

JONATHAN MILLER

A large, dark, saucer-shaped UFO is positioned at the top of the frame. A powerful, bright blue beam of light emanates from its center, shining down onto a road sign. The sign is rectangular with a white border and contains the text 'SHAKESPEARE GHOST TOWN' in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Below the text is a white arrow pointing to the right. The background shows a dark, hazy landscape with rolling hills and some sparse vegetation under a night sky.

SHAKESPEARE
GHOST TOWN

THE SHAKESPEARE INCIDENT

A Rattlesnake Lawyer Novel

THE SHAKESPEARE INCIDENT

By

JONATHAN MILLER



“The views expressed herein are not necessarily
those of the author.”

Arthur C. Clarke *Childhood's End*

PART I

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Chapter 1

Tuesday, July 7

“Have I ever told you the story of how I got my name?” Denny Song asked Cordelia Dunsinane. A ritual between them, he always asked her this question when he was nervous. Almost midnight, they stood on a desert ridge, next to a cylindrical water tower, just south of Lordsburg, New Mexico. If they looked to the west, they could see the outline of the “ghost town” of Shakespeare, an abandoned mining camp. To the south, they overlooked a squadron of heavily armed sheriff’s deputies and a mysterious black van on her family’s property, the New Shakespeare Ranch. Hell, the small-town deputies down below were distant relatives and might as well be her family, and that made it much, much worse.

Now was a good time to be nervous.

Denny was twenty-seven but looked years older. Off the drugs for a few weeks now, tattoos of flying saucers adorned his lanky arms. He wore a black tank top that read STRAIGHT OUTTA ROSWELL. It recreated the famed album cover of the rap masterpiece, *Straight Outta Compton*, but sported aliens instead of rappers glaring at the viewer.

He absent-mindedly played with an old Tek 9 semi-automatic handgun. Cordelia put her hand on his and slowly took the gun away from him.

“You might as well tell me the story while we figure out how to get the grail,” Cordelia said. She wore a black western cut shirt and rattlesnake cowboy boots like a back-up singer in a country band about to go to rehab. Her phone tucked in her shirtfront pocket beeped, indicating a new message. She almost used her right hand to check on it, before remember-

ing the gun. “This damn game has me messed up.”

When the CEO of Cygnus Moon, an Asian tech conglomerate, set up the 24 Grails Contest, the players couldn’t predict it would become a matter of life and death. Initially, the world viewed the game as a cross between *Pokémon Go* and *Forrest Fenn Treasure Hunt*. For the silver grails that mysteriously appeared all over the world, the prizes were astronomical. And when Cygnus Moon announced that if someone, *anyone*, touched the Omega Grail—the one currently located on the Dunsinane family ranch—the sky itself could be the limit.

“A grand prize beyond your ultimate desires.” Cygnus Moon’s company website specified few details on the contest. “Find the Omega Grail and have it verified.”

Finding the grail was no big deal. Having it *verified* might prove fatal.

No one knew how or when the final grail appeared on top of the boulder at New Shakespeare Ranch. No one knew how *any* of the other twenty-three grails magically appeared all over the world on random properties. And now the end-game had come here to the bootheel of New Mexico at the end of the earth.

Denny and Cordelia had discovered the Omega Grail two days ago, but they had to wait until it was “verified”—whatever that meant. Probably they would have to touch it in the presence of whoever was in the black van parked by the grail.

Leaning on a leg of the water tower, Cordelia looked at the dusty expanse of New Shakespeare Ranch. The cattle, the sheep and even the stray dogs were long gone. She wanted to touch the grail herself, more than anything, but somehow, she knew that Denny needed to be the one who did it. She sensed that touching it could kill her, but she didn’t quite know why. There was a lot about her past that she didn’t know or understand.

The Sheriff’s office had seized the ranch the night before, her father’s corpse still warm. Sheriff JC Diamond had shown an alleged warrant for bad loans from the bank on her late father’s estate.

“Your daddy owed a shit load of money to the wrong

people before he died,” the sheriff said. “If you challenge the validity of the ‘warrant,’ you gotta hire a lawyer and take it down to the courthouse. And as you know, *my* county, *my* courthouse.”

“But what about the grail?” Cordelia had asked. “What about the prize?”

“You want to touch that grail and win that prize, you gotta go through me. Well, you gotta go through *us*.”

Sheriff Diamond and his crew had set up a perimeter around the boulder, while the black van waited with its motor running, a few feet from the grail itself. When did that van get there?

New Shakespeare Ranch was her family’s land, her birthright, but the other members of her family were dead or lost to the wind. Her father had always said that his family was “special,” but they were vulnerable to meth, opioids and alcohol, just like everyone else. Maybe more so. Still, losing the ranch was like losing part of her soul. She wanted it back.

Denny reached up and put his hand on her shoulder. She was far taller, especially in boots.

“You gotta listen” Denny said. “It’s important.”

“You’re right, Denny.” She patted his hand. “You’ve told me the long-lost-sister-story like a million times but please, please tell me the story again if it calms you down.”

“We were twins,” Denny began. “Before I was even born, my real mother asked her sister, my aunt, for naming suggestions. My aunt said it should Denise if it’s a girl...”

“And *De-nephew* if it’s a boy,” Cordelia piped in on cue. “And your real mom said to just call you *Denny*. And that woman who took you overheard that and went with it. That’s how you got your name. But then you got taken away by that bad bitch before you even met your real mom, the saint.”

“My stepmom said my real mom was so beautiful. If only we could have been together as a family.”

“I’m sure your *real* mom would be proud of you,” Cordelia lied. “Your *real* sister too. If she’s still alive...”

“I wonder if my sister looks like me—half Korean, half-Hispanic and half-something else.”

Denny always made that same joke about his ethnicity.

At least she hoped that it was a joke. Meth had ruined his math skills.

The ritual over, Cordelia moved on. "That's a great story, honey. Now we gotta figure out what to do about the grail. You gotta be the one to touch it in front of whoever's in the van. I don't think they can shoot us in front of the judges."

Denny wasn't finished. "I don't know what happened. I've got a feeling I'll meet Denise real soon. Maybe my real mom even. I can sense that they're on their way here. I'm kinda psychic you know. I'm sure Denise is a psychic too. Fifth dimensional consciousness and all."

"That's the first time you've told me that," Cordelia said. "I sure hope you're right. We need all the help we can get." She looked at her watch. It was her late father's watch. It had stopped but the second hand was vibrating in place.

"I should look her up like right now," Denny continued, not noticing Cordelia's distress. "I think she's a lawyer or something. She must be really good, especially if she's psychic like me."

Denise Song was a psychic lawyer? That was also new. "Uhm...can't she just reach out to you with her mind, if she's like psychic?"

"Maybe she doesn't know I'm alive. She doesn't know where to look."

"Whatever. We got to worry about the grail."

"I still say that the grail was put there by aliens as a portal through that black hole, Cygnus X-1," Denny said. He had now switched to another ritual between them—the grail-planted-by-aliens one. "You know Cygnus Moon probably has a connection to the Cygnus X-1 black hole."

"Aliens don't offer grand prizes if you find their artifacts," Cordelia said. "It was probably put there by one of those stealth drones you worked with on base before you got discharged. They dropped it down while we were asleep."

"Maybe we can get Denise to help us. Who knows, she might not be that far away," Denny said. "You can look things up with your phone, right? Maybe we can find her that way."

He didn't own a phone; he had traded it in for drugs last year.

“Well, we got to make a choice right now,” Cordelia said. “We can stay up here and try to find your psychic sister, if she even exists, or we march down onto the ranch, you touch the grail and pray that the cops don’t shoot us.”

Denny looked down at the ranch—at the grail, at the black van and at the cops. He then looked at Cordelia. Her phone in the breast pocket of her shirt was still glowing from the unread message. She held the gun in her right hand.

“What should I do?” Denny asked. “Maybe I should just try to find my sister with the phone. What do you think?”

Cordelia could hand him the phone or the gun. She took another look at the grail on her family’s ranch and at the vibrating second hand of her father’s watch. Time was an issue right now. A grail in the hand is worth a lot more than a Denise in the bush. “That bitch Denise probably doesn’t exist. Denise and De-nephew? Sounds like a bad joke your stepmom told you. If this Denise is alive *and* if she’s a psychic, she would have found you by now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Fuck Denise! Let’s just get the damn grail,” she said. “It’s not like they’re going to shoot you on my property in front of the prize committee, especially if you let them know you have a gun. Just don’t point it at anyone.”

“You’re probably right. Give me the gun. Let’s just get the grail. I’m sure I won’t have to shoot anyone. Maybe Denise is just some silly-ass story my stepmom told me.”

She handed him the gun.

Denny took two steps away from the water tower. He held the gun in his right hand as his left hand curled into a fist of anger.

Cordelia knew of Denny’s hatred toward the sheriff, his hatred toward this whole county. “Promise me you’re not going to shoot them,” she said. “We got to play this cool.”

“I won’t if I don’t have to. I’m going to sneak around the back. There’s a ditch under the fence behind that boulder. I pop up from behind the rock, touch the grail and then we win the prize.”

Denny took a third step toward the ranch and seemed to cross an invisible tripwire over a fault line. The earth rum-

bled beneath them and then intensified when he took another step.

“What’s going on?” Denny asked.

“Look!” Cordelia said, pointing up. An object in the sky appeared directly above their heads. There was a blinding flash of light and then a pink glow in the darkness. It took a moment for their eyes to adjust. Blood now trickled out of her nose and ears. Whatever was up there now floated directly over the water tower and focused a spotlight on the grail.

“I told you it was a UFO!” Denny said. “It came through the black hole from another dimension.”

“Not even. It came out of the ground,” Cordelia said. “Like from right under the water tower.”

“It could still be a UFO.”

By definition, the thing above them was a UFO, as it was unidentified, flying and an *object*. It didn’t matter where it came from. The object wasn’t a flying saucer, more like a globe with stingray wings. It was impossible to tell its size in this light or whether it was metal, fiberglass or something extraterrestrial. The UFO was emitting the pink light, a pink from beyond the normal spectrum—not ultra-violet, but ultra-pink?

It made a sound like a dog-whistle that was barely audible to the human ear. The grail shimmered in the vibrating pink spotlight, like a mirror ball in Satan’s disco.

“He’s up there!” The sheriff was pointing right at them.

“We’ve got to do this now!” Cordelia said to Denny. “The cops know we’re here!”

The lights above them grew brighter.

There was another flash. Lightning emerged directly from the grail, then ricocheted around the canyon. Cordelia heard a high-pitched noise that sounded like a dog whistle—for a dog from another dimension.

Denny screamed. Had he been hit by lightning? He froze.

Cordelia’s whole body ceased to exist and then reappeared. Had all the pieces come back together correctly? Everything felt a little bit off. She fell to her knees and vomited. When her vision cleared, she checked her father’s

watch. The second hand was now rocking back and forth between twelve and six. At least she'd stopped bleeding...

While she still felt insubstantial, Denny now looked more solid, bigger even. He began walking directly down to the entrance of the ranch.

Cordelia stared at Denny and saw even his walk was different, like a zombie. He had "broken bad" before, and drugs made him do strange things, but now he might as well be someone or *something* else. While he had been hesitant to seek out the grail, now his eyes were locked on it.

Or maybe he looked so different because she felt even lighter, like she would float away at any moment. "Denny!" she yelled.

He didn't reply. He continued heading toward the cops.

"Denny, stop or we'll shoot!" the sheriff shouted. "We'll take out Cordelia too."

Denny kept walking. He lifted up his gun stiffly, as if he was a marionette and someone—or *something*—above was pulling the strings.

Damn. Instead of the gun, she should have given him the phone.

Chapter 2

“Looks like we got air support.” Sheriff JC Diamond frowned at the flying object hovering over the big water tower on the ridge above New Shakespeare Ranch. He always claimed in public that he didn’t believe in flying saucers and offered “logical” explanations to the press. He kept his real beliefs to himself.

He was the old-timer here. He could pass for a muscular fifty but was much older. He wore his standard crisp desert khaki. His shiny silver star badge was so sharp that it could draw blood. And of course, even though it was night, he wore his usual sunglasses.

“Did you call that in, Sheriff?” Antonio, one of his deputies, asked. “That sure don’t look like one of ours.”

“Maybe it’s like military or something, sir,” Beatrice said. “They got drones like that over at the missile range.”

“Should we shoot at it?” Claudio asked.

The sheriff turned around and frowned at the three twenty-something deputies in their ill-fitting khakis and dull badges. The new generation failed to live up to their potential, that was for sure. Drugs, video games, modern permissiveness. These deputies weren’t much different from the criminals they were supposed to be arresting.

Antonio Smith was the youngest. He had been hit in the head with a football a few too many times. Beatrice Baca was supposed to be the smart one. She was hoping to transfer to a higher paying job at Border Patrol once her twin daughters were a little older. And then there was Claudio Johnson, the only one who’d actually been in combat. He still had PTSD. Sheriff Diamond never knew whether Claudio would shoot the perp or shoot himself.

The only person he could really trust was Earl, the German Shepherd sitting calmly on his right.

“We’ll just have to wait and see,” the sheriff said. “And hope that it’s on *our* side.” His deputies didn’t know what was really going on, and he wasn’t about to tell them.

This unidentified object above the water tower was a wrinkle he hadn’t been expecting on this night of all nights. Did that change anything? Somehow, he knew that it would change *everything*.

All of a sudden, his deputies shimmered in the lightning, covering their eyes. He was glad he wore his sunglasses. Then the three of them vomited, as if on cue.

“I’m bleeding,” Antonio said.

“I don’t feel so good,” Beatrice said.

Claudio said nothing and threw up again.

“Damn rookies,” the sheriff said. “Man. The. Fuck. Up.”

They wiped their faces and tried to man up—whatever that meant. “What’s your secret? Why didn’t you throw up, Sheriff?” Beatrice asked.

“You’re not bleeding either,” Antonio said.

“I’m *grounded*,” the Sheriff said. “One of the benefits of being *old school*.”

“Well, Sheriff Old School, you better watch what’s going on below the drone, on the ground,” Beatrice said, “I don’t know how you see anything with those glasses.”

She pointed at two figures on the ridge. She would be a good border patrol agent—if they survived the night.

“He’s up there!” the sheriff yelled, pointing a powerful flashlight at the ridge. “By the water tower. It’s Denny and Cordelia!”

Lightning ricocheted around the canyon again. Earl whined. A scream came from the direction of the ridge and the sheriff saw Cordelia collapse to the ground. Denny started marching toward the sheriff and his crew.

“Are you sure it’s him?” Beatrice asked. “He looks funny.”

“Funny how? Like a clown?” the sheriff asked. He hated the word “funny” on principle. Nothing was funny to him.

“No, like funny *scary*,” Claudio said. Claudio had already drawn his gun.

"He's like a zombie," Antonio added. "He's walking so slow, like he weighs a million pounds."

"Alert the ambulance, just in case," the sheriff said. The ambulance was at the fire station over the ridge, less than a minute away. A hearse was parked in town if it came to that.

Denny kept coming.

"Denny, stop or we'll shoot!" the sheriff yelled. "We'll take out Cordelia too!"

Denny walked more like a robot than a zombie, his steps precise as if on a balance beam. He held the gun straight out from his body and his slow steps were in perfect beat.

"Try to take him alive," the sheriff said to his team. "But if you shoot him, take him out, he sure has it coming. Do NOT let him touch the grail under any circumstances!"

He directed the beefy Antonio off to the right. Beatrice Baca stood behind him; she was a mom after all. The wiry Claudio guarded the left flank. The canine, Earl, was still at his side. Earl was still spooked by something they couldn't hear, he continued whining softly.

"Good dog," the sheriff said, patting Earl's forehead. The dog didn't stop whining.

"Should we wake whoever's in the van?" Antonio asked.

"No," the sheriff said. "They don't need to see this."

The black van's doors were closed tight. At first the sheriff had thought the device on top was some kind of extraterrestrial transmitter, but it turned out to be a mountain bike. The man inside had claimed to be from the agency who "verified the prize." The man had shown the sheriff some fancy ID that had a military logo.

Why would the military be in charge of a silly grail contest? The answer was obvious to the sheriff—it was all part of the greater plan. No one told him anything, other than a text that Denny must not reach the grail, but they shouldn't kill him. He didn't know who sent the text, but knew he was supposed to obey.

But then again, if Denny died *accidentally*, that was on Denny, not him.

The van had darkly tinted windows. Did the man inside know what was going on?

Earl now started barking, in a slow but rhythmic pattern, as if keeping time with some cosmic metronome.

Denny kept coming. He was heading straight toward the grail, staying in the middle of the dirt road as if guided from above. Cordelia screamed his name, but he didn't respond.

"Denny, stop right there!" Sheriff Diamond yelled. Denny was now forty yards away and the Sheriff noticed that Denny had his eyes closed. Had they been closed the whole time? "That's an order. The grail ain't worth dying for. It's all some kinda bullshit."

The sheriff could now arrest Denny on a trespass charge alone. With another step, the sheriff could hang a "refusal to obey a lawful order" on Denny which would give them grounds to shoot to wound at least. With a second step, they had grounds to shoot to kill, despite what the text had ordered.

The UFO was still hovering above the ridge, the screeching sounds of the UFO were now at an audible frequency that made their skin crawl. The sheriff turned and shouted at Antonio, "Tackle him!"

Antonio had played middle linebacker for the Lordsburg High Mavericks. Antonio holstered his gun and headed toward Denny from the side, going for a tackle, just as they'd done in practice on that dirt field. Denny continued the robot-like slow march toward the grail. He ignored the beefy deputy on his flank.

Antonio dove toward Denny's legs, but it seemed like a switch was turned on from slow to fast. Denny whipped around and shot at him. Antonio went down face first, not moving.

Eyes still closed, Denny silently turned back toward the grail and kept walking. Earl now barked wildly. The Sheriff didn't want to release Earl and put his dog in danger, so he turned to Beatrice and told her to take the shot. "Phasers on stun," he said. Their code for a shot in the leg.

She fired.

Distracted by the barking dog and the glare of the drone's spotlight, her shot went wild. Denny, without missing a step, pointed his gun directly at Beatrice and fired. She went down

hard. Was she dead? What would happen to her daughters? The sheriff didn't have time to find out.

"Claudio!" the sheriff yelled. "It's all you. Take him out!"

Claudio fired. He was supposed to be the sharpshooter of the bunch. Every shot missed Denny as if he had some kind of a force-field that deflected the bullets. Eyes still closed, Denny fired a single shot at Claudio's general direction. Even though it hit him, Claudio took another step from sheer momentum and then fell to the ground.

Denny didn't change his expression.

No, Denny definitely wasn't funny anymore. It was now just Sheriff JC Diamond and Earl the German Shephard.

"You don't want to do this, Denny," Sheriff Diamond said. He gestured to Earl to stay and put both of his hands on his weapon. The dog stayed but didn't stop barking. He could live without his deputies, but he couldn't live without Earl. He had been Sheriff for years, and while he had drawn his weapon before, this would be his first shoot-out. About time.

He had always thought he would take Denny down for good, sooner rather than later, and now it would be his chance. It had to be part of the plan.

Denny kept walking toward him, his weapon out...

The sheriff lifted up his gun, ready to fire...

The sheriff heard the door of the van open. He heard footsteps behind him but dared not take his eyes off Denny. He sure hoped that the guy in the van was on their side.

The sheriff took a final deep breath as he stared at Denny, this was it.

Suddenly Earl stopped barking and the UFO vanished, disappearing back over the ridge. The pink spotlight was gone from the grail. Even the water tower went dark.

Before the sheriff could squeeze the trigger, Denny dropped the gun and collapsed. If he was the marionette, the puppeteer had loosened the strings.

"Denny!" Cordelia's wail echoed through the rocky hills. "You killed him!"

The sheriff had a clean shot, but Denny was clearly on the ground, his hand off his gun. The sheriff could no longer claim self-defense if Cordelia was somehow recording this.

“I didn’t do shit,” the sheriff said as he hurried over to Denny and slapped cuffs on the prone man from behind.

He looked over at his deputies. They were still breathing. That was a good sign. “Hang in there! The ambulance is on its way!”

Right on cue, an ambulance pulled into the compound after speeding from the other side of the hill.

“Three down,” he shouted to the two EMTs as they emerged out of the ambulance. Denny was down too, but he didn’t count.

“Nothing happened,” said a voice behind him.

The stranger was in his late twenties, Asian, and dressed in a black jacket over one of those tight black cycling jerseys with a small icon over the left breast. His black hair was long, and sweaty, as if he’d just run a mile.

Now that he had a good look at him, the sheriff noticed the stranger had a scraggly beard, and a lanyard with some kind of picture badge featuring a blurry photo. If he worked for the military, he was clearly not active duty. The nearby bases—Holloman Air Force Base, White Sands Missile Range and the ones over in Arizona—all had civilian employees. This guy must be one of them, and not one of *us*. The sheriff hated him at first sight.

“Nothing happened? What the hell are you talking about?” the sheriff growled at the stranger.

“Nothing happened with the *grail*.” The stranger was talking into his oversized phone. He finally noticed the sheriff’s deputies down on the ground. “Oh my God! This wasn’t supposed to happen! Are your deputies all right?”

“They’re going to be fine,” an EMT said. “None of these wounds looks fatal if we get ‘em to the hospital.”

The stranger listened to someone on his phone. “All right, I’ll let you know. I’ll put the sheriff on.”

The stranger handed the phone to the sheriff. “You better take this, it’s the big boss.”

The sheriff frowned and took the call. This stranger wasn’t one of them, but he had a line to the big boss and that bothered the sheriff. The sheriff himself hadn’t talked to the boss in years. Who was this guy?

"We're gonna say it's a military drone, right?" the sheriff said and then nodded at the response. He recounted the story into the phone, nodded again and handed the phone back to the stranger, who listened for a moment and then hung up.

It still didn't make sense, but it was becoming a little clearer. Just a little.

"What was supposed to happen?" the sheriff asked, his attention torn between his squad and the stranger. "Who the hell are you anyway?"

"That's not important right now." The man moved to the grail and looked puzzled. He hadn't noticed Denny's body on the other side of the ambulance.

The EMT shooed the sheriff away, so the sheriff walked closer to the stranger and the grail.

"I'm so sorry, this wasn't supposed to happen!" the man said again. "None of this."

"Was that one of *our* drones up there over the water tower?" the sheriff asked.

"We do a lot of work with drones," the stranger said. That didn't really answer the question of course. "That guy was supposed to trigger the grail. Are your men all right?"

The sheriff winced by the man's use of the word "trigger." This stranger obviously didn't get it, whoever he was.

The EMTs attended to his downed troops, but the immediate crisis was over. The deputies were alive, for now, and probably would survive. "They're stable," an EMT said.

"Do you want us to take the shooter to the hospital?" the other one asked the sheriff.

"No, Denny can die right here."

"*Denny?*" The stranger knew the name. He walked around the ambulance and saw Denny lying in the dirt. "Oh my God, you've got to help him."

"He wasn't shot," the sheriff said. He just fainted. I don't care who you are, he shot my men and that wasn't part of no plan, text or no text. It's my bust. He dies, he dies."

"Sheriff, that guy you want to let die was clearly affected by the grail." The man was really upset. He clearly wasn't one of *them*. "He didn't know what he was doing. This wasn't supposed to happen!"

"I don't care," the sheriff said. He took off his sunglasses at last, if only to make eye contact with the stranger. "The big boss says I've got to keep him in custody and make sure he never comes close to here again. He might trigger the grail for real next time and the whole world will go to hell."

The stranger nodded as if he finally understood. The sheriff put his glasses back on.

The EMTs loaded the fallen deputies into the ambulance and sped away.

"What was supposed to happen today?" the sheriff asked the stranger. "No one tells us anything way out here at the end of America. You can tell me the real truth now that everyone else is gone. I won't tell the big boss."

The stranger was trying to revive Denny. "Is there any way you can release your prisoner to me?"

The sheriff pointed his gun directly at the stranger.

"I don't care who the hell you are. You're alone. My county, my courthouse. Unless you have a court-order taking custody of *my* prisoner, he's going to Hidalgo County Detention Center, here in Lordsburg. Text or no text. We do things differently out here. This is Lordsburg, baby."

The man looked at his phone one more time, and then back at the gun. "Your bust, sheriff."

Still on the ground, Denny finally revived. He strained to lift his neck, opened his eyes and stared blankly at the sheriff. "Did I win?"

"You won a life sentence. You shot three cops," the sheriff said. "I should shoot your ass right now."

"I don't have any *recollection* of that."

"That makes sense," the stranger said.

Denny stared at the stranger, recognizing him. "You!"

"Not now, Denny," the stranger said, putting a finger to his lips indicating silence. He glanced at his phone one last time. "I'm going to do everything I can to get you out, but it might take a while."

"Do you know him?" the sheriff asked the stranger.

"He used to work with me on base."

"This piece of shit meth? I just know him as Denny. He's one of the usual suspects that somehow never gets

popped for good even though we know he's dirty. Gonna do a little search incident to arrest if you don't mind."

The stranger nodded. "Like I said, your bust sheriff. Denny, I'm going to try to get you out."

The sheriff holstered his gun, came over to Denny and put a foot on his back. He gave a look over at the stranger and realized that he'd have to do this by the book. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court. You have the right to talk to a lawyer..."

"I want my lawyer!"

"Who's your lawyer?" said the sheriff.

"Call my sister, Denise Song," Denny said to the stranger. "Find her for me. She's my lawyer, I'm not saying shit without her, I know my rights."

"*Denise Song?*" The stranger smiled a knowing, guilty smile. "It all makes sense now, why the grail didn't trigger. Sheriff, you can hold him for the moment, but I'll find his sister. Denny, I promise you. This wasn't supposed to happen!"

The stranger tapped on his phone. "Find Denise Song," he said out loud to his large phone that looked like it could be used as a laser. He smiled when he saw the result.