
Riven Infiltrates the Scargorman Secret Lair

Do you wonder how Riven manages to insert himself into the heart of the Scargorman's secret facility near the end of the book? Here's how, in scenes deleted from the novel.

Riven stood in the shadow of the overpass, dressed in a police uniform, watching the target vehicle approach the queue at the roadblock. The road slowed the vehicle, then stopped it completely at the end of the queue, directly beneath the overpass.

Stepping toward the truck's door, Riven flashed official authorization at the truck, which opened its door in compliance.

"We're looking for the terrorist who poisoned the Ghannam water supply," he told the truck's sole occupant, a nondescript man dressed in drab clothing who was holding a fresh orange in his hand.

The man shrugged and rotated his seat out of Riven's way as Riven stepped forward into the passenger compartment.

With one swift motion, Riven pressed a small tranquilizer bulb to the man's neck, and seconds later, the man slumped in his seat, the orange rolling across the floor. Riven closed the door, told the road that the vehicle had been cleared to continue, and bent to undress the man. As the truck moved past the roadblock and accelerated, Riven sampled the man's DNA the old-fashioned way: he ate him.

Not all of him; just a little blood. Riven applied the blood collector to the man's skin, opened his own mouth, and let four warm drops fall onto his tongue. It was oogy, but he

needed a live sample.

According to the mission plan, after the truck left the city, Riven had a short time before it would enter the only other area hidden from satellite and direct surveillance: a rocky overhang on the way to Scargorman's secure facility. By that time, Riven had to be this man, wearing this man's clothes, so that he could dump the unconscious man and the police uniform.

Tricky enough already, without adding the fact that the dump had to take place while the vehicle was in motion, maintaining constant velocity so that Scargorman security wouldn't wonder what might have caused it to falter.

As he locked down the pattern in the man's blood, removed the man's ID chip and inserted it in his own transformed flesh, donned the drab brown shirt, pants, and shoes, picked the orange up and stuck it into one pocket, and sprayed air-permeable hardening foam over the man to protect him when he hit the dirt by the side of the road where John Foley would retrieve him, he kept thinking of Aleta.

By now, she would have received his message that John had kidnapped him and taken him to Faraway for healing.

Riven positioned the man by the door. The overhang was up ahead.

After sending the message, he'd been intercepted by John, who stopped him from heading straight back to Aleta.

Time this right Door open. Flash of high weeds, black shadow. Push!

He wished he could have told her in person.

As the door closed, Riven accessed the vehicle computer and read the data on the man's ID chip: Fred Bing.

But she would approve of this mission.

He dropped into Fred's empty seat and checked the rest of the data. His new left knee ached. Taking a deep breath, he recognized the moment as the first he'd had in which to truly do nothing since the kidnapping.

Aleta. Shards, the bletcherous longing he felt to touch, to taste, to smell her. He rolled the orange between his palms, and its citrus fragrance sweetened the air. The media's coverage of her projects made him proud—and hungry for her.

But he was going undercover to prevent Levy Scargorman from destroying the Grand Central Starway upon which so many oppressed people were pinning their hopes.

Only John Foley and the Agency's Director knew where he was headed—and, of course, only John knew that shapeshifting was part of the plan. Ever since Yoshi Trowton had been unmasked as the mole, trust was hard to come by at the Agency, and Riven agreed that the fewer who knew of his mission, the better.

He hadn't sent words in his second message to Aleta. He'd sent devotion.

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The truck pulled up to the gate outside the secure facility, told the gate what it needed to hear in order to open, and crossed the wide swathe of scorched-earth pavement to the plain, windowless building. Riven touched the orange in his pocket for luck as the truck continued into a carport and stopped by a guard post set into the wall next to a large sealed door.

"Scanning," the guard inside the post said over the truck's comm.

Riven couldn't see the guard; the post was as windowless as the building. But he didn't let that bother him. He just sat, waiting, being Fred.

He didn't know the guard's name, didn't know the number of people who lived year-round in this facility. All he and John knew was that Fred was the only person who ever left the building, and that he did so roughly three times per year, at irregular intervals, with no apparent prior warning, to travel into the city and acquire goods from a rotating selection of clueless merchants. This paranoid security was standard operating procedure for the many such facilities maintained by the various Ten Families, where, inside these buildings, shielded from any electronic intrusion, the most precious secrets could be kept.

When the Agency's equally standard attention to these facilities—Scargorman's in this particular case—had revealed a sequence of shipping manifests that seemed to indicate Fred might be going on a supply run soon, John had little time to do more than yank Riven off the ship headed for the Dagarro moon and brief him on the way to the Scargorman facility.

The Grand Central Starway was due to open formally in a few months. Riven knew that he would need every minute of that time to complete his mission, in total isolation, in the bastion of Scargorman secrets. He must discover the specific nature of Scargorman's plans. And he must thwart them.

The DNA scan and total body scan revealed nothing unusual about Fred.

The various scans of the truck and its contents—both organic and non-organic—revealed nothing unusual about those.

A slot opened in the guard post, and the guard stuck out his hand.

Riven studied that hand for a second, opened the door, and got out of the truck.

The hand was palm up, the fingers slightly cupped.

Bletcherous blight! This must be some sort of test. What?

Fingers cupped On impulse, Riven pulled the orange out of his pocket and dropped it into the guard's hand.

The hand withdrew.

An enormous door fell into place behind the truck, the noise of angry metal reverberating in the now thoroughly enclosed carport. Riven steeled himself.

Instead of an attack, the large inner door opened, and four people poured into the sealed carport, heading directly for the back of the truck. The guard inside the post emerged and was joined by a second guard who trailed the four other people.

The two men and two women who made up the group of four ignored Riven as they studied the labels on the various containers in the truck's hold, calling out to each other while they distributed the containers amongst themselves, piled the boxes onto float pallets, and steered the pallets away, laughing and chattering. "Party tonight!" one of them proclaimed, lifting a congloved arm, and the others cheered.

The second guard exchanged pleasantries with the first, collected a few containers of her own, and left the port.

Riven eyed the containers that remained in the truck. There were several float pallets left near the wall.

As he took a step toward the pallets, something sharp stung the back of his neck. He flinched and spun.

The door guard chuckled. "Got you again." He headed back to the guard post, tossing a casual, "Welcome back," over his shoulder.

Riven tamped down the surge of adrenaline and just stood there, being Fred. Nothing to

worry about. The door guard had injected him with Fred's in-house tech, which was even now informing him of Fred's work schedule via its connection to the facility's computer system. Tech like that wouldn't be allowed outside the walls; precious Scargorman secrets might leak that way. It would have to be reinstalled each time Fred returned. All routine.

He piled the remaining containers on the float pallet, studying the tech as he did so. Its access to the main computer system was extremely limited, but it might be a gateway he could use. In the meantime, he'd better get to work doing Fred's job.

Welcome to his new life as all-around odd-job in a Scargorman secret lair.