

КОМПЛЕКС ТРИНАДЦАТЬ

COMPLEX 13

by

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PROLOGUE: THE PRISON OF NO RETURN

There are several Great Military Myths out there.

One of the most well-known is the Area 51 myth: that the US Air Force holds a crashed alien spacecraft—and the aliens that arrived in it—inside a hangar complex in the Nevada desert.

Another is that Adolf Hitler did not commit suicide in his fortified bunker in Berlin before the Soviet armies stormed it. Rather, the Soviets caught him and took him back to Moscow where he ended his days in an isolation cell, going mad.

A third is that the Israeli Mossad, the most ruthless secret service organisation in the world, knew of the September 11 attacks in advance and did *not* tell its ally America, thinking that such a shocking Islamist attack would only enhance US support for Israel.

Interesting conspiracy theories, yes.

But one myth has long prevailed over them all.

A legend which many in the United States intelligence community swear is true—especially those CIA operatives

who eavesdropped on the former Soviet Union in the early years of the Cold War.

It was they who heard the radio intercepts of whispered, frightened Russian voices speaking of a place named “КОМПЛЕКС ТРИНАДЦАТЬ.”

Complex 13.

It was the USSR’s Area 51, a high-security facility nineteen miles outside Tunguska—the site of a famous meteor impact in 1908—where the Soviets supposedly held their own array of extra-terrestrial creatures.

The myths about Complex 13 are terrifying: that no prisoner who entered the complex ever left; that the Soviets fed human prisoners to the aliens there; and that the Soviets did foul experiments on the aliens themselves.

Members of the Soviet prison system—political prisoners, anti-socials and military deserters—knew Complex 13 by another name.

The prison of no return.

But then an odd thing happened.

According to the CIA, Complex 13 was decommissioned in December 1959, its furnaces extinguished, its iron doors shut, its place on maps obliterated. It is not mentioned in any Soviet transmission—radio or otherwise—after that date.

It has not been found since.

In 1959, Complex 13 vanished from history.

THE LONELY MOUNTAIN

***Tunguska,
North-eastern Siberia,
Present day***

The American troops shouldn't have been there—out in the barren northern mountains of Siberia, a thousand miles from anywhere, breaching the sovereign territory of Russia.

Indeed, technically, since they were carrying weapons and wearing combat uniforms, not only were they breaching the sovereignty of Russia, they were committing an act of war.

But these twelve battle-hardened Force Recon Marines didn't care.

Their mission was to be a quick one.

Get in, verify that it was the right complex, get whatever documents they could find on the subject, and get out.

Why? Because this was *urgent*.

Their own government had one big problem back home and this might be the *only* way to solve it.

'It's under this one!' Rockmeyer indicated the ominous black mountain rising up before them. It soared into the sky like a slab

of seamless black stone, its front face covered in the rocky detritus of a major landslide.

Master Sergeant Rockmeyer held in his hands a high-density sonic-resonance imager, aimed at the mountain. The imager now revealed that there was a cave-system inside the mountain, but one that featured voids with *squared-off* corners.

A man-made structure.

THE FINISHER

The commander of the team stepped forward.

His name was Lieutenant John T. Armstrong, a quiet but effective man who excelled at unusual missions.

Among other things, he'd tracked down Saddam Hussein to a tiny hole outside Tikrit; he was also the one who'd captured bin Laden after a gigantic firefight in a cave in Tajikistan. America had not yet released that information to the world.

He was the man the Marines called in for the hard missions, the tough ones.

His call-sign: *the Finisher*.

Armstrong called in his team's only piece of heavy equipment: an M-19B tunnel-boring machine. It looked like a tank fitted with a big cone-shaped drill-head on its main cannon.

The tunnel-borer roared to life, started cutting into the mountainside.

Within an hour, it had penetrated two hundred metres into the landslide...

...where it struck iron.

The doors of Complex 13.

* * *

THE INSIDE OF HELL

Flashlights in darkness—twelve of them—lancing through the hazy gloom.

Led by Armstrong, the Marine team came to the giant iron doors of Complex 13, hidden for nearly fifty years under the landslide, and now ripped open by Armstrong's tunnel-borer.

Scrawled in spraypaint over the broken iron doorframe were Milton's famous words, translated into Russian: '*Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.*'

The team entered anyway.

'Man, when Hell freezes over...' someone said.

He was right.

It looked like Hell...frozen-over.

Immediately inside the iron doors, they found a giant grey all-concrete receiving dock. It was flanked by some glass-walled administration offices.

Blood was splattered everywhere—painting the dock's concrete walls and the offices' glass windows with long foul strokes. Human body parts lay strewn about the floor, preserved for years by the extreme cold, body parts that seemed...

...half-eaten.

A layer of frost covered everything.

Beyond the receiving dock, past a heavy steel door, they found a wide spiralling stairwell, going down into hazy darkness.

Armstrong peered down into the stairwell—

—just as something large and leathery swooped low and fast behind his head and with an ear-piercing shriek ripped the head of the man behind him *clean off!*

Armstrong whirled around—just as Rockmeyer opened fire on the creature—*brrrraaaaapp!*—and it smashed against the nearest wall, hit.

It lay on the floor, whimpering, dying.

The eleven remaining Marines gathered around it, stared at it.

It was man-sized, but with oily scaled skin and bat-like wings. It looked a little like a teradactyl, the flying dinosaur, only its head was more developed, more complex, like that of a miniature *dragon*.

‘Mother of *God*, it just tore Kasdan’s head off...’

‘Jesus, it’s just like the two we saw at Groom Lake...’

‘Which means,’ Armstrong said, ‘the Russians might also have some of the bigger ones. And that’s why we’re here. Stay sharp. Twohy and de Souza, stand guard here. The rest of you, come on. It’s time to get nasty.’

They descended the stairs.

THE STAIRCASE AND THE HANGAR

The staircase was open-sided, open to the air.

It was actually a tall-and-spindly spiralling *structure* that hung from the ceiling of an immense underground room. But this spiralling staircase never reached the floor of the hangar—it ended abruptly thirty feet *above* the floor of the room, at a long straight catwalk that was itself suspended off the floor.

For in the centre of this hangar, on its base, directly underneath the long catwalk, stood the centrepiece of Complex 13.

A spaceship.

THE SHIP

In a word, it was *magnificent*.

Even under a layer of 50-year-old frost, it was magnificent.

Its lines were streamlined and smooth; its outer shell was silver, armoured and hard. It had two downswept wings, one high tailfin and three mammoth rear thrusters.

Totally alien.

Totally cool.

It was largely intact, except for its great crushed nose—the result of a tremendous crash many years ago.

Filling the vast floor area all around the ship was a huge multi-holed alien structure, like a nest of some sort, or a three-dimensional spiderweb, dotted with thousands of foul slimy holes. This huge web fanned out from the ship and climbed the walls of the hangar. It too was covered in frost.

All was still.

‘There!’ Armstrong pointed at a small office, also raised off the floor, bolted to the wall at the very end of the catwalk far below them. ‘That must be the lab! Move!’

Down the staircase they raced.

As they ran, more of the man-sized dragons emerged from nests mounted on the walls of the hangar. They swooped in on the double-helix-like staircase—as the Marines descending the stairs returned automatic fire at them.

The dragons squealed, some fell, flapping and spasming.

One grabbed a Marine and hurled him off the stairs, sending him falling a hundred feet into the web-like formation on the floor of the hangar. The man landed in the web, which cushioned his fall, and he survived...

...for about two seconds.

Thwack! He was grabbed by a fiendishly strong claw that reached out from the nearest hole and yanked him out of sight, screaming. Then—

Crunch!

A foul blast of human blood came spraying out of the hole and the screaming stopped.

‘*Fucking* hell...’ the Marine behind Armstrong breathed.

Armstrong paid him no heed. He hit the catwalk on the fly, just as one of the winged dargons landed on it right in front of him and bared its teeth.

Two booming shots from his Desert Eagle pistol removed the dragon's head and it stumbled and staggered—headless—before falling off the catwalk, out of his way.

Behind him, another Marine fell.

They were three down, now.

Armstrong came to the lab, found the door locked from the inside.

Four booming gunshots fixed that. The door came free and he kicked it open and entered.

THE DEATH LAB

It was quiet as a tomb in the lab.

No squeals, no gunfire, no blood-sprays.

Armstrong and his men fanned out. 'Gentlemen! Files, notes, everything you can find. We can't stay for long! Move it! Koepf—cover that door behind us!'

As his men went to work, Armstrong scanned the lab—benches, desks, filing cabinets, serum bottles; all of it covered in frost; long abandoned.

An ice-encrusted human corpse lay in a corner—coiled in the foetal position, frozen in death; but whole, uneaten.

'Doc!' Armstrong called to his medic. 'Check him out!'

Doc slid to the dead man's side, examined him.

'He froze to death, sir. Musta locked himself in here to hide from the aliens.'

Someone called: 'Jesus, these records date back to 1938, when the ship was found buried half a mile underneath Tunguska...the Soviets believed its crash was the impact in 1908. It had just penetrated deep underground...'

Another man said, 'They brought it inside this facility—and examined it for years, venturing ever deeper into it. Then, in mid-1956, they found the creatures in its innermost chamber. But they

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were frozen in some kind of suspended-animation unit. Hibernation units. They were sleeping. And the stupid Soviets woke them them up. Within three years, it was all over.'

Armstrong was still standing near the frozen laboratory worker. Clasped in the dead man's hands was a large notepad.

Armstrong grabbed it, flipped it open.

The early pages were written in neat, clinical Russian:

'The extra-terrestrials adore the taste of human meat. Live human meat. They won't touch the dead prisoners. Saw the anti-social writer, Polemov, thrown into the ship today. He wasn't as brave as he was in his anti-Soviet writings! He screamed like a girl as they dragged him across the catwalk and tossed him in.'

And another entry:

'These creatures do not appear to be the builders of the spaceship. It is well beyond their development. The remains of least nine other alien species have been found on the ship—all dead. Only this species survived. Was this some kind of zoological transport ship in which the animals escaped?'

Then this entry:

'The creatures seem to go through three life-phases: the slug-like infant phase, the dragon-like flying adult, and then the largest phase of all, the enormous super-adults that live in the holes of the large web/mound formation. The infant phase lasts approximately five weeks. The adult phase, ten weeks. The super-adult phase, another ten weeks. Total life-span, twenty-five weeks.'

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'The life-cycle is reminiscent of the common butterfly, only with one additional stage: a small slug becomes a large winged adult which then cocoons again and becomes much much larger...

'According to Comrade Dr Karlov, at the fifth week of super-adult life, the creatures give asexual birth to new infants. On present observations, the good doctor estimates that every one super-adult gives birth to two infants...'

But then, late in the notebook, the ordered writing became a frantic, messy, desperate scrawl:

'We've lost control of the complex! Karlov was wrong! It wasn't a one-to-two ratio at all! Only the first generation had that ratio. The second generation of super-adults gave birth to four infants. The next gave birth to eight. Then the next: sixteen! They have now multiplied beyond our control and are taking over the complex!'

The final entry read:

'The order has been given. Complex 13 is surrounded by the Spetsnaz who, along with the outside temperatures, are keeping the creatures at bay. The Complex is now to be buried under a deliberate landslide, triggered by explosives. Trapped in this laboratory, I cannot get out, unless I choose to run the gauntlet of a thousand man-eating creatures. I will die in here. For the hundreds of men I have marched to their deaths, may God have mercy on my soul.'

Armstrong stuffed the notebook into his backpack. 'I have the breeding information!' he called.

‘And I have the killing information,’ one of his men said. ‘The Soviets did experiments on them with different temperatures. Heat is no good—they can survive superheated temperatures of up to 1,000 degrees Celsius. No wonder our grenades didn’t work! But they’re not impervious to cold! According to this data, the things can’t survive temperatures below -35° Celsius!’

‘That’s why they’re trapped in here...’ Doc said.

‘And that’s exactly the information we need,’ Armstrong called. ‘Now let’s get the hell out of here.’

JOURNEY OUT OF HELL

Out of the lab they bolted.

Dozens of squealing man-sized dragons now filled the air of the hangar.

Armstrong and his men fired up in every direction as they ran, bringing down creatures all around them.

They came to the spindly metal spiral staircase leading to the ceiling...

...just as a series of great low growls arose from the floor of the hangar.

Every man froze.

The high-pitched squeals of the smaller dragons stopped.

Then, with a great cracking sound, five large super-adults burst up out of the web-formation on the floor of the hangar!

They were enormous—not only possessed of *heads* like T-Rexes, but each was the size and shape of a T-Rex, only with huge flapping leathery wings and six free-grasping claws which they used to grab prey. Their heads were utterly terrifying: longnosed and leathery, with giant jaws equipped with teeth twenty inches long!

And how they moved!

The great superdragon-like monsters soared into the air, swooping around the staircase like giant bats, snapping at

Armstrong and his men. They towered over the humans—easily double their size.

One creature bit a Marine clean in half.

Another grabbed two with its claws and stuffed them *both* into his mouth together.

In both cases the creature in question instantly *vomited up* its food, spraying blood and partially-digested human remains everywhere in some peculiar kind of eating function. No sooner had the remains hit the floor than hundreds of little slug-like creatures emerged from the web and started eating the shredded remains.

Yet another of the super-adults made for Armstrong himself—but the Finisher just whirled to face it and fired his large-bore Desert Eagle right into the monster's left eye.

The giant creature's eye exploded, torn from its socket and the monster squealed and fell out of the air, crashing down on top of its ship, writhing and convulsing.

Now only five Marines remained on the spiral staircase.

Armstrong and two of them made it to the top of the stairs just as two of the super-adults wrenched on the staircase itself, ripping *the entire structure* from its ceiling mounts, causing the whole high-and-narrow staircase to topple...and fall...*with the last two Marines on it!*

Like a slow-falling tree, the staircase fell, crashing down onto the silver spaceship and the web formation on the floor, crushing through the suspended catwalk on the way.

No man would be going down there ever again.

THE RACE OUT

Armstrong found his two rear-guards—Twohy and de Souza—lying dead at the top of the (now destroyed) spiral

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staircase, their corpses *being eaten* by three of the smaller dragons!

Disturbed by Armstrong's sudden arrival, the three mini-dragons looked up from their gobbling—their snouts smeared with fresh blood. Then, with astonishing speed, they made for Armstrong and his two surviving men—Doc and Rockmeyer.

The three Marines ducked as one and the dragons overshot them. Then the Marines turned and firing their MP-5s *after* the beasts, ripping them to shreds, causing them to peel downwards like three damaged fighter planes.

Running again.

Hard and fast.

Desperate now.

Into the giant receiving dock...and Armstrong saw the exit doors and thought of the safety of the outside cold beyond them.

At which point, the super-adults emerged from the depths of the complex. One landed on the concrete floor of the loading dock with a great boom, upturned its massive head and roared fiercely. The deep-bass sound of its roar shook the walls.

And suddenly, as he turned to look back, Armstrong tripped on a corpse and fell awkwardly forward, flat onto his face.

The fall saved his life—but not so Doc and Rockmeyer.

For as Armstrong had fallen, a super-adult creature had come swooping down and had sliced the other two Marines in half, clean across the waist.

They fell, in pieces.

Armstrong—alone now—ran, staggered, stumbled, the last few metres, clawing his way out through iron doors of Complex 13, under the words *abandon all hope, ye who enter here*.

He dived into the doorway, into the long tunnel his men had bored, and immediately felt the colder air, spun to look back—

—just in time to see the wide-open jaws of a super-adult come rushing at his face! All he saw was teeth and tongue and the monster's deep dark yawning throat and then—

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* * *

CHOMP!

The jaws clamped shut, *one single inch* away from Armstrong's nose.

And John T. Armstrong lay there...on his butt, on the icy ground...*right in front of* four of the gigantic winged super-adults, these great alien dragons, all of them towering over him, looming over him, glaring at him with their foul evil faces and their bloody man-eating grins.

But they didn't step forward through the great iron doorway.

Couldn't step forward.

It was too cold.

Armstrong had made it. Just.

And so he left the tunnel, left Complex 13, with a backpack full of information.

Once outside, he was collected by a long-range pick-up chopper, from which he radioed his prized information back to the States...

...back to Groom Lake, Nevada...

...the home of Area 51, the notorious secret base, where a group of American military scientists were currently under attack from a rapidly-multiplying colony of dragon-like aliens that they had disturbed from their slumber in the lone alien ship that was kept in the underground hangar there.

THE END