PRIVATE GAMES

SPECIAL FREE PREVIEW: THE FIRST 16 CHAPTERS
Private Games
BOOKS BY JAMES PATTERSON

The Private Novels

Private Games (with Mark Sullivan)
Private: #1 Suspect (with Maxine Paetro)
Private (with Maxine Paetro)

A complete list of books by James Patterson is at the back of this book. For previews and information about the author, visit JamesPatterson.com or find him on Facebook or at your app store.
For Connor and Bridger, chasers of the Olympic dream

—M.S.
It is not possible with mortal mind to search out the purposes of the gods.

—Pindar

For then, in wrath, the Olympian thundered and lightninged, and confounded Greece.

—Aristophanes
Prologue
THERE ARE SUPERMEN and superwomen who walk this earth.

I’m quite serious about that, and you can take me literally. Jesus Christ, for example, was a spiritual superman, as were Martin Luther and Gandhi. Julius Caesar was superhuman as well. So were Genghis Khan, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Adolf Hitler.

Think about scientists like Aristotle, Galileo, Albert Einstein, and J. Robert Oppenheimer. Consider artists like da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Vincent van Gogh, my favorite, who was so superior it drove him insane. Above all, don’t forget athletically superior beings like Jim Thorpe, Babe Didrikson
Humbly, I include myself on this superhuman spectrum as well—and deservedly so, as you shall soon see.

In short, people like me are born for great things. We seek adversity. We seek to conquer. We seek to break through all limits—spiritually, politically, artistically, scientifically, and physically. We seek to right wrongs in the face of monumental odds. And we’re willing to suffer for greatness, willing to engage in dogged effort and endless preparation with the fervor of a martyr—which, to my mind, is an exceptional trait in any human being at any age.

At the moment I have to admit that I’m certainly feeling exceptional, standing here in the garden of Sir Denton Marshall, a sniveling, corrupt old bastard if there ever was one.

Look at him on his knees, with his back to me and my knife at his throat.

Why, he trembles and shakes as if a stone had just clipped his head. Can you smell it? Fear? It surrounds him with an odor as rank as the air after a bomb explodes.

“Why?” he gasps.

“You’ve angered me, monster,” I snarl at him, feeling a deeper-than-primal rage split my mind and seethe through every cell. “You’ve helped ruin the games, made them a mockery and an abomination.”

“What?” he cries, acting bewildered. “What are you talking about?”

I deliver the evidence against him in three damning sentences that turn the skin of his neck livid and his carotid artery a sickening, pulsing purple.
“No!” he sputters. “That’s... that’s not true. You can’t do this. Have you gone utterly mad?”

“Mad? Me?” I say. “Hardly. I’m the sanest person I know.”

“Please,” he says, tears rolling down his face. “Have mercy. I’m to be married on Christmas Eve.”

My laugh is as caustic as battery acid. “In another life, Denton, I ate my own children. You’ll get no mercy from me or my sisters.”

As his confusion and horror become complete, I look up into the night sky, feeling storms rising in my head, and understanding once again that I am superior, superhuman, imbued with forces that go back thousands of years.

“For all true Olympians,” I vow, “this act of sacrifice marks the beginning of the end of the modern games.”

Then I wrench the old man’s head back so his back arches. And before he can scream, I furiously rip the blade across his throat with such force that his head comes free of his neck all the way to his spine.
Book One

THE FURIES
CHAPTER 1

THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2012, 9:24 A.M.

IT WAS MAD-DOG hot for London. Peter Knight’s shirt and jacket were drenched with sweat as he sprinted north on Che- sham Street past the Diplomat Hotel and skidded around the corner toward Lyall Mews in the heart of Belgravia, home to some of the most expensive real estate in the world.

Don’t let it be true, Knight screamed internally as he entered the mews. Dear God, don’t let it be true.

Then he saw a pack of newspaper reporters gathering at the yellow tape of a London Metropolitan Police barricade that blocked the road in front of a cream-colored Georgian-style townhome. Knight lurched to a stop, feeling like he was going to retch up the eggs and bacon he’d had for breakfast.

What would he ever tell Amanda?
Before Knight could compose his thoughts or still his stomach, his cell phone rang. He snatched it from his pocket without looking at caller ID.

“Knight,” he managed to choke out. “That you, Jack?”

“No, Peter, it’s Nancy,” the voice replied in an Irish brogue. “Isabel has come down sick.”

“What?” he groaned. “No…I just left the house an hour ago.”

“She’s running a temperature,” the full-time nanny insisted. “I just took it.”

“How high?”

“One hundred. She’s complaining about her stomach, too.”

“Lukey?”

“He seems fine,” she said. “But—”

“Give them both a cool bath, and call me back if Isabel’s temp hits a hundred and one,” Knight said. He snapped the phone shut, swallowed the bile burning at the back of his throat.

A wiry man about six feet tall, with an appealing face and light brown hair, Knight had once been a special investigator assigned to the Old Bailey, home of England’s Central Criminal Court. Two years ago, however, he joined the London office of Private International at twice the pay and prestige. Private has been called the Pinkerton Agency of the twenty-first century, with offices in every major city in the world staffed by top-notch forensic scientists, security specialists, and investigators such as Knight.

Compartmentalize, he told himself. Be professional. But this felt like the straw that would break the camel’s back. Knight had already endured too much grief and loss, both personally
and professionally. Just the week before, his boss, Dan Carter, and three of his colleagues had perished in a plane crash over the North Sea that was still under investigation. Could he live with another death?

Pushing that question and his daughter’s illness to one side, Knight forced himself to hurry on through the sweltering heat toward the police barrier, giving the Fleet Street crowd a wide berth, and in so doing spotted Billy Casper, a Scotland Yard inspector he’d known for fifteen years.

He went straight to Casper, a blockish man with a pock-marked face who scowled the second he saw Knight. “Private’s got no business in this, Peter.”

“If that’s Sir Denton Marshall dead in there, then Private does have business in this, and I do, too,” Knight shot back forcefully. “Personal business, Billy. Is it Sir Denton?”

Casper said nothing.

“Is it?” Knight demanded.

Finally the inspector nodded, but he wasn’t happy about it, and asked suspiciously, “How are you and Private involved?”

Knight stood there a moment, feeling lambasted by the news and wondering again how the hell he was going to tell Amanda. Then he shook off the despair and said, “The London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games is Private London’s client. Which makes Sir Denton Private’s client.”

“And you?” Casper demanded. “What’s your personal stake in this? You a friend of his or something?”

“Much more than a friend. He was engaged to my mother.”

Casper’s hard expression softened a bit and he chewed at his lip before saying, “I’ll see if I can get you in. Elaine will want to talk to you.”
Knight felt suddenly as if invisible forces were conspiring against him.

“Elaine caught this case?” he said, wanting to punch something. “You can’t be serious.”

“Dead serious, Peter,” Casper said. “Lucky, lucky you.”
CHAPTER 2

CHIEF INSPECTOR ELAINE Pottersfield was one of the finest detectives working for the Metropolitan Police, a twenty-year veteran of the force with a prickly, know-it-all style that got results. Pottersfield had solved more murders in the past two years than any other inspector at Scotland Yard. She was also the only person Knight knew who openly despised his presence.

An attractive woman in her forties, the inspector always put Knight in mind of a borzoi, with her large round eyes, aquiline face, and silver hair that cascaded about her shoulders. When he entered Sir Denton Marshall's kitchen, Pottersfield eyed him down her sharp nose, looking ready to bite at him if she got the chance.

“Peter,” she said coldly.

“Elaine,” Knight said.
“Not exactly my idea to let you into the crime scene.”
“No, I imagine not,” replied Knight, fighting to control his emotions, which were heating up by the second. Pottersfield always seemed to have that effect on him. “But here we are. What can you tell me?”

The Scotland Yard inspector did not reply for several moments. Then she finally said, “The maid found him an hour ago out in the garden, or what’s left of him, anyway.”

Flashing on memories of Sir Denton, the learned and funny man he’d come to know and admire over the past two years, Knight’s legs felt wobbly, and he had to put his vinyl-gloved hand out on the counter to steady himself. “What’s left of him?”

Pottersfield grimly gestured at the open French door.

Knight absolutely did not want to go out into the garden. He wanted to remember Sir Denton the last time he’d seen him, two weeks before, with his shock of startling white hair, scrubbed pink skin, and easy, infectious laugh.

“I understand if you’d rather not,” Pottersfield said. “Inspector Casper said your mother was engaged to Sir Denton. When did that happen?”

“New Year’s past,” Knight said. He swallowed and moved toward the door, adding bitterly, “They were to be married on Christmas Eve. Another tragedy. Just what I need in my life, isn’t it?”

Pottersfield’s expression twisted in pain and anger, and she looked at the kitchen floor as Knight went by her and out into the garden.

Outside, the temperature was growing hotter. The air in the garden was still and stank of death and gore. On the flagstone...
terrace, five quarts of blood—the entire reservoir of Sir Den-
ton’s life—had run out and congealed around his decapitated
corpse.

“The medical examiner thinks the job was done with a long
curved blade that has a serrated edge,” Pottersfield said.
Knight again fought off the urge to vomit. He tried to take
the entire scene in, to burn it into his mind as if it were a
series of photographs and not reality. Keeping everything at
arm’s length was the only way he knew to get through some-
thing like this.

Pottersfield said, “And if you look closely, you’ll see some
of the blood’s been sprayed back toward the body with water
from the garden hose. I’d expect the killer did it to wash away
footprints and such.”

Knight nodded, and then, by sheer force of will, moved his
attention beyond the body, deeper into the garden, bypassing
forensics techs gathering evidence from the flower beds and
turning to a crime-scene photographer snapping away near the
back wall.

Knight skirted the corpse by several feet and from that new
perspective saw what the photographer was focusing on. It
was from ancient Greece, and was one of Sir Denton’s prized
possessions: a headless limestone statue of an Athenian sena-
tor cradling a scroll and holding the hilt of a busted sword.
Sir Denton’s head had been placed in the empty space be-
tween the statue’s shoulders. His face was puffy, lax. His mouth
was twisted to the left, as if he were spitting. And his eyes were
open, dull, and, to Knight, shockingly forlorn.

For an instant, the Private operative wanted to break down.
But then he felt himself swell with outrage. What kind of bar-
brian would do such a thing? And why? What possible reason could there be to behead Denton Marshall? The man was more than good. He was . . .

“You’re not seeing it all, Peter,” Pottersfield said behind him. “Go look at the grass in front of the statue.”

Knight closed his hands to fists and walked off the terrace onto the grass, which scratched against the paper booties he wore over his shoes, making a sound that was as annoying to him as fingernails on a chalkboard. Then he saw it and stopped cold.

Five interlocking rings, the symbol of the Olympic Games, had been spray-painted on the grass.

Through the symbol, an X had been smeared in blood.
WHERE ARE THE eggs of monsters most likely laid? What nest incubates them until they hatch? What are the toxic scraps that nourish them to adulthood?

So often during the headaches that occasionally rip through my mind like gale-driven thunder and lightning, I ponder those kinds of questions, and others.

Indeed, as you read this, you might be asking your own questions, such as “Who are you?”

My real name is irrelevant. For the sake of this story, however, you can call me Cronus. In old Greek myths, Cronus was the most powerful of the Titans, a digester of universes, the Lord God of Time.

Do I think I am a god?

Don’t be absurd. Such arrogance tempts fate. Such hubris
mocks the gods. And I have never been guilty of that treacherous sin.

I remain, however, one of those rare beings to appear on earth once a generation or two. How else would you explain the fact that long before the storms began in my head, hatred was my oldest memory and wanting to kill was my very first desire?

Indeed, at some point in my second year of life, I became aware of hatred, as if it and I were linked spirits cast into an infant's body from somewhere out there in the void, and for some time that's what I thought of as me: this burning singularity of loathing thrown on the floor in the corner, into a box filled with rags.

Then one day I instinctively began to crawl from the box, and with that movement and freedom I soon understood that I was more than anger, that I was a being unto myself—that I starved and went thirsty for days, that I was cold and naked and left to myself for hours on end, rarely cleaned, rarely held by the monsters that walked all around me, as if I were some kind of alien creature landed among them. That's when my first direct thought occurred: I want to kill them all.

I had that ruthless urge long, long before I understood that my parents were drug addicts, crackheads, unfit to raise a superior being such as me.

When I was four, shortly after I sunk a kitchen knife into my comatose mother's thigh, a woman came to where we lived in squalor and took me away from my parents for good. They put me in a home where I was forced to live with abandoned little monsters, hateful and distrustful of any other beings but themselves.

Soon enough I grasped that I was smarter, stronger, and
more visionary than any of them. By the age of nine, I did not know exactly what I was yet, but I sensed that I might be some sort of different species, a supercreature, if you will, who could manipulate, conquer, or slay every monster in his path.

I knew this about myself for certain after the storms started in my head.

They started when I was ten. My foster father, whom we called Minister Bob, was whipping one of the little monsters, and I could not stand to hear it. The crying made me feel weak and I could not abide that sensation. So I left the house and climbed the back fence and wandered through some of the worst streets in London until I found quiet and comfort in the familiar poverty of an abandoned building.

Two monsters were inside already. They were older than me, in their teens, and members of a street gang. They were high on something, I could tell that about them right away, and they said I’d wandered onto their turf.

I tried to use my speed to get away, but one of them threw a rock that clipped my jaw. It dazed me and I fell, and they laughed and got angrier. They threw more stones, which cracked my ribs and broke blood vessels in my thigh.

Then I felt a hard smashing above my left ear followed by a Technicolor explosion that crackled through my brain like the crippled arms of so many lightning bolts ripping a summer sky.
PETER KNIGHT FELT helpless as he glanced back and forth from the Olympic symbol crossed out in blood to the head of his mother’s fiancé.

Inspector Pottersfield stepped up beside Knight. In a thin voice, she said, “Tell me about Sir Denton.”

Swallowing his grief, Knight said, “Denton was a great, great man, Elaine. Ran a big hedge fund, made loads of money, but gave most of it away. He was also an absolutely critical member of the London Organising Committee. A lot of people think that without Sir Denton’s efforts, we never would have beaten out Paris for the games. He was also a nice guy, unimpressed with himself. And he made my mother very happy.”

“I didn’t think that was possible,” the chief inspector remarked.

“Neither did I. Neither did Amanda. But he did,” Knight
said. “Until just now, I didn’t think Denton Marshall had an enemy in the world.”

Pottersfield gestured at the bloody Olympic symbol. “Maybe it has more to do with the Olympics than with who he was in the rest of his life.”

Knight stared at Sir Denton Marshall’s head and returned to the corpse before saying, “Maybe. Or maybe this is just designed to throw us off the track. Cutting off someone’s head can easily be construed as an act of rage, which is almost always personal at some level.”

“You’re saying this could be revenge of some kind?” Pottersfield replied.

Knight shrugged. “Or a political statement. Or the work of a deranged mind. Or a combination of the three. I don’t know.”

“Can you account for your mother’s whereabouts last evening between eleven and twelve thirty?” Pottersfield asked suddenly.

Knight looked at her as though she were an idiot. “Amanda loved Denton.”

“Spurned love can be a powerful motive for rage,” Pottersfield observed.

“There was no spurning,” Knight snapped. “I would have known. Besides, you’ve seen my mother. She’s five foot five and a hundred and ten pounds. Denton was two twenty. There’s no way she’d have the physical or emotional strength to cut off his head. And no reason to.”

“So you’re saying you do know where she was?” Pottersfield asked.

“I’ll find out and get back to you. But first I have to tell her.”

“I’ll do that if you think it might help.”
“No, I’ll do it,” Knight said, studying Sir Denton’s head one last time, and then focusing on the way his mouth seemed twisted, as if he wanted to spit something out.

Knight fished in his pocket for a pen-size flashlight, stepped around the Olympic symbol, and shined the beam into the gap between Sir Denton’s lips. He saw a glint of something, and reached back into his pocket for a pair of forceps he always kept there in case he wanted to pick something up without touching it.

Refusing to look at his mother’s dead fiancé’s eyes, he began to probe between the man’s lips with the forceps.

“Peter, stop that,” Pottersfield ordered. “You’re—”

But Knight was already turning to show her a tarnished bronze coin he’d plucked from Sir Denton’s mouth.

“New theory,” he said. “It’s about money.”
CHAPTER 5

WHEN I RETURNED to consciousness several days after the stoning, I was in hospital with a fractured skull and the nauseating feeling that I had been rewired somehow, made more alien than ever before.

I remembered everything about the attack and everything about my attackers. But when the police came to ask me what had happened, I told them I had no idea. I said I had memories of entering the building, but nothing more; and their questions soon stopped.

I healed slowly. A crab-like scar formed on my scalp. My hair grew back, hiding it, and I began to nurture a dark fantasy that became my first obsession.

Two weeks later, I returned home to the little monsters and Minister Bob. Even they could tell I’d changed. I was no longer
a wild child. I smiled and acted happy. I studied and developed my body.

Minister Bob thought I’d found God.

But I admit to you that I did it all by embracing hatred. I stroked that crab-like scar on my head, and focused my hatred, my oldest emotional ally, on things that I wanted to have and to have happen. Armed with a dark heart, I went after them all, trying to show the entire world how different I really was. And though I acted the changed boy—the happy, achieving mate—in public, I never forgot the stoning or the storms it had spawned in my head.

When I was fourteen, I secretly began looking for the monsters that broke my skull. I found them eventually, selling dime bags of methamphetamine on a corner twelve blocks from where I lived with Minister Bob and the little monsters.

I kept tabs on the pair until I turned sixteen, and felt big and strong enough to act.

Minister Bob had been an ironworker before he found Jesus. On the sixth anniversary of my stoning, I took one of his heavy hammers and a pair of his old work coveralls, and I slipped out at night, when I was supposed to be studying.

Wearing the coveralls and carrying the hammer in a school-bag harvested from a trash bin, I found the two monsters that stoned me. Six years of their drug use and six years of my evolution had wiped me from their memory banks.

I lured them to an empty lot with the promise of money, and then I beat their monstrous brains to bloody pulp.
SHORTLY AFTER CHIEF Inspector Pottersfield ordered Sir Denton’s remains bagged, Knight left the garden and the mansion consumed by far worse dread than he’d felt when he’d entered.

He ducked the police tape, avoided the reporters, and headed out of Lyall Mews, trying to decide how in God’s name he was going to tell his mother about Denton. But Knight knew he had to, and quickly, before Amanda heard it from someone else. He absolutely did not want her to be alone when she learned that the best thing that had ever happened to her was...

“Knight?” a man’s voice called to him. “Is that you?”

Knight looked up to see a tall, athletic man in his midforties, wearing a fine Italian suit, rushing toward him. Below his thick salt-and-pepper hair, anguish twisted his ruddy, blockish face.
Knight had met Michael “Mike” Lancer at Private’s London offices twice in the eighteen months since the company was hired to act as a special security force during the Olympic Games. But he knew the man largely by reputation.

A two-time world decathlon champion in the 1980s and ’90s, Lancer had served with the Coldstream Regiment and in the Queen’s Guard, which had allowed him to train full-time. At the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, he led the decathlon after the first day of competition, but then cramped in the heat and humidity during the second day, finishing out of the top ten.

Lancer had since become a motivational speaker and security consultant who often worked with Private International on big projects. He was also a member of LOCOG, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games, charged with helping to arrange security for the mega-event.

“Is it true?” Lancer asked in a keenly distraught voice. “Denton’s dead?”

“Afraid so, Mike,” Knight said.

Lancer’s eyes welled with tears. “Who would do this? Why?”

“Looks like someone who hates the Olympics,” Knight said, and then described the manner of Sir Denton’s death, and the bloody X.

Rattled, Lancer said, “When do they think this happened?”

“Shortly before midnight,” Knight replied.

Lancer shook his head. “That means I saw him only two hours before his death. He was leaving the party at the Tate with...” He stopped and looked at Knight in sad appraisal.

“Probably my mother,” Knight said. “There were engaged.”
“Yes, I knew that you and she were related,” Lancer said.
“I’m so, so sorry, Peter. Does Amanda know?”
“I’m on my way to tell her right now.”
“You poor bastard,” Lancer said, and then looked off toward the police barrier. “Are those reporters there?”
“A whole pack of them, and getting bigger,” Knight said.
Lancer shook his head bitterly. “With all due loving respect to Denton, this is all we need with the opening ceremonies tomorrow night. They’ll blast the lurid details all over the bloody world.”
“Nothing you can do to stop that,” Knight said. “But I might think about upping security on all members of the organizing committee.”
Lancer made a puffing noise, and then nodded. “You’re right. I’d best catch a cab back to the office. Marcus is going to want to hear this in person.”
Marcus Morris, a politician who had stood down at the last election, was now chairman of the London Organising Committee.
“My mother as well,” Knight said, and together they headed on toward Chesham Street, where they thought taxi traffic would be heavier.
Indeed, they’d just reached Chesham when a black taxi appeared from the south, across from the Diplomat Hotel. At the same time, farther away and from the north, a red taxi came down the near lane. Knight hailed it.
Lancer signaled the black taxi in the northbound lane, saying, “Give my condolences to your mother, and tell Jack I’ll be in touch sometime later today.”
Jack Morgan was the American owner of Private Interna-
tional. He’d been in town since the plane carrying four mem-
bers of the London office had gone down in the North Sea with
no survivors.

Lancer stepped off the curb and set off in a confident stride,
heading diagonally across the street as the red taxi came closer.

But then, to Knight’s horror, he heard the growl of an engine
and tires squealing.

The black taxi was accelerating, heading right at the
LOCOG member.
KNIGHT REACTED ON instinct. He leaped into the street and knocked Lancer from the cab’s path.

In the next instant, Knight sensed the black taxi’s bumper less than three feet away, and tried to jump in the air to avoid being hit. His feet left the ground, but could not propel him from the cab’s trajectory. The fender and grille struck the side of his left knee and lower leg and drove on through.

The action wheeled Knight into the air. His shoulders, chest, and hip smashed on the hood and his face was pressed against the windshield, enabling him to catch a split-second image of the driver. Scarf. Sunglasses. A woman?

Knight was hurled up and over the roof as if he were no more than a stuffed doll. He hit the pavement hard on his left side, knocking the wind out of him, and for a moment he was
aware only of the sight of the black taxi speeding away, the
smell of car exhaust, and the blood pounding in his temples.

Then he thought: A goddamn miracle, but nothing feels bro-
ken.

The red taxi screeched toward Knight and he panicked,
thinking he’d be run over after all.

But it skidded into a U-turn before stopping. The driver, an
old Rasta wearing a green-and-gold knit cap over his dreads,
threw open his door and jumped out.

“Don’t move, Knight,” Lancer yelled, running at him.
“You’re hurt!”

“I’m okay,” Knight croaked. “Follow that cab, Mike.”

Lancer hesitated, but Knight said, “She’s getting away!”

Lancer grabbed Knight under the arms and hoisted him into
the back of the red cab. “Follow it!” Lancer roared at the
driver.

Knight held his ribs, still struggling for air as the Rasta taxi
driver took off after the black cab, which was several blocks
ahead by now, turning hard onto Pont Street, going west.

“I catch her, mon!” the driver promised. “Dat crazy one
tried to kill you!”

Lancer was looking back and forth between the road ahead
and Knight. “You sure you’re okay?”

“Banged up and bruised,” Knight grunted. “And she wasn’t
trying to run me down, Mike. She was trying to run you
down.”

The driver power-drifted onto Pont Street, heading west.
The black taxi was two blocks ahead now, its brake lights
flashing red before it lurched in a hard right turn onto Sloane
Street.
The Rasta mashed the gas hard, turning the leafy road into a blur. They reached the intersection with Sloane so fast, Knight felt sure they’d actually catch up to the woman who’d just tried to kill him.

But then two more black taxis flashed by them, both heading north on Sloane, and the Rasta was forced to slam on the brakes and wrench the wheel to avoid hitting them. Knight’s cab went into a screeching skid, and almost hit another car: a Metropolitan Police vehicle.

The siren went on. So did the flashing lights.

“No!” Lancer yelled.

“Every time, mon!” the driver shouted in frustration, and slowed the taxi to a stop.

Knight nodded in an angry daze, looking through the windshield as the taxi that had almost killed him melted into the traffic heading toward Hyde Park.
BRIGHTLY FLETCHED ARROWS whizzed and cut through the hot midmorning air. They landed on and around the yellow bull’s-eyes painted within larger red and blue circles on a long line of targets set up across the lime-green pitch at Lord’s Cricket Grounds near Regent’s Park in central London.

Archers from six or seven countries were completing their final practice rounds. Archery would be one of the first sports to be decided after the 2012 London Olympic Games opened, with team competition scheduled to start midmorning on Saturday, two days hence, and the medal ceremony to be held that very afternoon.

Which is why Karen Pope was up in the stands, watching through binoculars, boredom slackening her face.

Pope was a sports reporter for the Sun, a British tabloid newspaper that boasts more than seven million readers, thanks
to its reputation for aggressive, bare-knuckle journalism and its tradition of publishing photographs of young bare-breasted women on page 3.

Pope was in her early thirties, and attractive in the way Renée Zellweger was in the film *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, but too flat-chested to ever be considered for page 3. Pope was also a dogged reporter, and ambitious in the extreme.

Around her neck that morning hung one of only fourteen full-access media passes granted to the *Sun* for the Olympics. Such passes had been severely limited for the British press because more than twenty thousand members of the global media would also be in London to cover the seventeen-day mega-event. The full-access passes had become almost as valuable as Olympic medals, at least to British journalists.

Pope kept thinking she should be happy to have the pass and to be here covering the games at all, but her efforts so far this morning had failed to yield anything truly newsworthy about archery.

She’d been looking for the South Koreans, gold medal favorites, but had learned that they had already finished their practice session before she arrived.

“Bloody hell,” she said in disgust. “Finch is going to kill me.”

Pope decided her best hope was to do research for a feature that, with lively writing, might somehow make the paper. But what sort? What was the angle?

Archery: Darts for the Posh?
No, there was absolutely nothing posh about archery.

Indeed, what in God’s name did she know about archery? She’d grown up in a footballer family. Earlier that very morn-
ing Pope had tried to explain to Finch that she’d be better off assigned to athletics or gymnastics. But her editor had reminded her in no uncertain terms that she’d only just joined the paper six weeks before from Manchester and therefore was the low person on the sports-desk totem pole.

“Get me a big story and you’ll get better assignments,” Finch had said.

Pope forced her attention back to the archers. It struck her that they seemed so calm. It was almost like they were in a trance up there. Not like a cricket batsman or a tennis player at all. Should she write about that? Find out how the bowmen got themselves into that state?

C’mon, she thought in annoyance. Who wants to read about Zen in sports when you can look at bare boobs on page 3?

Pope sighed, set down her binoculars, and shifted her position in one of the Grand Stand seats. She noticed stuffed down into her handbag a bundle of mail she’d grabbed as she left the office. She started going through the stack, finding various press releases and other items of zero interest.

Then she came to a thick manila envelope with her name and title printed oddly in black and blue block letters on the front.

Pope twisted her nose as if she’d sniffed something foul. She hadn’t written anything recently to warrant a wack-job letter, most definitely not since she’d arrived in London. Every reporter worth a damn got wack-job letters. You learned to recognize them quickly. They usually came after you’d published something controversial or suggested a diabolical conspiracy.

She slit the envelope anyway and drew out a sheaf of ten pages attached by a paper clip to a folded plain paper greeting
card. She flipped the card open. There was no writing inside. But a computer chip in the card was activated and flute music began to play, weird flute music that got under her skin and made her think that someone had died.

She shut the card and then scanned the first page of the sheaf of pages, and saw that it was a letter addressed to her, and typed in a dozen different fonts, which made it hard to read. But then she began to get the gist of it, and Pope read the letter three times, her heart beating faster with every line until it felt like it was throbbing high in her throat.

She scanned the rest of the documents attached to the letter and the greeting card, and almost felt faint. She dug wildly in her bag for her phone and called her editor.

“Finch, it’s Pope,” she said breathlessly when he answered. “Can you tell me whether Denton Marshall has been murdered?”

In a thick Cockney accent, Finch said, “What? Sir Denton Marshall?”

“Yes, yes, the big hedge fund guy, philanthropist, member of the organizing committee,” Pope confirmed, gathering her things and looking for the nearest exit to the stadium. “Please, Finchy, this could be huge.”

“Hold on,” her editor growled.

Pope had made it outside and was trying to hail a cab across from Regent’s Park when her editor finally came back on the line. “They’ve got the yellow tape up around Sir Denton’s place in Lyall Mews and the coroner’s wagon just arrived.”

Pope punched the air with her free hand and cried, “Finch, you’re going to have to get someone else to cover archery and dressage. The story I just caught is going to hit London like an earthquake.”
“LANCER SAYS YOU saved his life,” Elaine Pottersfield said.

A paramedic prodded and poked at a wincing Knight, who sat on the bumper of an ambulance on the east side of Sloane Street, a few feet from the Rasta’s parked red taxi.

“I just reacted,” Knight insisted, aching everywhere and feeling baked by the heat radiating off the pavement.

“You put yourself in harm’s way,” the chief inspector said coldly.

Knight got annoyed. “You said yourself I saved his life.”

“And almost lost your own,” she shot back. “Where would that have left . . .” She paused. “The children?”

He said, “Let’s keep them out of this, Elaine. I’m fine. There should be footage of that taxi on CCTV.”

London had ten thousand closed-circuit security cameras
spread out across the city, all of which rolled twenty-four hours a day. A lot of them had been there since the 2005 terrorist bombings in the tube—London’s subway system—which left fifty-six people dead and more than seven hundred wounded.

“We’ll check them,” Pottersfield promised. “But looking for a black taxi in London? Since none of you got the license plate, that’s going to be near impossible.”

“Not if you narrow the search to this road, heading north, and the approximate time she got away. And call all the taxi companies. I had to have done some damage to her hood or grille.”

“You’re sure it was a woman?” Pottersfield asked skeptically.

“It was a woman,” Knight insisted. “Scarf. Sunglasses. Very pissed off.”

The Scotland Yard chief inspector glanced over at Lancer, who was being interviewed by another officer, before saying, “He and Sir Denton. Both LOCOG members.”

Knight nodded. “I’d start looking for people who have a beef with the organizing committee.”

Pottersfield did not reply because Lancer was approaching. He’d torn his tie loose around his neck and was patting at his sweating brow with a handkerchief.

“Thank you,” he said to Knight. “I am beyond in your debt.”

“Nothing you wouldn’t have done for me,” Knight replied.

“I’m calling Jack,” Lancer said. “I’m telling him what you did.”

“It’s not necessary,” Knight said.

“It is,” Lancer insisted. He hesitated. “I’d like to repay you.”

Knight shook his head. “LOCOG is Private’s client, which
means you are Private's client, Mike, and it's all in a day's work."

“No, you…” Lancer said, hesitated, and then completed his thought. “You shall be my guest tomorrow night at the opening ceremonies.”

Knight was caught flat-footed by the offer. Tickets to the opening ceremonies were almost as prized as invitations had been to the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton the year before.

“If I can get the nanny to cover for me, I'll accept.”

Lancer beamed. “I'll have my secretary send you a pass and tickets in the morning.” He patted Knight on his good shoulder, smiled at Pottersfield, and then walked off toward the Jamaican taxi driver, who was still getting a hard time from the patrol officers who'd pulled him over.

“I'll need you to make a formal statement,” Pottersfield said. “I'm not doing anything until I've spoken with my mother.”
TWENTY MINUTES LATER, a Metropolitan Police patrol car dropped Knight in front of his mother’s home on Milner Street in Knightsbridge. He’d been offered painkillers by the paramedics, but had refused them. Getting out of the cop car was brutal, and he kept remembering, in flashes, an image of a beautiful pregnant woman standing on a moor at sunset.

Thankfully, he was able to put her out of his mind by the time he rang the doorbell, suddenly aware of how dirty and torn his clothes were.

Amanda would not approve. Neither would…

The door swung open to reveal Gary Boss, his mother’s longtime personal assistant. Boss was in his thirties, thin, well-groomed, and impeccably attired.

He blinked at Knight from behind round tortoiseshell
glasses and sniffed, “I didn’t know you had an appointment, Peter.”

“Her son and only child doesn’t need one,” Knight said. “Not today.”

“She’s very, very busy,” Boss insisted. “I suggest…”

“Denton’s dead, Gary,” Knight said softly.

“What?” Boss said, and then tittered derisively. “That’s impossible. She was just with him last—”

“He was murdered,” Knight said, stepping inside. “I just came from the crime scene. I need to tell her.”

“Murdered?” Boss said, and then his mouth sloughed open. He closed his eyes as if in anticipation of some personal agony. “Dear God. She’ll be…”

“I know,” Knight said, and moved by him. “Where is she?”

“In the library,” Boss said. “Choosing fabric.”

Knight winced. His mother despised being interrupted when reviewing samples. “Can’t be helped,” he said, and walked down the hall toward the doors to the library, getting ready to tell his mother that, in effect, she had just been widowed for the second time.

When Knight was three, his father, Harry, had died in a freak industrial accident, leaving his young widow and son a meager insurance payout. His mother had turned bitter about her loss, but then turned that bitterness into energy. She’d always liked fashion and sewing, so she used the insurance money to start an apparel company she named after herself.

Amanda Designs had started in their kitchen. Knight remembered how she had seemed to look at life and business as one long, protracted brawl. Her pugnacious style succeeded, though. By the time Knight was fifteen, his mother had built
Amanda Designs into a robust and respected company by never being happy and by constantly goading everyone around her to do better. Shortly after Knight graduated from Christ Church college at Oxford, she’d sold the concern for tens of millions of pounds and used the cash to fund the launch of four more successful apparel lines.

In all that time, however, Knight’s mother never allowed herself to fall in love again. She’d had friends and consorts and, Knight suspected, several short-term lovers. But from the day his father had died, Amanda had erected a solid shield around her heart that no one, except for her son, ever managed to breach.

Until Denton Marshall had come into her life.

They met at a cancer fund-raiser and, as his mother liked to say, “It was everything at first sight.” In that one evening, Amanda transformed from a cold, remote bitch into a schoolgirl giddy with her first crush. From that point forward, Sir Denton had been her soul mate, her best friend, and the source of the deepest happiness of her life.

Knight flashed on that image of the pregnant woman again, knocked on the library door, and entered.

An elegant woman by any standard—in her late fifties, she possessed the posture of a dancer, the beauty of an aging movie star, and the bearing of a benevolent monarch—Amanda Knight was standing at her worktable, dozens of fabric swatches arrayed in front of her.

“Gary,” she scolded without looking up. “I told you that I was not to be—”

“It’s me, Mother,” Knight said.

Amanda turned to look at him with her slate-colored eyes
and frowned. “Peter, didn’t Gary tell you I was choosing…” She stopped, seeing something in his face. Her own face twisted in disapproval. “Don’t tell me: your heathen children have driven off another nanny.”

“No,” Knight said. “I wish it were something as simple as that.”

Then he proceeded to shatter his mother’s happiness into a thousand jagged pieces.
If you are to kill monsters, you must learn to think like a monster.

I did not begin to appreciate that perspective until the night after the explosion that cracked my head a second time, nineteen years after the stoning.

I was long gone from London, my first plan to prove to the world that I was beyond different—that I was infinitely superior to any other human—having been thwarted.

The monsters had won that war against me by subterfuge and sabotage. As a result, when I landed in the Balkans in the late spring of 1995, assigned to a NATO peacekeeping mission, the hatred I felt had no limits. Its depth and dimensions were incalculable.

After what had been done to me, I did not want peace. I wanted violence. I wanted sacrifice. I wanted blood.
So perhaps you could say that fate intervened on my behalf within five weeks of my deployment to the fractured, shifting, and highly combustible killing fields of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It was July, a late afternoon on a dusty road eighteen miles from the besieged city of Srebrenica, in the Drina Valley. I was riding in the passenger seat of a camouflaged Toyota Land Cruiser, looking out the window, wearing a helmet and flak jacket.

I’d been reading about Greek mythology from a book I’d picked up, and was thinking that the war-torn Balkan landscape through which we traveled could have been the setting of some dark and twisted myth; wild roses were blooming everywhere about the mutilated corpses we’d spotted in the area, victims of one side’s atrocity or the other’s.

The bomb went off without warning.

I can’t recall the sound of the blast that destroyed the driver, the truck, and the two other passengers. But I can still smell the cordite and the burning diesel.

And I can still feel the aftershock of the invisible fist that belted me with full force, hurling me through the windshield and setting off an electrical storm of epic proportions inside my skull.

Dusk had blanketed the land when I regained consciousness, ears ringing, disoriented, nauseated, and thinking at first that I was ten years old and had just been stoned unconscious. But then the tilting and whirling in my mind slowed enough for me to make out the charred skeleton of the Land Cruiser and the bodies of my companions, which were burned beyond recognition. Beside me lay a subma-
chine gun and pistol, a Sterling and a Beretta, which had been thrown from the truck.

It was dark by the time I could stand with the weapons and walk.

I staggered and fell for several miles across fields and forests before I came to a village somewhere southwest of Srebrenica. Walking in, carrying the guns, I heard something above and beyond the ringing in my ears. Men were shouting somewhere in the darkness ahead of me.

Those angry voices drew me, and as I went toward them I felt my old friend hatred building in my head, irrational, urging me to slay somebody.

Anybody.
THE MEN WERE Bosnians. There were seven of them, armed with old single-barrel shotguns and corroded rifles they used to goad three handcuffed teenage girls ahead of them as if they were driving livestock to a pen.

One of them saw me, shouted, and they turned their feeble weapons my way. For reasons I could not explain to myself until much later, I did not open fire and kill them all right there, the men and the girls.

Instead, I told them the truth, that I was part of the NATO mission and that I’d been in an explosion and needed to call back to my base. That seemed to calm them somewhat and they lowered their guns and let me keep mine.

One of them spoke broken English and said I could call from the village’s police station, where they were heading.
I asked what the girls were under arrest for, and the one who spoke English said, “They are war criminals. They belong to Serbian kill squad, working for that devil Mladić. People call them the Furies. These girls kill Bosnian boys. Many boys. Each of them does this. Ask oldest one. She speak English.”

Furies? I thought with great interest. I’d been reading about the Furies the day before in my book of Greek mythology. I walked more quickly so I could study them, especially the oldest one, a sour-looking girl with a heavy brow, coarse black hair, and dead dark eyes.

Furies? This could not be a coincidence. As much as I believed that hatred had been gifted to me at birth, I instantly came to believe that these girls had been put in front of me for a reason.

Despite the pain that was splitting my head, I fell in beside the oldest one and asked, “You a war criminal?”

She turned her dead dark eyes on me and spat out her reply: “I am no criminal, and neither are my sisters. Last year, Bosnian pigs kill my parents and rape me and my sisters for four days straight. If I could, I shoot every Bosnian pig. I break their skulls. I kill all of them if I could.”

Her sisters must have understood what she was saying, because they, too, turned their dead eyes on me. The shock of the bombing, the brutal throbbing in my head, my jet-fueled anger, the Serbian girls’ dead eyes, the myth of Furies—all these things seemed to suddenly gather together into something that felt predestined to me.

The Bosnians handcuffed the girls to heavy wooden chairs bolted to the floor of the police station and shut and locked
the doors. The landlines were not working. Neither were the primitive cell-phone towers. I was told, however, that I could wait there until a peacekeeping force could be called to take me and the Serbian girls to a more secure location.

When the Bosnian who spoke English left the room, I cradled my gun, moved close to the girl who’d spoken to me, and said, “Do you believe in fate?”

“Go away.”

“Do you believe in fate?” I pressed.

“Why do you ask me this question?”

“As I see it, as a captured war criminal, your fate is to die,” I replied. “If you’re convicted of killing dozens of unarmed boys, that’s genocide. Even if you and your sisters were gang-raped beforehand, they will hang you. That’s how it works with genocide.”

She lifted her chin haughtily. “I am not afraid to die for what we have done. We killed monsters. It was justice. We put balance back where there was none.”

*Monsters and Furies*, I thought, growing excited before replying, “Perhaps, but you will die, and there your story will end.” I paused. “But perhaps you have another fate. Perhaps everything in your life has been in preparation for this exact moment, this place, this night, right now, when your fates collide with mine.”

She looked confused. “What does this mean, ‘fates collide’?”

“I will get you out of here,” I said. “I will get you new identities, hide you, and protect you and your sisters forever. I will give you a chance at life.”

She’d gone steely again. “And in return?”

I looked into her eyes. I looked into her soul. “You will be
willing to risk death to save me, as I will now risk death to save you.”

The oldest sister gave me a sidelong look. Then she turned and clucked to her sisters in Serbian. They argued for several moments in harsh whispers.

Finally, the one who spoke English said, “You can save us?”

The clanging in my head continued, but the fogginess had departed, leaving me in a state of near-electric clarity. I nodded.

She stared at me with those dark dead eyes and said, “Then save us.”

The Bosnian who spoke English returned to the room and called out to me, “What lies are these demons from hell telling you?”

“They’re thirsty,” I answered. “They need water. Any luck with the telephone?”

“Not yet,” he said.

“Good,” I replied, flipping the safety on the submachine gun as I swung the muzzle around at the Furies’ captors, opening fire and slaughtering every one of them.
Book Two

LET THE GAMES BEGIN
CHAPTER 13

AS THE TAXI pulled up in front of a sterile skyscraper deep in the City of London—the city’s financial district—Peter Knight could still hear his mother sobbing. The only other time he’d ever seen her cry like that was over his father’s body after the accident.

Amanda had collapsed into her son’s arms after learning of her fiancé’s death. Knight had felt the wracking depths of her despair, and understood them all too well. She’d been stabbed in the soul. Knight didn’t wish that sensation on anyone, much less his own mother, and he held her through the worst of the mental and emotional hemorrhaging, reliving his own raw memories of loss.

Gary Boss had come into her office finally, and nearly wept himself when he saw Amanda’s abject sorrow. A few minutes
later, Knight received a text message from Jack Morgan telling him to come directly to Private London because the Sun had hired the firm to analyze a letter from someone who claimed to be Sir Denton’s killer. Boss said he would take over Amanda’s care.

“I should stay,” Knight had replied, feeling horribly guilty about leaving. “Jack would understand. I’ll call him.”

“No!” Amanda said angrily. “I want you to go to work, Peter. I want you to do what you do best. I want you to find the sick bastard who did this to Denton. I want him put in chains. I want him burned alive.”

As Knight rode an elevator to the top floors of the skyscraper, his thoughts were dominated by his mother’s charge to him, and despite the steady ache in his side, he felt himself becoming obsessed. It was always like this with Knight when he was on a big case—obsessed, possessed—but given his mother’s involvement, this investigation felt more like a crusade: no matter what happened, no matter what the obstacle, no matter how much time was required, Knight vowed to nail Denton Marshall’s killer.

The elevator door opened into a reception area, a hypermodern room appointed with art that depicted milestones in the history of espionage, forensics, and cryptography. Though the London office itself was brutally understaffed at the moment, the lobby bustled with Private International agents from all over the world, who had come in to pick up their Olympics security passes and assignments.

Knight circled the mob, recognizing only a few people, before passing a model of the Trojan horse and a bust of Sir Francis Bacon on his way to a tinted bulletproof glass wall. He
looked into a retina scan while touching his right index finger to a print reader. A section of the wall hissed open, revealing a scruffy, freckle-faced, carrot-haired man with a scraggly beard. He wore cargo jeans, a West Ham United football jersey, and black slippers.

Knight smiled. “G’day, Hooligan.”

“What the fug, Peter?” Jeremy “Hooligan” Crawford said, eyeing Knight’s clothes. “Been having sex with an orangutan, have you?”

In the wake of Wendy Lee’s death in the plane crash, Hooligan was now the chief science, technology, and forensics officer at Private London. In his early thirties, he was caustic, fiercely independent, and unabashedly foul-mouthed—as well as insanely smart.

Born and raised in Hackney Wick, one of London’s tougher neighborhoods, the son of parents who’d never finished secondary school, Hooligan had nevertheless obtained degrees in math and biology from Cambridge by the age of nineteen. By twenty, he had earned a third degree, in forensics and criminal science, from Staffordshire University, and was hired by MI5, where he worked for eight years before coming to work at Private at twice the government salary.

Hooligan was also a rabid football fan and held season tickets to games played by London’s West Ham United club. Despite his remarkable smarts, as a youngster he’d been known to get out of control watching big games, at which point his brothers and sisters had given him his current nickname. Although many people would not boast of such a moniker, he wore it proudly.

“I scuffled with the hood and roof of a taxi and lived to tell
the tale,” Knight told Hooligan. “The letter from the killer here yet?”

The science officer brushed past him. “She’s bringing it up.”

Knight pivoted to look back through the crowd of agents toward the elevator, which was opening again. Sun reporter Karen Pope exited, clutching a large manila envelope to her chest. Hooligan went to her. She seemed taken aback at his scruffy appearance, and shook his hand tentatively. He led her back into the hallway and introduced Knight.

Pope instantly turned guarded and studied the investigator with suspicion, especially his torn and filthy coat. “My editors want this to be done discreetly and quickly, with no more eyes than are necessary. As far as the Sun is concerned, that means you and you alone, Mr. Crawford.”

“Call me Hooligan, eh?”

Knight had instantly found Pope both abrasive and defensive, but maybe it was because he felt like his entire left side had been beaten with boat oars, and because he had gone through the emotional wringer of his mother’s collapse.

He said, “I’m working the Marshall murder on behalf of the firm, and on behalf of my mother.”

“Your mother?” Pope said.

Knight explained, but Pope still seemed unsure.

Feeling zero patience, Knight said, “Have you considered that I just might know something about this case that you don’t?”
THAT HIT A nerve. Pope’s face flushed indignantly.

“I don’t recall your byline,” Knight continued. “Do you work the city desk? The crime beat?”

“If you must know, I work sports normally,” she said, thrusting her chin at Knight. “What of it?”

“It means I know things about this case that you don’t,” Knight said.

“Is that so?” Pope shot back. “Well, I’m the one holding the letter, aren’t I, Mr. Knight? You know, I really would prefer to deal with Mr. . . . uh, Hooligan.”

Before Knight could reply, an American male voice said: “It would be smart to let Peter in on the examination, Ms. Pope. He’s the best we’ve got.”

A lanky man with surfer good looks, the American stuck out his hand and shook hers, saying, “Jack Morgan. Your editor ar-
ranged through me for the analysis. I’d like to be there as well, if possible.”

“All right,” Pope said without enthusiasm. “But the contents of this envelope cannot be revealed to anyone unless you’ve seen it published in the *Sun*. Agreed?”

“Absolutely,” Jack said, and smiled genuinely.

Knight admired the owner and founder of Private. Jack was younger than Knight, and even more in a hurry than Knight. He was also smart and driven, and believed in surrounding himself with smart, driven people and paying them well. He also cared about the people who worked for him. He was devastated at the loss of Carter and the other Private London operators, and had come across the Atlantic immediately to help Knight pick up the slack.

The foursome went to Hooligan’s lab, one floor down. Jack fell in beside Knight, who was moving much more slowly than the others. “Good job with Lancer,” he said. “Saving his ass, I mean.”

“We mean to please,” Knight said.

“He was very grateful, and said I should give you a raise,” Jack said.

Knight did not reply. They had not talked salary in light of his new responsibilities.

Jack seemed to remember and said, “We’ll talk money after the games.” Then the American shot him a more critical eye. “Are you all right?”

“Feel like I’ve been playing in the scrum, but I remain chipper,” Knight assured him as they entered Private London’s science unit, cutting-edge in every respect.

Hooligan led them to a far corner, to an anteroom where he
told them all to don disposable white jumpsuits and hoods. Knight groaned, but once in the suit and hood, he followed Hooligan through an air lock and into the clean room. The science officer moved to a workstation that included an electron microscope, and state-of-the-art spectrographic equipment. He took the envelope from Pope, opened it, and looked inside.

He asked, “Did you put these in sleeves, or did they come to you like this?”

Knight heard the question over a headset built into his hood, which made the ensuing conversation sound like transmissions from outer space.

“I did that,” Pope replied. “I knew right away they’d need to be protected.”

“Smart,” Hooligan said, wagging a gloved finger at her and looking over at Knight and Jack. “Very smart.”

Despite his initial dislike of Pope, Knight had to agree. He asked, “Who touched these before you protected them?”

“Just me,” Pope said as Hooligan removed the sleeve that contained the letter. “And the killer, I suppose. He has a name. You’ll see it there. He calls himself Cronus.”
SEVERAL MOMENTS LATER, the weird flute music emanated from the card, irritating Knight and making him feel like the killer was toying with them. He finished scanning the letter and the attached documents, then handed them to Jack.

The music must have gotten to Jack as well, because he slammed the card shut, cutting off the music, and then said, “This guy’s off his rocker.”

Pope said, “Crazy like a fox, then, especially those bits about Marshall and his former partner, Guilder. The documents back his allegations.”

“I don’t believe those documents,” Knight said. “I knew Denton Marshall. He was a supremely honest man. And even if they were factual, it’s hardly justification for cutting the man’s head off. Jack’s right. This guy is seriously unbalanced, and supremely arrogant. He’s taunting us. He’s telling us that we
can't stop him. He's saying this is not over, that it could just be the beginning.”

Jack nodded, and said, “When you start with a beheading, you're taking a long walk down Savage Street.”

“I'll start running tests,” Hooligan said. He was looking at the card. “These music-playing chips are in a lot of greeting cards. We should be able to trace the make and model.”

Knight nodded, saying, “I want to read through the letter one more time.”

While Pope and Jack watched Hooligan slice out the working components of the musical greeting card, Knight returned to the letter and began to read as the flute music died in the lab.

The first sentence was written with symbols and letters that Knight could not read, but he guessed they were ancient Greek. The second and all subsequent sentences in the letter were in English.

_The ancient Olympic Games have been corrupted. The modern games are not a celebration of gods and men. They are not even about goodwill among men. The modern games are a mockery, a sideshow that takes place every four years, and were made that way by so many thieves, cheats, murderers, and monsters._

_Consider the great and exalted Sir Denton Marshall and his corpulent partner, Richard Guilder. Seven years ago, Sir Denton sold out the Olympic movement as a force for honest competition. From the documents that accompany this letter, you will see that they suggest that in order to assure London would be selected to host the 2012 games, Sir Denton and_
Mr. Guilder cleverly siphoned funds from their clients and secretly moved the money into overseas bank accounts owned by shell corporations owned by shell corporations owned by members of the International Olympic Committee. Paris, runner-up in the selection process, never had a chance.

And so to cleanse the games, the Furies and I find it just that Sir Denton should die for his offenses, and so that has come to pass. We are unstoppable beings, far superior to you, able to see corruption where you cannot, able to expose monsters and slay them for the good of the games when you cannot.

—Cronus
The story continues!

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