

DEMOLITION

A man in a brown jacket and cap stands in a desolate, industrial demolition site. In the background, a large, multi-story building is being dismantled, with its skeletal frame visible. To the right, a smaller, two-story concrete building stands partially ruined, with missing windows and peeling paint. The ground is covered in dirt, rocks, and sparse vegetation. The sky is a uniform, dark grey, suggesting an overcast day or dusk.

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

I dedicate this edition
to Adam and Erin,
and the rest of the Zed Talkers.

Thank you, and

Welcome to the Screwniverse.

Demolition

The wall gave way easier than expected. Not that they really expected anything, seeing that the wall wasn't on any of the plans they had been given before the job. They were more than halfway done with the demolition of the small inactive military base once known as Fort McMyerson. At the height of the Cold War, it served as the chief hub for intelligence on the East Coast. However, as the hostilities drew down in the late 80's, the need for such a hub dwindled. Until, in 1990, the base was closed and all still active personnel moved to different locations.

It stood empty and unguarded for over twenty years. The facades of the buildings crumbled, the roads grew grass, and the memories of what had happened there faded from memory. In 2010, when the demolition commenced, a few retired officials came to say their final farewells to the location they had called their workplace. It happened without much fanfare, just a handful of grey-haired men, and some unknown men, who stood and watched with some stoic resignation as the first buildings began to crumble under the relentless push of the work machines.

As with all things, "you start with a broom, and finish with a toothpick". After the "soft" buildings had been bulldozed, and the rubble cleared, there were several buildings, of a once high military importance, that had concrete abutments and reinforced steel frames that rendered their demolition a bit more involved. The crew first went in and cleared all interior walls, furniture, paperwork, and the such. Once the building was cleared, explosives would be set up, and the structure reduced to dust. That's if they could get these buildings cleared. This particular set of fake walls was troubling.

The wall gave way to a small vestibule, unremarkable except for the metal security door in the middle of the wall in front of them. A simple metal door, no markings, with a set of three keyholes surrounding a doorknob. Judging by the design of the door, the workmen guessed it had been manufactured and installed sometime in the 1960s.

And it was strong. The most zealous of the workers attempted to smash through it with a sledgehammer, but to no avail. Another came with a power saw and attempted to cut the frame off the hinges, also without any effect. The door and wall seemed to be made from slabs of actual steel. That was quite unusual in construction, being that steel isn't a very cost-effective wall material. The workmen pulled out the blueprints, and found what should have been the other wall for this room that didn't exist. They attempted to breach it by means of various power tools and brute force but without effect.

There was no one to call either. The demolition had been handled by some small, nondescript government agency with little oversight of the whole process. An agency whose sole function seemed to be consolidation and knocking down of obsolete military installations of varying levels of National Security sensitivity. The demo crew had strict operational procedures in place if they encountered anything of a perceived sensitive nature. Destroy it. Break it. Crush It. Rend it to pieces, and then burn the pieces. That was the job. It wasn't the workers' responsibility to understand what they found, just to demo it. Their handlers had made that strictly clear. There was no one to call, it was up to the demo crew to take care of it.

They circled back around to the door. They made a radio call to bring a set of diamond-tipped drill bits down to them. The team that delivered the bits stayed to see what all the trouble was. They drilled through the locks first. Then they did the same to the door knob. All the workmen, twenty of them now, stood huddled around this door. Some were in the vestibule between the false wall and the steel wall. The rest stood peering through from the outer room. Even with the three locking mechanisms drilled out, the door didn't want to open.

A call went out for a snake camera and monitor. The demo company used them a lot for locked safes. The company maintained a backlog of hundreds of locked safes from around the world. They specialized in viewing its contents, without opening them. Standard operating procedure was, when a safe was found, that it would be sent directly to the warehouse to be catalogued and placed in queue for the process of inspection. However, if a customer paid enough, it could be done on site. With that, the foreman arrived and inquired as to why the camera

was being requested. He wanted a signed quote from the customer, he wanted top dollar. The workmen showed him the “room that didn’t exist” on the blueprints, and that couldn’t be breached by ordinary equipment. The foreman wouldn’t allow the camera to be used for such a benign room.

The foreman left, and eleven of the twenty guys left with him; *show’s over boys, get back to work*. And here was the original crew, with strict instructions to demo this room. They figured the best way to get through this door was to cut out the lock area until it gave way. They brought in a torch cart and began the slow process of cutting around the lock. If only it had been that easy. The door still wouldn’t give, and they found out why when they removed the lock area. There were two-inch steel rods as part of the security on the door, that set into the frame of the door as an added measure against opening it. More frustrating, was the fact that, as they peered through the hole they had cut out through the metal door, there was yet another door, seemingly a twin to the first.

The work bell rang and the workers left, a bit despondent about the fruitless endeavors that had eaten up the last hours of their work day. The foreman chastised them for not being done with that room. Tomorrow, he said, he would be down there to make sure it got finished.

Work officially started at 8am sharp for this crew. Yet at 7:30, all but three of them were there already, at the door behind the wall, ready to begin work. By 7:45 the foreman arrived, and two others called in sick, so work commenced with a crew of eight. They cut the top and bottom of the door. The men worked with a precision and purpose that their foreman had never seen before. They *wanted* to get through that door.

By 8:15, they had successfully dismantled the door that had so troubled them yesterday. And yet a bigger trouble now lay before them. The foreman had seen a door like this, once before, in what seemed like another life. The door looked just like the first except, stenciled on it in red paint, were three words that spurred them to wait a moment...”DO NOT OPEN”

The workmen could not be stopped though. The foreman really had no way to explain to them what could lie behind the door. The one he had encountered all those years before, in a dream, had held back countless terrors.

He had tempered those terrors, but others had not been so lucky. That's why he was chosen for this job. He had no real construction or demolition experience. But he knew how to handle situations like this, and Carlos Alexander had hired him personally for this precise reason. The foreman knew that the men now cutting through this new door would be killed. Either by whatever lay behind the door, or by the agency for the secrets they may or may not know.

The foreman hoped he was overreacting. Perhaps it was just a door after all. The workmen grew more fervent as they methodically cut through the locks and bars that held the door in place. As the first piece fell out, they quickly shone a flashlight into the space behind the second door. An empty room. All that work for an empty room with a switch on the wall. The foreman breathed a small sigh of relief. Wait... is that an industrial elevator button on the far wall? The blueprints didn't say anything about a basement...but they didn't say anything about this room either. That sinking feeling began to return to the pit of the foreman's stomach.

It was lunch time, but there wasn't a single person on this crew eating. They wouldn't rest until they had satisfied their curiosity. They cut the last of the supports on the door and kicked it out of the frame. The dust poured out from the room as they all surged forward, looking for more clues. The middle portion of the floor was the lift platform. four of the seven men checked the platform, and the other three examined the rest of the room. That was it, four steel walls, a platform, and a button.

The foreman tried to warn them. He told them this elevator was above their paygrade. They'd go to lunch and radio into headquarters about what to do. The men wouldn't be stopped though. The first group of four men rode the platform down, waiting in complete darkness for the rest of their fellow workers to arrive. The foreman flicked on the battery powered light he carried with him. The smell of dust and mold and rot hung heavy in the air. The light fell upon a huge expanse of rows of monitors. They looked like they dated back to the 60s; they may have been top of the line quality for the time. One of the guys found the main power switch and flipped it. The power to the whole grid to which the base was connected had been deactivated, but the room lit up with crackles and pops

and sparks, nonetheless. The foreman fought back the urge to run; but there was nothing to be afraid of he told himself. Just an old intelligence gathering room from the cold war...nothing more.

The lights were on mostly, many of the bulbs had blown when the power was restored. One by one, power was coming back to the monitors. They were an older type screen, so they needed to warm up a bit. They flickered here and there; two or three amidst dozens of banks of monitors. Static, static, static on all of them. Except for the monitors on the leftmost bank, on the furthest wall, three of them were working just fine, despite decades of disuse. They shone out in the darkness, playing some video feeds, from some old forgotten cameras; the scenes flickering across those screens frightened the foreman most of all, chilled him to his bones. He understood what he was seeing. What was playing on those monitors was going to cost the lives of everyone watching them, the foreman excepted of course. He had told them not to go down there. He had told them to leave it be. But it was too late now. As his crew basked in the glow of the monitors, they never noticed him quietly slipping away. He rode the elevator up, to make the call he was hoping to not have to make.

The newspaper would say that the floor collapsed underneath the workers, and they fell fifty feet to their death in an unmarked cavern. Their families mourned them; the company paid them well enough for their losses. The media called them the “McMyerson Seven” as the foreman just happened to be away on a call when the collapse happened. The structural integrity of the base was such that the bodies were deemed irrecoverable, and the whole area was fenced off and guards stationed to its borders for the first time in twenty years. Workers from other parts of the base never even heard the collapse. And stories started circulating on that day. Some said that the workers tapped into an old nuke lab, and had died from radiation poisoning. This was supported by all the personnel in full protective gear combing the site for days after the incident. Others cited darker, more sinister plots...tales that none dared mention above a whisper. The foreman was questioned by the company and sent home. He had earned at least a day's rest for the loyalty he showed, they reckoned.

As the foreman settled into his couch that night, thoughts of what had transpired danced through his head. Those monitors, Number's 258, 242, and 288 each showed a scene that would defy any normal man's rationale. Individually, any of subjects on the screens would have caused a man to think he was losing his mind. Collectively, the gruesome "movies" played out on those screens spoke to a conspiracy; dark and overwhelming. So wide reaching and pervasive in its scope that to acknowledge it, meant to accept that everything you knew was wrong. For even the short time that the "McMyerson Seven" viewed it, it showed them that there were powers beyond reckoning that moved in unseen ways, influencing reality over countless millennia, working toward an unfathomable plot... But the foreman had enough of that. He had come to the door of this great conspiracy once, and barely escaped with his life. This second time was enough to assure him that he had no desire to know anything more than he already knew. He twisted the cap off of his beer, put his feet up on the table, and thought of other things.



Welcome to the Screwiverse™.

This place looks a lot like any other.

Except, beneath the rotting surface, is a dark and depressing reality; one where our heroes can't ever seem to get ahead and where our enemies lurk hidden in everyday places. Follow a man thrust into the world unexpectedly. Or a story about a girl with a gift, and a curse. Or a story about elder demons gone mad with power.

Be prepared to be pulled deep into this dark world through an intertwined collection of short stories, by first time author D.A. Solomon.