souls for power. I hope the Voice finds them, and quick! Let me know if I can help."

I don't think I'd ever heard Curt Van Loan that rattled. To use my working name, even on a scrambled line, showed just how tightly wound he'd suddenly become. So I changed my face and started looking for answers. For nearly a week I drew mostly blanks. But a pattern slowly emerged.

Every antiquities and rare book dealer in the region, honest or crooked, told the same story. Just over a year ago the doctorate candidate made the rounds looking for material. Some related to the Sons, but she also sought texts and icons related to every small faith from them to the Amish. Just after the scholar vanished, a very intense college aged man came looking only for the material related to the Sons. He flashed money, but got few results.

I pulled together a decent description of the young man. Then I headed for the University. The guy turned out to be an overachiever, with connections. Business major, with minors in Psychology, and Comparative Religion. Member of the most upscale frat on the campus. The kind where members feel they're entitled to whatever they want.

The doctoral candidate vanished near the end of the fall semester. Come the new term my suspect and several of his fraternity brothers decided to take that semester off to travel abroad. I started checking on the frat rats and their backgrounds.

With Curt's help I discovered the crew did indeed visit London, Paris, and quite a bit of Germany, being among the first visitors to tour much

of the now opened East Germany. But then they came home. One at a time, and through Canada and Mexico. Two weeks after the last one returned came the archive raid.

Now credit card purchases of the group showed up in circular area around a large and hilly forested region. Most of the land turned out to be privately held. Curt's eager, but discrete, researchers soon discovered that one large plot belonged to one of the frat-boys' grandfather. Local legend held that the hunting lodge on the property served mainly as a venue for hunting illicit activities and forbidden pleasures.

So there I went. I hiked in from five miles out loaded like a pack mule. At the base of the hill holding the lodge I found trail showing signs of use. The other half dozen paths I'd encountered looked like the last person on them had been an Indian. This trail seemed to circle the whole hill.

So I waited. About an hour later someone came round the trail's bend. The fellow had the look and feel of a professional. An alert, but bored professional. He appeared to be in his thirties. He carried a pump action shotgun with a holster on his hip. He paused about twenty yards past me to relieve himself into a small sinkhole. He did some stretches with the shotgun, then continued on.

With the guard out of sight I scurried most of the way up the hill. Circling around I found an active path leading up to the lodge. The guard made a circuit about every forty-five minutes. Around twenty-five meters from the lodge lay a pair of concentric fences about five yards apart. Guard dogs. Had to be. The fence even crossed the primitive service road to the lodge. That meant that all traffic to the place used the seen-better-days ariel tram to the next lower hill. I settled into a spot shielded from the lodge with a view of both trails.

I waited for the guard to change. Just before dusk began a burly fellow carrying another shotgun and a night vision device came down from

the lodge. He pulled one of those new folding A-frame ladders from behind a tree. He used the ladder to bridge both fences. Some minutes later the other guard reversed the process. Shortly after that three dobermans made a loping circuit of the fenced area.

Just before full dark I waited behind a huge oak tree on the circular trail. I held a silenced Glock in one hand. One of my dad's original gas guns filled the other. Sure, I had slimmer new models. But for the Sons of Thor the older version seemed appropriate.

As the guard stepped by I moved toward him. Dad's gun put a good sized cloud around his head. The first whiff of dad's gas makes most people take a gasping breath. He was no different. Before he could make any significant move I smashed his right hand with the butt of the Glock. The shotgun fell into last fall's layer of leaves. Then he crumpled beside the weapon. I took the small walkie-talkie he carried.

Back up the hill I tossed some beef jerky over the fence. It took a little while for the dogs to get wind of it. When they showed up I hosed them down with gas. By that time I decided the woods were now almost as dark as a Son of Thor's heart.

I could detect no electronic alarms on the fences. And there seemed to be none active on the lodge itself. The place had alarms installed. Around 1960, at the latest. No current in them. The old Yale lock finally yielded to my picks. I slipped into a lower level corridor I judged to be between the servants' quarters and some storage areas.

I followed the smell of cooking. That led to a heavy door that leaked a little noise along with the odor of frying meat and onions. I risked a quick look through the small inset window. The place turned out to be a combination kitchen, dining and break area. The recent guard sat at a table with coffee and a sandwich. Another man worked a big skillet over a gas stove. Two more of the same type tried to improve the picture on a huge black and white TV. I changed my vocal implant

to my signature Twilight Zone voice. Then I took a deep breath and stepped inside.

The former guard saw me first. He grabbed for his holster. The quiet pop of a round from the silenced Glock, and the shattering of the coffee cup it hit, got the attention of the rest.

“Move and you die!”

My voice changed pitch and tone five times with those four words. It scares even people who have never heard of The Voice. The guard froze as hot coffee and porcelain fragments hit his face. They all took in my black ops style combat rig with a black sniper's veil covering my head.

“Sleep or die!” I said as I triggered the gas gun.

Two minutes later I'd assured myself that all slept and no others lurked in the connecting rooms. I stuffed them all in a closet and blocked the door.

Back in the corridor I checked out a couple of storerooms that connected to it. I found food for at least a month for twenty people. Then I headed up to the upper crust's digs.

The upper level turned out to be divided into three areas. Guest rooms and suites to the rear. Common areas could be found in the center. Looking down into the beautiful wooded valleys sat the keep of the lord of the manse.

I found four of the six frat-boys in the living room. They watched video porn with beer as they waited for supper. They'd have a long wait. They made quite a bit of noise. They made a bit more as a gas disperser landed among their chairs and sofa.

As they began to fall I heard a muffled, “Keep it down out there!”

I turned as a side door to the room opened. This college kid carried a Colt Peacemaker in a left handed cross draw holster. His hand flashed from the door knob to the pistol. But I was faster. One of my custom throwing knives sank into his forearm as his hand closed on the gun butt.

Before his mind could process the shock I reached him. With a quick one-two I gut punched the kid, then triggered the gas gun into the room behind him. I pulled the sagging body aside to dive low through the door.

The sixth frat-boy worked at rising from a desk chair as the gas began to reach him. As he passed out he just managed to say, "But we can't be beaten..." Then he hit the floor, his holstered Luger untouched.

The door to the owner's area was locked. From the outside. I made a sweep of the guest and common areas. Nobody else home. Back in the office/den I found every bit of flat space covered with stolen Sons of Thor references. And study notes.

I retrieved my knife from the frat-boy's arm. Into the wound I poured a coagulant and germ killing concoction I'd learned about from my big Uncle Jim. Something he'd learned from his grandfather. It stings like Hell, but stops almost any bleeding. I found a set of keys on Mr. Luger.

While the rest of the lodge classed as luxurious. I quickly upgraded the owner's suite to downright opulent. That is if you were into extremely expensive art mostly right out of the Kama Sutra. Then I recognized one painting that went missing in World War Two.

I pulled my mind back to the present. All of the doors off the corridor were locked. Light came out from under only one of them. I listened at all the other doors, but heard nothing.

Choosing the most used key on the ring I tried it in the lock of that backlit door. The mechanism barely made a sound. Gun in each hand I stepped inside.

What I found was hardly what I expected. A thin man of about middle age lay on a top of the line hospital bed. In addition to movement restraints, he had an oxygen line and tubes both giving and receiving fluids. I guess he felt the changing air patterns from the open door. He came awake slowly. Much to my surprise no fear tinged his shaky voice. In fact I thought I detected hope.

“And who might you be?”

I didn't think to change my voice back to something human. “A seeker of truth,” I croaked.

His face lit up. “The Independent Operator!” came his strong whisper. He closed his eyes for a moment. A sudden tear flowed from each one before he continued, “My prayers have been answered... I am Chief Warrant Officer Steven Owens, formerly of U. S. Army Intelligence, and the last living Son of Thor.”

Knock me over with a broom straw. Except for Curt Van Loan and my dad, I can count the people I've heard use the term 'Independent Operator' on my thumbs.

“You know who I am?” I asked

“By name, not hardly. They used to play us the call you made to the Secret Service after you busted that attempt on Jimmy Carter. Just so we'd be aware if we bumped into you. I didn't know you were still active. Now, can you turn off that IV drip? Its got a mild sedative in it. Keeps me loopy.”

When I hesitated he continued, “You've got all kind of reasons to be suspicious. And I could see you've heard of the Sons of Thor. Don't let

me loose 'till you're convinced. But I can convince you faster clear headed. Now, how many did you take down so far?"

"Six frat-boys, three dogs, and five guards," I replied feeling as if control slipped out of my hands.

"That's all the bodies I know about. I have cancer. That's why I retired from the Army. They give me my chemo. My nurse is locked in the sleeping room over there. My sister's down in the dungeon. She's the one who accidentally started this whole mess. Her and her blessed thesis."

A busy three hours later I slipped out of the place. Before I'd walked a mile I heard helicopters headed for the parking lot on the tram hill. Curt Van Loan sure knew who to call at the Defense Department.

As I walked I thought about a woman named Freida. And how her independent mindset hopefully spelled the end of the Sons of Thor.

The man called Falco represented the strongest bloodline back to the beginning of the Sons. Then the Nazis ordered him to the United States. This threw the Council of Thor's plans for him out the window. Before he left, the Council ordered him to impregnate four women to preserve the bloodline. With the Sons believing women were dumb servants of superior men, nobody thought to ask Freida what she thought of the idea. Having no choice, she bore the child in silence.

At age three young Stefan and the other three were ordered to the Son's boarding school for proper indoctrination. As the group approached the railroad station a British bombing raid began. Freida grabbed Stefan and split from the group. With an intelligence unsuspected by her masters she managed to disappear with the boy.

When the war ended they lived in what became the American Zone of Occupied Germany. Freida knew the Sons would regroup and be

looking for them. So she found a quiet loner American soldier and got him to fall in love with her. He adopted Stefan and brought them home to Missouri.

What she did not expect was that she too would fall in love. Twice. The respect and kindness of her new husband, and of his family, transformed her. She joyfully bore him five more children. And she fell in love with her new country, problems and all.

All along the way she taught Stefan, now Steven, about the evil that was the Sons of Thor. They would “speak German” privately in Steven's room. They did not know Genie, the youngest child, could hear them from her “secret place” in the house. This sparked her interest in comparative religion.

Steven joined the Army as an Intelligence Analyst. Later he revealed his background to his commander. For many years he headed a team tracking down any remnant of the Sons outside the Soviet Block.

Just before Steven's cancer diagnosis happened Genie headed back to school to pursue her Doctorate. She started digging for material on the Sons of Thor. Not understanding the possible consequences, she mentioned her interest to the frat-boy undergrad. Who mentioned it to the grandson of the lodge owner. Who just happened to belong to an acolyte family to the Sons. And then the whole mess started. Seems grandson thought the power of Thor's blessings could be transferred to new bloodlines. CW5 Owens played him around in circles like a piano on wheels. Then I showed up.

Curt Van Loan will check this out, of course. But I think the power quest of the Sons of Thor has finally ended.

Write www.planetarystories@gmail.com and give us your comment.