

Harry clambered up the steep slope between the thick ledges of sandstone boulders, each stratum a hundred-thousand-year interval. Climbing through time, he mused, one of the six impossible things before breakfast that Alice didn't get to do. At the top of the bluff the wind was gale force, howling past his ears and peppering his face with grit.

Suddenly, his head exploded. He felt himself plunge off the escarpment, smash against the sharp rocks, and catapult downward toward the ravine. Pain shot through his leg and chest. He hit the sand in the dry gulch then slammed into a sandstone boulder. At the last moment he remembered to wrap his arms around his head before it whiplashed the ground. The darkness in his skull began to spread, a black ink moving across his brain. He saw it stain his life and slowly blot out time. He saw the dark shadow loom behind him, the devil come to collect, silent in the airless seep of consciousness. Then he saw nothing.

"You gave me a scare, Harry," Diana shouted above the wind. "That's the first serious accident in years of field work here."

"It ... wasn't an accident." The words came out slowly, methodically. "One of your people tried to kill me. Might even have been you."

Diana took off her hat, her face alternating between anger and disbelief. "What the fuck do you mean I tried to kill you?"

"Simple. Someone tried to bash my skull in. Then pushed me off the cliff. There's a big rock with my blood on it still lying there. I noticed it on the way up to the truck. Big rocks make handy weapons. Badlands are full of them. Humans have been using them to bash in skulls for two million years. And australopithecines before then."

"Save me the archaeology jokes," she said in a pained voice. "You can't be serious, Harry. Why the hell would I want to kill you?" She put her hat back on, hiding her face and emotions in the shadow of the big brim. "You wouldn't think that if you knew how I felt when I saw you lying there in the gully." It was almost a whisper.