



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

TENET'S TALES

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Matt Olsen is on the trail of something that just might get him killed. Reporting for *The Orbis Observer*, a yellow rag that's cracked cases like Area 51 and Bigfoot, Matt's used to tangling with the paranormal. Now, he's tracking the Hantu Jarang Gigi: the legendary ape-men spirits of the Malaysian jungle. What Matt doesn't know is that something in the steamy maze is also tracking him...and it might just change his life forever...or end it.

The first in a series of action-packed, supernaturally-laced stories known as Tenet's Tales, *The Truth is Out There* is sure to please fans of *The Dresden Files*, *The Sandman Slim Series*, and *The Secret Histories*.

Google will get you killed. Take it from me.

The name's Matt Olsen, reporter for *The Orbis Observer*. You know the one. We're that ratty little rag that's all over the Internet, sporadic in print; and just like you, we believe that "the truth is out there." We believe that there **are** aliens, Area 51's, hobgoblins that steal your groceries when you're not looking, and baby-having-Bigfoot-mammas — as well as all the things that go bump in the night. We believe that someone out there is trying to muck up the works and cover up the stories that you know are true. That's my job, after all — digging through the muck and uncovering it. I do it for me; I do it for you.

My passion has always been the truth; ever since I sat in that stupid Sunday school class and heard about my great, big, loving grandfather in the sky who wanted nothing more than to love me, be my friend, protect me, and make my life wonderful. Ever since my parents died in a car wreck and no one — no one — could tell me why their all-mighty, all-powerful, all-loving god (and yes, I mean god with a little "g") would let my parents die and leave me, a seven year old boy, completely and utterly alone in the world.

Just like you, I need to — I am driven to — find truth.

Which is why I do what I do.

Which is why Google got me killed.

I still remember the day it all started. I was on a case for *The Observer*, working on a story from the jungles of Southeast Asia--Malaysia, of all places. My story was about the Hantu Jarang Gigi--the legendary ape-men spirits of the jungle. Locals said these creature-things were real; they roamed the rainforests of southeastern Malaysia; and they called them "the ghosts with widely spaced teeth." Pretty fearsome creatures, should the tales and legends be

taken at face value. Needing to resupply and upload some files in order to make some deadlines and keep the bills paid, I'd come into Singapore. It was a Saturday evening, and the vibrant city assaulted me from every angle with sensation: music, lights, scents, voices, and spices were painted in broad, garish swaths all about me.

An investigative lark led me to a Google search for “supernatural pale white men.” It was that which sealed my fate. I wasn't even looking for **him**, I was searching for more local leads for the Hantu Jarang Gigi. They often appeared or manifested or whatever you want to call it in the form of white pale men or apes before dragging their victims, screaming and bloody, back into the impenetrable darkness of the dank, dripping jungle understory. My web search found plenty of information about them, including some very interesting and recent hits regarding local sightings near my encampment. However, my search also revealed results that I was not expecting.

I'd uncovered a veritable treasure trove of information about a mysterious figure that had, for ages it seemed, appeared all throughout the world and seemed to possess strange and unusual powers. Amazing things happened around this...being...things that simply defied all logic and lacked solid explanations. At first, I was completely blown away. It was akin to being the first person to discover video proof of Little Green Men or being the photographer who just happened to get the first clear, undeniable shot of Bigfoot on 35 millimeter.

I made several notes and references in one of my many moleskine notebooks and filed away the searches for later use. After all, I was on an assignment about the ape-men-ghosts, not some odd ball, bald-headed weirdo

that could make it rain when he wanted or cause men to see visions from his very touch. It would make an excellent story for later, certainly; *The Observer's* readers are insatiable and it's my job to make the rags fly off the shelves. Now, however, I had a solid piece to work and a deadline to meet.

I wrenched my eyes from the intriguing searches. Hours had slipped by, and it was now early Sunday morning. I quickly saved my files, finished off the last of my barley water, and did a final check on my latest delivery of supplies. They were in route now and would be delivered at the hotel in a mere few hours. The morning and my departure would arrive before I wanted it to, and I had a long trek back into the stinking, sweat-inducing jungles waiting on me. It was a short jaunt from the Internet cafe to the hotel, and it was late, so I figured a walk would do me some good.

Boy, was I wrong.

I'd only gone a few blocks when a voice as large and cold as an iceberg assaulted me from a dark, garbage-strewn alley. "Beware the Hantu, mortal. Unaltered, your current path leads to doom, death, and darkness."

Understand that no one in Singapore knew what I was there about, **no one**. While *The Observer* tends to treat me fairly well, it's not like I travel with an entourage of assistants, producers, and the like. I don't work for the *Food Network* or the *History Channel* or anything. So, when this icebox-chilled voice came rolling down the hot-as-blazes Malaysian night and told me that it knew exactly what I was up to, I suddenly felt like I was standing naked, hip-deep, in a glacial pool of Antarctic ice water.

"Who are you? What do you know about my work?" I challenged, trying to sound tough while praying that I'd not pissed myself.

A crazy-sounding giggle drifted out of the dank darkness. “Suffice it to say that I know enough. I know, as well, that if you do not heed my words, the Hantu, by this time tomorrow night, will be roasting your eyeballs over their dung fires.”

A gleam of silver flashed from the area that seemed to be the silhouette’s face. The aura of crazy had dimmed to an ember and now, there was no malice in the voice that issued forth from the shadows, just a calm statement of fact. I think that is what frightened me the most about the words. They were not said to frighten me. They were merely stated; like I would state my shoe size, because I simply **knew** it to be so.

It was that element of truth, which struck me speechless and shivered me to my core. Trust me, those moments in my life are exactly as rare as a free lunch.

After a handful of fear-constricted breaths, I’d recovered from my shock. I charged down the alleyway screaming like a madman. I’m still not precisely sure why, but it was almost a reflexive response, expressing my utter outrage at what had been stated and the manner in which it had been said. I was angry that he— whoever he was— was so damned cocksure. It didn't matter, because I ran all the way down that filth-strewn path, and there was no one.

Other than rats, bugs, and trash, it was completely and utterly empty.



With the blazing morning light and my five AM wake-up call, I'd nearly forgotten about the whole, odd "shadowy-figure-in-the-alleyway" incident. What I'd not forgotten about, I'd written off to a nightmare, perhaps a bad bit of my fish head curry from the night previous that'd made an encore as a bad dream. Regardless, I barreled ahead on my pre-plotted course and re-entered the dark, uncanny jungles in my pursuit of the truth about the fabled ape-men-spirits of Southeast Asia.

If you've never been to the sub-tropical forests of Malaysia, you can take it from me that they possess a singularly unnerving and perplexing quality in their symmetry. Every tree forms the center in what seems to be a gigantic starburst pattern. Out of each of the six "arms" of these starbursts, several other grids of trees align. This creates an unsettling and almost mesmerizing quality, like some great and malevolent intelligence carefully molded miles and miles of jungle into a uniform and confusing maze. Through this perplexing tangle, it would take the greater part of a day to make it back to my solitary base camp. By sundown, everything had gone to hell in a hand basket.

My base camp had been completely shredded. It looked like a tornado made of razor blades had passed through the two small tents and supplies that I'd left behind. A few items had been left untouched: a small leatherman belt tool that I usually carried with me into rough places; tent stakes; and a small collapsible shovel, but why they'd been completely untouched, unspoiled, and spared while everything else had been shattered, rent, and ripped to bits made no sense whatsoever.

One thing was missing: my bag. This was the bag that I usually carried with me everywhere—it was a lovely leather piece the color of darkened honey.

Although I'd received it as a gift from one of my journalism professors upon graduation, I didn't care so much about the bag as I did what was in it. Inside was every single moleskine notebook (save the one I'd had with me in Singapore) that I'd used since becoming a reporter for *The Orbis Observer*. There were years and years of hard work and blood, sweat, and tears in those small, hand-written pages: leads and contacts, ideas and secrets that I could not trust to a computer or a network anywhere. I'd only left it at camp in the first place because the place was so bloody remote and deserted. I **had** to get it back; there was simply no question about it.

And, I had a trail to follow.

Whatever had invaded and destroyed my camp had been thoughtful — or fearless — enough to leave a nice trail for me through the jungle. Now, I'm not saying that I'm any kind of top-shelf tracker or Aragorn-esque ranger or anything, but the swath of destruction that had been cut through my camp had continued on, right through the oddly dense underbrush of the jungle. It was, as I'd said earlier, like an angry, vengeful tornado had dropped into the middle of the jungle and ripped it a new one.

Fuming, I stomped out of camp and promptly stumbled right over the handle of the folding camp shovel. Cursing and picking myself up from the wet foliage, I could barely see the shovel's handle jutting up from the ground like a crooked tooth in the ever-deepening gloom. Two thoughts entered my brain.

First, *How in the world did that get here?*

And second, *Am I really about to wander off into the jungle at night without a light?*

Somehow, these two utterly ridiculous questions took the stinger right out

of my anger. I took a couple of deep breaths to think about what I might need and scrounged around in the quickly failing light and was able to get together a single working lantern. I noticed then, in my newly forged pool of light, that not only had the shovel moved seemingly on its own, but also had the leatherman and the five tent stakes. To this day, I still don't know what possessed me to pick them up, but I nabbed them all and took them with me. They were, each one, as cold as an ice cube. Thus armed with light and seven items iron, I set out.

