

BRAXTON BONNER

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Written by

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FINAL DRAFT

BRAXTON BONNER - "THE CASE OF THE DEADLY SAUCER"

TEASER:

FADE IN:

EXT. OPEN RANGE LAND - DAY

The cattle grazing on the open plains appear as small dots from the vantage point of this high vista. A river winds nearby, bordering the plains.

From the right, a small slow moving swirling trail of dust comes into view, the sign of a vehicle crossing the plains. The view zooms in ever tighter on the vehicle.

The dust gives way to the sight of a older pickup truck racing down an unpaved road. Dust trailing its mud flaps.

The driver is ALFRED WHATLEY, a man in his 60's with snow white hair sticking out from under a John Deere cap.

Flanking him are the fenced-in fields of the open plains bordered by the thicket of trees clumped along the river. Just ahead the road dead-ends into a closed metal gate.

Whatley pulls up and parks his pickup sideways across the road just as another shiny new pickup pulling a boat drives up from the other side of the gate.

Whatley gets out of his pickup leaving the door open. He takes a couple of steps toward the gate and stands with his arms crossed. The new pickup comes to a stop.

Whatley's nephew JAMES SAMPSON, a man in his early 20's, steps out of the new pickup and opens the gate toward Whatley.

SAMPSON

You going to move that piece of crap or
am I going to have to push it out of
the way?

WHATLEY

I don't think you have the nuts to
scratch that new truck of yours.

Sampson ties the gate back and walks toward Whatley.

SAMPSON

(angry) What do you want?

WHATLEY

(also angry) To talk some sense into you!

SAMPSON

By blocking my way and insulting me?

Whatley points to the truck/boat combination.

WHATLEY

You've got to stop this nonsense. This ain't what your mother wanted.

Sampson stops directly in front of his uncle.

SAMPSON

How I spend my money is my business...

WHATLEY

You're supposed to use that money to go to college...not to buy this useless junk. And now I hear you're going to sell the rest just so you can buy more junk?

SAMPSON

She willed the land to ME. I can sell it and buy whatever I want. It's MY MONEY!

Whatley calms his voice.

WHATLEY

Alright. Alright. If you're head strong on selling it at least give me a chance to...

Whatley's face loses all expression. He looks up and over his nephew's shoulder. His eyes widen, his jaw slackens. Sampson doesn't notice.

SAMPSON

We've already been over that a dozen times. You don't have the money. And I don't want to wait to start enjoying my life.

Clouds rapidly form in the sky just above a giant oak tree behind Sampson.

SAMPSON

And I'm tired of you telling me what to do with my inheritance. This property is legally mine and you're trespassing. So get that hunk of junk out of my way.

Whatley stands motionless, his eyes still glued to the silent event taking place behind his nephew.

SAMPSON

Did you hear me? I said move your truck.

Whatley's face has turned pale. Sampson takes a step back to look his uncle over head to toe. He speaks with concern.

SAMPSON

What's the matter? You having a stroke or something?

Sampson notices Whatley's horrified eyes are focused behind him. He slowly looks over his shoulder.

A saucer-shaped craft burst through the undulating clouds and hovers over the trees. Sampson wheels around.

The craft emits two strong search lights which speckle the ground around the men. Whatley appears petrified as the lights converge, first illuminating Sampson, then him.

The lights suddenly extinguish. A second later a blue beam accompanied by a loud hum shoots from the craft and grabs a horrified Whatley.

SAMPSON

Hey you son of a bitch!

Whatley is immobilized. His body lifts slightly off the ground and is slowly dragged away from the pickup. Sampson grabs him and engages in a tug-of-war with the beam.

SAMPSON

Let go you ass hole!

The beam snatches Whatley from Sampson's grasp and begins dragging him again.

Sampson runs to Whatley's open pickup door and grabs a rifle hanging on a rear window gun rack. He turns and carefully takes aim.

Sampson takes a shot at the craft just as Whatley's feet leave the ground. A shot later, a spark flies and the blue beam extinguishes.

Whatley falls to the ground and comes to. He sees his nephew firing again at the hovering craft. He runs to his pickup as Sampson continues his assault.

Whatley reaches through the open door, grabs a cellphone off the seat and presses buttons with shaky hands. The word MENU and several icons appear on the phone's view screen.

Frantically, Whatley again presses buttons as another rifle shot rings out behind him. Then a loud HUM. He turns around and sees the saucer shooting a red beam at Sampson.

The beam grabs the rifle out of Sampson's hands, spins it 180 degrees and positions the barrel inches away from his forehead.

CUT TO BLACK OVER THE SOUND OF THE RIFLE FIRING.

Roll Opening Credits.

INT. BRAXTON BONNER'S OFFICE - DAY

BRAXTON BONNER, a husky man in his mid 50's, enters. He sports a white mustache and goatee along with a sizable ponytail at the end of his slick-backed silver hair.

The sunshine momentarily brightens a room adorned with framed antique pictures. Hanging prominently is a picture of a young Braxton along side a woman holding a baby.

He quietly closes the door and steps lightly toward his desk.

His niece, 30 year old BETTY BONNER, opens another door and steps in. Braxton stops in mid-stride and smiles. He talks with an exaggerated West Texas accent.

BRAXTON

Now how do you always know when I'm trying to sneak in here?

Betty doesn't return the smile.

BRAXTON

What's wrong, Betty?

BETTY

It's Alfred Whatley. He's in jail.

BRAXTON

What did that old cuss do to land in jail?

BETTY

He's accused of murdering his nephew.

Braxton scrawls his face.

BRAXTON

Murder?

BETTY

He's down in county lockup and used his one phone call to call here. He won't talk to anyone but you.

Without hesitation Braxton walks straight and steady toward the door he'd entered.

BRAXTON

You know where I'll be.

INT. COUNTY LOCKUP - DAY

An armed jailer escorts Braxton down a corridor of cells. They stop at the last cell where Whatley sits on the edge of the bed, his face cupped in his hands.

Braxton steps around the jailer and peers through the bar.

BRAXTON

Alfred?

Whatley offers no response. Braxton raises his voice a bit.

BRAXTON

Alfred.

Whatley lifts his head and focuses his red eyes through the bars. He looks ill, but brightens a bit when he recognizes Braxton. His words are low and subdued.

WHATLEY

Braxton. Thank God you're here.

Braxton motions to the jailer with a quick hand gesture and a furled brow.

BRAXTON

Open this damn thing up.

The jailer complies. Whatley drops his face back into his cupped hands. Braxton steps in. The jailer re-locks the door.

BRAXTON

I'll holler at you when I'm ready.

The jailer nods. Braxton stands in position until the jailer walks away. He takes a seat on the empty bed across from Whatley.

After the CLANK of a door locking, Braxton leans toward Whatley and speaks softly.

BRAXTON

Alfred. What are you doing in here?

Whatley again raises his head and peers at Braxton through bloodshot eyes. His voice is strained, he looks almost catatonic.

WHATLEY

I don't know, Brax. They won't listen to me. I swear, I didn't do nothing.

BRAXTON

Well they say you shot Jimmy...

Whatley's jaw clenches, his eyes widen and his placid face comes alive with expression.

WHATLEY

I didn't shoot him! It was that...that...floating thing of light that just come out of nowhere. It took me first. But I couldn't move...

Whatley drops his head.

WHATLEY

Now you're going to think I'm crazy too.

BRAXTON

It's OK Alfred. I don't think you're crazy. Just start from the very beginning and tell me what happened.

Whatley raises his head and refocuses his red eyes on Braxton.

BRAXTON

And don't leave nothing out. I want to know exactly what you saw.

Whatley glances at the floor a moment and clears his throat. He takes a breath and looks at Braxton.

WHATLEY

I'd heard Jimmy was going to sell the rest of that river bottom to a big time developer. I got mad. Went out there to try to talk some sense into him. Met him at the gate and got into an argument when that thing showed up.

BRAXTON

What thing are you talking about? What did it look like?

Whatley locks eyes with Braxton and speaks forcefully.

WHATLEY

A flying saucer Braxton. A damn flying saucer!

Braxton subdues a look of shock on his face and responds with a calm voice.

BRAXTON

OK. A flying saucer.

Whatley drops his gaze back to the floor. Braxton speaks sympathetically.

BRAXTON

Go on Alfred, tell me the rest.

Whatley continues to stare at the floor as he recites.

WHATLEY

It made its own clouds out of a clear blue sky. Then it busted through them and grabbed me up in some kind of beam. It started dragging me.

Whatley looks up at Braxton and speaks more in a matter-of-fact tone.

WHATLEY

I couldn't move, Brax. Next thing I remember is falling to the ground and seeing Jimmy shooting at it. I ran to my pickup to get my phone, call for help. Then it shot another beam at Jimmy. Snatched that rifle right out of his hands.

Whatley's voice begins to quiver.

WHATLEY

Then it turned it on him and shot him.
It shot Jimmy, Brax! With my rifle! I
swear I didn't do it. I couldn't do
it...

Whatley drops his head back into his cupped hands. Braxton
leans over and pats him on the shoulder.

BRAXTON

It's OK Alfred. I know you couldn't
shoot anybody, let alone your own
nephew. Go on ahead, finish your story.

WHATLEY

That's it. After that it just flew away.

Whatley recovers and re-fixes his gaze on Braxton.

WHATLEY

Jimmy saved me from that thing, Brax. I
didn't shoot him, it did. You got to
believe me.

BRAXTON

Of course I believe you Alfred. We go
back a long ways together and I've
never known you to be much of a story
teller. But right now your in a state
of shock and we need to get you to a
hospital...

Whatley becomes agitated.

WHATLEY

I ain't going to no crazy hospital! I
know what I saw and no doctor is going
to tell me any different.

Braxton's voice becomes more authoritative.

BRAXTON

Listen here Alfred, I ain't talking
about no crazy hospital. You say that
saucer shot a beam at you. No telling
what it could have done to your
innards. You need to have a doctor look
you over.

Whatley reluctantly shakes his head "yes."

BRAXTON

Good. I'll make the arrangements. In the meantime I'm going out to start doing some snooping. See what I can dig up.

Braxton stands, looks over his shoulder and hollers.

BRAXTON

Jailer!

Then back to Whatley.

BRAXTON

You cooperate with them doctors, you hear?

The CLANK of a door unlocking.

BRAXTON

Don't give them any static. Betty will be by later to check on you.

The jailer steps up and unlocks the bars. Braxton pats Whatley on the back.

BRAXTON

Don't you fret none, Alfred. We gonna find out who really killed your nephew.

The jailer opens the door. Braxton steps through. The jailer locks it behind him.

BRAXTON

You just hang in there. I'll be in touch.

Braxton and the jailer disappear down the corridor of cells.

INT. COUNTY JAIL VISITORS LOBBY - DAY

The jailer unlocks the door. Braxton steps through and pauses long enough to shoot a smile to his escort.

BRAXTON

I thank you, sir.

JAILER

No problem.

The jailer disappears behind the iron door. Braxton takes a seat on a wooden bench in the empty lobby. He pulls out a cell phone, presses a button and assumes talking position.

BRAXTON

Betty? (pause) No, actually, he's pretty tore up. I can't even get a coherent story out of him right now. He claims a flying saucer shot his nephew. (pause) That's right a flying saucer. Listen here, I want a Doctor to look him over, pronto. I'll go file the petition right now then maybe talk to our new Sheriff while I'm there. (pause) Yea that'd be good. But before I head back I'm a gonna stop by Alfred's place, talk to his wife Joanna, see what she knows. (pause) Yea, OK, Bye bye, now.

Braxton slips the phone into his pocket then heads for the door.

INT. BRAXTON'S LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Betty is on the phone in what was the living room of this old Victorian house converted into an office.

BETTY

Yes. (pause) Yes, that's correct, this afternoon if possible.

She writes on a yellow legal pad.

BETTY

One o'clock? Good, he'll be glad to hear that. (pause) Thank you very much. Goodbye.

She hangs up the phone, steps to a kitchen with a coffee maker and pours a cup. The mailman, HANK, an older man in his 60's steps in with a handful of letters.

Betty emerges from the kitchen blowing the steam off the hot beverage.

HANK

How are you Betty?

Betty acknowledges him with a pleasant smile.

BETTY

Fine. And yourself Hank?

HANK

About the same as yesterday.

Hank glances at Betty's computer screen which is full of text and pictures.

HANK

Still writing your blob?

She giggles and takes her seat in front of it.

HANK

What's so funny?

BETTY

It's called a blog. With a 'g.'

Hank joins her in the chuckle and hands her the mail.

BETTY

And yes I'm still writing it.

HANK

So you write like a newsletter about Mr. Bonner's cases?

BETTY

Sort of.

Betty sorts through the envelopes, never taking her eyes off of them as she speaks.

BETTY

I guess it's doing OK. I do have a few loyal readers, although there's not that many people interested in agricultural law.

HANK

Why don't you write about something else?

She stops sorting, taps the postage against her fingers.

BETTY

You know, that's a great idea. We just got a strange case this morning.

Betty comes out of her trance and looks Hank in the eyes.

BETTY

What would you say if I told you a UFO shot and killed a man?

HANK

Then I'd say you're crazy.

BETTY
What if it were true?

HANK
I'd say I'm crazy.

Hank moves toward the door while Betty continues to ponder.

HANK
But it sounds like it would make some
pretty interesting reading. See you
tomorrow.

BETTY
Thanks Hank.

Hank exits. Betty scoots her chair to her computer,
positions her fingers above the keyboard and gazes blankly
at the monitor. After a moment she begins typing.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Braxton is rummaging through several magazines in a wall
rack. A lady behind a glass window slides it open. She
pokes her head through.

RECEPTIONIST
Braxton?

Braxton turns toward her and smiles.

BRAXTON
Yes ma'am?

RECEPTIONIST
The Sheriff will see you now.

Braxton strolls to the window and looks in.

RECEPTIONIST
Just go on in. He's waiting for you.

BRAXTON
Thank you kindly, Margret. Good to see
you again.

The lady returns the smile.

RECEPTIONIST
You too.

Braxton opens a door prominently labeled "SHERIFF CRAIG
HAMILTON."

INT. SHERIFF'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

Braxton enters lightly knocking. The Sheriff, CRAIG HAMILTON, a fit man in his mid 40s stands from behind his desk.

BRAXTON
Sheriff Hamilton?

HAMILTON
Come in Mr. Bonner.

Braxton makes his way to the front of the desk and extends his hand to the very tall, blond headed Sheriff.

BRAXTON
Braxton Bonner, Alfred Whatley's attorney.

The men shake hands over the desk.

HAMILTON
Craig Hamilton.

BRAXTON
My good pleasure, sir.

HAMILTON
I've heard of you Mr. Bonner. You were a federal prosecutor in DC a few years back.

BRAXTON
I was indeed, sir.

The Sheriff motions to the chairs positioned in front of his desk.

HAMILTON
Have a seat.

Braxton sits in one of the two leather bound chairs.

BRAXTON
And congratulations on your recent appointment to Sheriff. Are you from the area, sir?

HAMILTON
Dallas. Twenty years with the DPD.

BRAXTON
I'll bet it was fresh smell of the piney woods that brought you here.

HAMILTON

Actually it was a bitter divorce and child support, which I really don't care to talk about.

BRAXTON

Understood.

HAMILTON

What can I do for you Mr. Bonner?

BRAXTON

Well sir, I was hoping to get a little insight on what happened to my client.

HAMILTON

I don't have any 'insights' Mr. Bonner, just facts. And they lead me to one simple conclusion. Your client murdered his nephew and now he's concocted a fairy tale to cover it up.

BRAXTON

Sheriff, Alfred Whatley has been a law abiding citizen in this county his entire life with no prior criminal record whatsoever.

HAMILTON

I'm taking that into account Mr. Bonner. That's why I'm supporting the transfer to Travis County Medical.

The Sheriff leans in across his desk.

HAMILTON

But understand this. That's as far as I go. Once he's through suffering his 'trauma,' I want him back in my lockup.

Hamilton leans back in his chair.

HAMILTON

As far as I'm concerned, Alfred Whatley murdered his nephew to inherit his sister's land. Simple as that.

Braxton shoots Hamilton a puzzled look.

BRAXTON

Inherit his sister's land? What gives you that idea?

HAMILTON

Whatley admitted it himself. Last week he got into an altercation with Sampson in the Roadhouse parking lot. Whatley stated in front of several witnesses, including two of my deputies that if Sampson died, Whatley would inherit the land.

BRAXTON

Alfred threatened to kill his nephew?

HAMILTON

No. He said Sampson was going to kill himself with his 'fast living.' And he would end up inheriting the land anyway. So you see Mr. Bonner, your client had a strong motive to see his nephew dead.

BRAXTON

A motive of which I was unaware, sir. However, that does sounds more like a casual comment than an admission of guilt.

HAMILTON

I think it was a slip of the tongue. If we would have questioned him right then and there it might have saved Sampson's life.

Hamilton stands.

HAMILTON

But you're right Mr. Bonner, Alfred Whatley is a one of those good old hometown boys, so we let him go. I'm not going to make that mistake again.

Braxton also stands.

HAMILTON

Anything else?

BRAXTON

Just one other question. Were there any reports of unusual occurrences that night? Strange lights in the sky, atmospheric anomalies? That sort of thing?

HAMILTON

As far as I know the murder of James Sampson was the only 'unusual' occurrence to happen in Bastrop County that night.

Braxton extends his hand.

BRAXTON

Much obliged for your time, sir.

The men shake hands.

HAMILTON

Good luck, Mr. Bonner.

BRAXTON

Thank you.

Braxton exits.

INT. WHATLEY RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Seated on a sofa is LORETTA WHATLEY, a lady in her mid 50s whose long dark hair outlines a stern, but lovely face. Braxton sits beside her.

BRAXTON

I know this is tough Loretta, but I need to know. What's been a going on between Alfred and your nephew?

Loretta speaks with a calm, rational tone.

LORETTA

Nothing, until last month. That's when Jimmy started selling off that damn river bottom land he inherited from Alfred's sister.

BRAXTON

Been fishing there many a times.

LORETTA

Eloise knew how much Alfred loved that land and always promised she'd sell it to us. But we never got around to writing anything down on paper before she died.

Loretta stands and paces.

LORETTA

About a week ago Alfred saw Jimmy in town and found out he'd already sold half of the land and had a buyer for the rest. Alfred got furious and they ended up in an argument. He came home steaming, but you know Alfred, he cooled off pretty fast.

BRAXTON

Loretta, the Sheriff told me Alfred spouted off about inheriting the land if Jimmy died. Is this true?

Loretta looks at Braxton with surprise.

LORETTA

Well, yes. Alfred and Eloise were very close. She wanted to keep the land in the family. That's why Alfred got so mad about Jimmy selling it to outsiders. Why?

BRAXTON

Because it gives Alfred the motive for murder in the eyes of the law.

Loretta sits back down next to Braxton and looks him square in the eyes.

LORETTA

Braxton, Alfred went out there to make Jimmy an offer, not to kill him.

BRAXTON

Is there anything on paper to prove that?

She looks off.

LORETTA

No.

Then re-fixes a stern gaze on Braxton.

LORETTA

But I don't care what anybody says, Alfred didn't kill Jimmy.

BRAXTON

You know I believe that, Loretta. What I'm having a hard time with is why he would say flying saucer did.

LORETTA

Because it's got to be the truth. Have you thought about that?

BRAXTON

Loretta, that's pretty far fetched...

LORETTA

Braxton, have you ever known Alfred to stretch the truth beyond the length of a trout?

Braxton pauses then smiles.

BRAXTON

No, I can't say I have.

LORETTA

Then why would he make up such an insane story now?

BRAXTON

To save himself from the chamber. He is accused of murder, Loretta.

LORETTA

Murdering his sister's only son? You and I both know how he feels about family. It's easier for me to believe that a flying saucer did it than Alfred.

BRAXTON

I know, I know. That's what makes this so perplexing.

LORETTA

Well, it's not to me. It must have happened just the way Alfred says it did.

Loretta stands.

LORETTA

He's just as much the victim as poor little Jimmy. And I'm praying you'll find a way to prove it.

Braxton stands.

BRAXTON

Well, much as I hate to say it, I think I'd have better luck proving the existence of the All Mighty himself. But you know I'll give it my best.

INT. BRAXTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Braxton enters carrying a file. On his way to his desk Betty steps in with a steaming cup in hand.

BETTY

Mister Whatley will be transferred to Travis County Medical this afternoon at one o'clock.

BRAXTON

Good. I'd like for you to be there, make sure he behaves himself.

BETTY

Sure.

Braxton tosses the file on a cluttered desk and takes a seat in a high back leather chair. Beside him an antique bookshelf with row after row of law books covers the wall.

BRAXTON

I'm beginning to wonder if both Alfred and his wife have gone crazy.

BETTY

Maybe this will clear your mind.

Betty hands him the cup. Braxton responds with a smile.

BRAXTON

Thank you, Betty. I'd forgot I'd missed my morning cup.

BETTY

What did you find out?

BRAXTON

Not much and all of it bad news.

Betty scoots a chair in front of his messy desk and sits. Braxton takes a sip of his coffee.

BRAXTON

Loretta believes Alfred's story, the Sheriff is convinced Alfred did it and to make matters worse, Alfred's got a motive as obvious as a clown's red nose.

BETTY

So, what do you believe?

BRAXTON

I've known Alfred all my life. I just can't see him as a cold blooded murder. But then I don't believe a flying saucer from outer space shot his nephew either.

Braxton ponders a moment, blowing across the top of the steaming cup.

BETTY

Maybe the flying saucer wasn't from outer space.

He refocuses his gaze on Betty.

BRAXTON

Now that's a thought.

BETTY

Don't you still have a few contacts in Washington you could call?

BRAXTON

Yea, but not anybody that high up. Besides I've worked for the feds long enough to know that even if it was one of theirs, they'd never admit it.

Betty stands and scoots the chair back to it's original location.

BETTY

Be worth a try. Any information that would suggest that it was a government saucer might be enough to introduce reasonable doubt. Keep Mr. Whatley out of the chamber.

Braxton smiles.

BRAXTON

Betty, you sound like a trial lawyer.

BETTY

Good, maybe all that studying is paying off after all.

BRAXTON

You a gonna be a fine attorney some day.

Betty returns the smile.

BRAXTON

Listen here, after you're done with Alfred why don't you just go on home. Take the afternoon off.

BETTY

Thanks. I've got huge test next week. I could really use the study time. What about you?

BRAXTON

I'm a gonna spend the rest of the day doing a little studying myself.

BETTY

Well, then I'll see you tomorrow.

Betty heads for the door.

BRAXTON

By the way I'm gonna be a stopping by the coroner's office first thing in the morning, so I'll probably be a coming in a little late.

She opens the door and stands in its frame.

BETTY

You know, I'd like to go with you.

Braxton looks surprised.

BRAXTON

You want to see a dead body?

BETTY

Not necessarily, but, I am curious.

BRAXTON

Alrighty then. Plan on meeting me there at eight in the AM.

BETTY

Great. I'll see you in the morning.

Betty smiles and closes the door behind her. Braxton opens the file he threw on his desk and glances through a couple of the loose papers inside.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINERS OFFICE - HALLWAY - DAY

Braxton, Betty and the medical examiner, Doctor WARREN FANNING, an attractive man in his 30s, stroll down a hallway. Fanning sports a traditional white lab coat.

FANNING

I wouldn't expect to see you down here
Mister Bonner. Don't you practice
agricultural law?

BRAXTON

I do indeed, sir. I'm honored but
bewildered that you know that fact.

FANNING

I read your blog. It's actually very
interesting.

Braxton ponders. Betty takes a couple of extra steps to
catch up with Fanning.

BETTY

I write the blog and I'm not sure that
Mister Bonner has ever even read it.

In unison, Betty and Fanning look at Braxton. He forces a
congenial smile.

BRAXTON

Oh, that. Embarrassingly enough I
haven't yet had the opportunity to
partake of its literary nutrition.

Betty looks at Fanning with a dead-pan face.

BETTY

He hasn't read it.

BRAXTON

Well, you know I just don't do much of
that Internet thing.

Fanning focuses a pleasant smile on Betty.

FANNING

You're a very good writer, Miss Bonner.
And I must say, you're picture
certainly doesn't do you justice.

Betty smiles. Fanning quickly moves ahead, stops at a door
and pulls out a key.

FANNING

Here we are.

He unlocks and holds it open for Braxton and Betty.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINERS OFFICE - MORGUE - DAY

Fanning walks over to one of two body drawers and reads the label. Braxton and Betty join him.

FANNING

Sampson, James. We don't get many of these type of customers.

Fanning pulls open the drawer and unzips the body bag down to the chest.

FANNING

And none like this.

Braxton and Betty simultaneously lean in to gawk at Sampson's pale face, complete with a small hole in the middle of his forehead.

Betty displays no reaction. She gazes at the body as a scientist would a specimen. Braxton grimaces and turns his eyes away.

BRAXTON

Dead bodies always give me the heebee jeebees.

BETTY

What type of 'customer' would that be, Doctor?

FANNING

A single gunshot wound to the forehead. Normally, nothing special. Except in this case the bullet severed the base of the brain stem with almost surgical precision.

BRAXTON

A 'magic' bullet?

FANNING

It wasn't the bullet. It was the aim. The bullet passed through just the right amount of tissue to create just the right amount of shrapnel to cut the brain stem precisely in two.

BETTY

A one in a million shot?

FANNING

I'd say it was incalculable. To me it appears whoever shot him was actually aiming for the back of his head, not the front.

Betty points to the cadaver.

BETTY

What about these powder burns? He must have been shot at point blank range.

Fanning gazes at Betty with another warm smile.

FANNING

You're absolutely right. The rifle was no more than a few inches away.

Fanning catches Braxton's gaze.

FANNING

It appears the victim was shot 'gangster execution style.' On his knees with the shooter standing over him.

BRAXTON

Were there any scuff marks on his knees or trousers?

Fanning looks a bit embarrassed.

FANNING

Well, now that you mentioned it, I didn't check for that.

BETTY

So the victim could have been standing with the shooter perched above him. Maybe on the back of a pickup truck.

FANNING

I suppose that's equally plausible.

BRAXTON

What about any unusual skin markings? Something like, say, an energy beam of some sort might leave.

FANNING

You mean like a burn mark? No, nothing like that.

Fanning narrows his eyes and looks at Braxton with intense interest.

FANNING

Just what type of energy beam are we talking about here?

Now it's Braxton who appears embarrassed.

BRAXTON

Oh, I don't know specifically. Sounds loony, but it's rumored that the deceased here was exposed to a light beam of unknown origin right before he was shot.

Fanning speaks with sincere intrigue.

FANNING

A light beam from what exactly?

Braxton glances around the room apparently looking for words.

BRAXTON

Well...

Betty locks eyes with Fanning and speaks with conviction.

BETTY

It's possible the victim was exposed to the exhaust of a top secret experimental aircraft, which leaves unique skin markings.

FANNING

You mean, area fifty one, the 'Aurora Project' kind of stuff?

BETTY

Something like that.

Fanning takes a moment to glance between Betty and Braxton.

BRAXTON

Very top secret stuff...real hush hush...

Fanning re-zips the body bag.

FANNING

Alright. You've piqued my interest. I'll look the body another over again and give you a call.

This time it's Betty that shoots Fanning a welcoming smile. She reaches in her purse, pulls out a card and hands it to him.

BETTY

We'd really appreciate it. And please, keep this confidential.

EXT. COURTHOUSE LAWN - DAY

The large, ornate door opens. Braxton and Betty step out and stroll down the sidewalk cutting through the huge front lawn of the Victorian-style courthouse.

BRAXTON

My goodness Betty, now you sound like a forensic pathologist.

BETTY

I'm really sorry if I overstepped my...

BRAXTON

Heavens no! I'm glad you came with me. I believe you derailed his 'gangster execution' notion. That was smart thinking.

Betty forces back a self-assured grin.

BETTY

Did you get 'a hold of anybody in Washington yesterday?

BRAXTON

Yea I did, but most of them just laughed when I asked if they had heard any rumors of a 'government sponsored flying saucer.'

BETTY

You mean 'experimental aircraft.'

Braxton looks at Betty with a smile.

BRAXTON

I should have had you call.

The couple take the last few steps to the intersection of another sidewalk leading to the parking lot. They stop.

BRAXTON

Listen here, I'm a going out to the crime scene. Want to tag along?

BETTY

Sure.

EXT. OPEN RANGE LAND (CRIME SCENE) - DAY

A 4X4 pickup pulls up and parks sideways across the road in front of the closed metal gate. A door opens and a cowboy boot hits the sandy ground.

Braxton steps out of the drivers side and walks toward the gate, leaving his truck door open. He focuses on the giant oak tree nearby. Betty joins him.

BRAXTON

According to Alfred, the saucer hovered so low it barely cleared the top of that oak.

He gazes back at the open pickup door.

BRAXTON

Sampson was opening the gate when Alfred drove up and parked cross ways just like we did. He left the pickup door open and met Sampson somewhere about here.

Betty assumes Sampson's imaginary position. Braxton glances at the top of the oak tree.

BRAXTON

While they were arguing the saucer shows up behind the oak and hovers just a few feet in front of it. It snags Alfred in some kind of beam and drags him... 'sideways' he said.

Betty traces a line with her eyes between Braxton and the top of the tree. She walks toward its huge trunk.

BRAXTON

Next thing he remembers he's on the ground watching his nephew 'a shooting at this thing...

BETTY

Braxton.

Betty squats and examines the ground.

BETTY

Come take a look at this.

Braxton joins her. Betty points to a pair of parallel gouges in the sandy road.

BRAXTON
Well, I'll declare.

BETTY
That does look like feet being dragged.

Braxton gazes at the ground then to his pickup.

BRAXTON
Okay. Let's say Alfred was dropped here. Then he ran to his pickup to call for help.

He steps to the open pickup door and leans in over the seat.

BRAXTON
He stops at the door, grabbed for his cell phone and tried to call for help.

Braxton stands upright, turns around and traces his eyes to the general area Sampson stood. Betty steps up.

BRAXTON
Alfred said he didn't actually see the fatal shot. Time he turned around, all he saw was the saucer flying away without a sound.

He looks at the ground and shakes his head. His voice seems strained.

BRAXTON
Even if it did happen, there ain't no way we're ever gonna convince a jury of it.

BETTY
Why JUST Mister Whatley?

Braxton looks puzzled.

BRAXTON
What do you mean?

BETTY
Why did it try to take just Mister Whatley? Why not Sampson? Or both?

Braxton looks at Betty with pleased amazement.

BRAXTON

You're right. Alfred never did say anything about that saucer grabbing his nephew, just the rifle.

Then takes his seat in the pickup. Betty opens up the truck's passenger door and gazes at Braxton from across the seat.

BETTY

Maybe his age?

BRAXTON

Say what?

She climbs in and shuts the door. Braxton starts the pickup.

BETTY

'Why Mr. Whatley?' Maybe it was his age.

BRAXTON

You're right. They're both human males of the same race, even of the same family. Age is the only difference I can think of.

Braxton ponders a moment then places the truck in gear.

BRAXTON

Well, I think we've eyeballed everything we can here. Let's go take a look see at that murder weapon.

The truck backs up and drives away.

INT. EVIDENCE LOCKER - DAY

Braxton and Betty enter a long hallway flanked with chain link fences on both sides. Behind the barriers are row after row of shelving containing tagged articles.

Braxton steps up to a counter with an old style bell and taps it. A loud ring reverberates through the room. A unseen voice responds.

VOICE

I'm coming.

A man in his early 20s, MICHAEL WOODS, steps from behind a shelf and up to the counter. He glances at the couple.

WOODS

What can I do for you.

BRAXTON

I'm Braxton Bonner, Alfred Whatley's attorney.

WOODS

Oh yea, I've heard of you. I read your blog.

Braxton looks at Betty who returns his gaze with a surprised, but somewhat smug expression.

WOODS

I never thought I'd be interested in reading about 'water rights.' But you make it interesting.

Braxton extends a smile and head nod to Betty.

BRAXTON

Actually my daughter-in-law here is the real author.

Woods immediately extends an open hand to Betty.

WOODS

Michael Woods.

They shake.

BETTY

Betty Bonner.

WOODS

Betty Bonner, you're an excellent writer. And I should know.

Woods points to a stack of paperback novels.

WOODS

Most of the time there's not much to do down here but read. Have you ever thought about writing fiction?

Betty looks slightly embarrassed.

BETTY

Well, yes, I've thought about it.

She focuses her gaze on Braxton.

BETTY

But, you know what they say.

Then on Woods.

BETTY

Truth is stranger than fiction.

And smiles.

BETTY

And finding the truth is what brings us here. We were hoping, Michael, that we could take a look at the murder weapon used in the Whatley case.

WOODS

Oh yea. That one was weird.

Woods heads toward the back.

WOODS

Right out of a an 'X files' episode.

He disappears around the corner but continues talking.

WOODS

They brought it in just like this. I don't know if anybody else noticed it, but I saw it right away.

Woods returns with a rifle in one hand and a small plastic container in the other.

WOODS

I still haven't figured it out.

He places the rifle on the counter and opens the container.

BRAXTON

That would be what, sir?

Woods sits the container on the counter and takes a step back. He glances between Braxton and Betty then points to the rifle.

WOODS

Go ahead, take a look.

Braxton picks up the weapon and begins to look it over. Betty gazes in the open container. Inside are several spent bullet casings.

She picks up one of the casings and starts a close examination as Woods glances between her and Braxton.

WOODS

Do you see it? I'll give you a hint.
It's not the shells.

Betty looks up at him.

WOODS

Well, not those anyway.

She grimaces slightly and drops the shell back into the container. Then glances at the rifle Braxton is scrutinizing.

BETTY

Are you talking about the one stuck in the chamber?

WOODS

You're close.

Braxton spins the rifle around. Sticking out of the ejection slot is the end of a shell casing.

BRAXTON

An occasional stuck shell ain't all that unusual.

WOODS

This one is.

In unison Braxton and Betty look closely at the protruding shell. Both jerk their head back slightly, turn in unison and gaze at each other with a blank look.

BRAXTON

Looks like we a gonna require some considerable expertise in ballistics.

WOODS

Told you.

EXT. COURTHOUSE LAWN - DAY

The large ornate doors of the Victorian-style courthouse open. Braxton and Betty step out and begin their stroll down the sidewalk.

BRAXTON

A precise trajectory from a bullet that couldn't have even been fired? This is starting to sound like an episode of the 'Twilight Zone.'

BETTY

But the facts are sure beginning to support Mister Whatley's story.

BRAXTON

Seems that way.

BETTY

So we know the stuck shell was from the last bullet fired by that rifle. Does that help us?

BRAXTON

I wouldn't think so. The DA could make the case that Alfred fired the rifle AFTER he shot his nephew. There's no way of matching the fatal bullet to its original casing.

The couple stop at the intersection of another sidewalk leading to the parking lot.

BRAXTON

But after what we saw, I don't think it'll take much to convince our new Sheriff to let me send that rifle up to the boys in Washington. I'll bet he'll be just as curious as we are. Where you 'a going?

BETTY

Back to the office. Got a little writing to do.

BRAXTON

Always writing. Well, it'll sure do you good toward your law degree.

Betty smiles.

BETTY

And you know, I really enjoy it. See you later.

The couple separate and walk toward different parking lots.

BRAXTON

After while, crocodile.

INT. BRAXTON'S LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Betty is seated at her desk, her eyes glued to the computer monitor, her fingers nimbly typing at breakneck speed.

On her monitor the headline: BRAXTON BONNER: THE CASE OF THE DEADLY SAUCER is followed by several paragraphs of narrative.

A pleasant chime is heard and the screen flashes "BRAXTON." Quickly, Betty turns off her monitor, grabs a file and steps to the door leading to Braxton's office.

INT. BRAXTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Braxton is closing the door to his private entrance when Betty enters with file in hand. She waits in front of his desk as he makes his way to his leather chair.

BRAXTON

That boy needs to find him a fishing hole and unwind. He's tighter than an eight-day-clock.

BETTY

The new Sheriff?

BRAXTON

I was sure wrong. It took a call to the FBI crime lab to finally convince him to let me have that rifle looked over.

Braxton eases into his chair.

BRAXTON

Thank God Charlie was at work today. I thought for a while that boy was a gonna want to talk to the director himself.

BETTY

The doctors report came in.

Betty hands Braxton a piece of paper. He begins looking it over.

BETTY

Mister Whatley didn't even have as much as a trace of gun shot residue anywhere on him.

BRAXTON

Then he couldn't have been the shooter. Unless he went home and took a quick shower before the sheriff got there.

Braxton leans back in his chair, laces his fingers together behind his head and gazes at the ceiling.

BRAXTON

It's all good but it's still circumstantial. We need disreputable evidence.

Betty turns toward Braxton as if a thought just popped into her head.

BETTY

You know, Saturday night I'm having dinner with a UT professor. He's studying forensics. Maybe he can help...

Braxton rolls his head and looks at Betty.

BRAXTON

He?

BETTY

Braxton, he's just a friend. And besides, it's been over two years. I think by now Bobby would want me to go on with my life.

Braxton sits upright.

BRAXTON

I know, I know. You're right. I'm just being selfish. It's just hard for me to imagine you with anyone else.

Betty breaks Braxton's gaze and stares into space.

BETTY

That's been hard for me too. I still love Bobby. I miss him more than you can imagine.

BRAXTON

I don't have to imagine it Betty. I know you do. I miss him too.

Braxton stands and steps around his desk toward Betty.

BRAXTON

But let's not get wrapped up in a pity party. That ain't gonna bring Bobby back to life or help Alfred with his.

He pats her on the shoulder and forces a big smile.

BRAXTON

What say you and I partake of a death defying chocolate malt over to the Roadhouse?

Betty returns the forced smile.

BETTY

Sounds good.

The couple head for the door.

INT. BRAXTON'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Braxton stands in front of an oven wearing a robe and sporting a huge mitt on one hand. He's staring off into space, apparently lost in thought. A chime rings.

He opens the oven door, retrieves a frozen dinner and sits it on the counter. A different chime rings.

With his free hand he reaches in his robe pocket and pulls out a cell phone. After glancing at the display he presses a button and places it to his ear.

BRAXTON

Hello, Joanna.

INT. AN UPSCALE HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Braxton's wife, JOANNA BONNER, a very attractive lady in her mid 50s, relaxes on plush sofa. She is eloquently dressed as are the rest of the lobbys inhabitants.

JOANNA

What are you doing?

INT. BRAXTON'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Braxton grabs the dinner with the mitt and moves it to a small table as he talks on the phone.

BRAXTON

Oh, I'm about to sit down to a delicious, nu-trious, gourmet meal.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Joanna glances over her shoulder and around the room. She speaks with a matter-of-fact tone.

JOANNA

Yea, so am I in a few minutes. But I wanted to find out what's going on down there.

INT. BRAXTON'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Braxton shakes off the mitt, pulls out a chair and sits.

BRAXTON

What do you mean?

INTERCUT - HOTEL LOBBY/BRAXTON'S RESIDENCE

JOANNA

Well, I've been reading Betty's blog about a man charged with murdering his nephew. He's claiming a UFO did it. And you're his attorney?

BRAXTON

Does everyone in the world read that Internet except me?

JOANNA

Well. Is it true, Braxton?

BRAXTON

Joanna, that man is Alfred Whatley.

JOANNA

Alfred Whatley? Why would he say a crazy thing like that?

BRAXTON

Because that's what he claims he saw. And so far the evidence seems to be bearing him out.

JOANNA

Braxton, your supposed to be down there helping Betty finish out her law degree, not become an Internet celebrity.

BRAXTON

He's charged with murder, Joanna. This is Texas, that's the death penalty if he's found guilty.

Joanna leans forward. Her tone is more sympathetic.

JOANNA

Braxton, I know Alfred's been your close friend for a long time, but his story is ludicrous. The best way to help him is to get him to a psychiatrist.

BRAXTON

He has already been evaluated and passed with flying colors. So he's not crazy and I don't believe he's lying.

She pauses as a slight look of frustration crosses her face.

JOANNA

Alright Braxton, whatever. Are you flying back to D.C. this weekend?

BRAXTON

No, right now I can't spare the time. The trial is a coming up and we're still not ready.

Joanna looks even more frustrated. Her tone is short.

JOANNA

Fine. Enjoy your meal. I'll call you later.

She grimaces angrily while pressing a button on the phone and dropping it to the sofa.

Braxton pulls his phone away from his ear and slowly sits it on the table. After a moment of starrng blankly into space he shakes his head.

BRAXTON

Good bye, Joanna.

He picks up a fork and begins eating.

EXT. COURTHOUSE LAWN - DAY

A very attractive red head, SHANNON BEAR, holds a microphone at speaking position. Directly in front of her, a man points a video camera at her.

BEAR

This is the second week of the strange trial of Alfred Whatley. Accused of murdering his nephew James Sampson, Whatley claims he's innocent and a 'flying saucer' is to blame.

View through the camera.

BEAR

The first week was spent bringing in character witnesses, establishing the relationship between Whatley and his nephew. A relationship that was once very close but became strained several months ago after Sampson inherited a small fortune from his mother, Whatley's sister.

The camera slowly zooms in.

BEAR

The prosecution claims Whatley became enraged with jealousy when Sampson began spending his deceased mother's inheritance on cars and boats instead of college, which was established as the motive for murder.

Zoom stops.

BEAR

Although Whatley admits he was angered with his nephew, he vehemently denies shooting Sampson and still maintains an other-worldly craft is to blame.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Betty and Whatley sit behind a large table in a room reminiscent of the 1930s. Tall, pressed tin ceilings with slow moving fans and everything else made of oak.

Sitting behind a duplicate table to their left is the prosecutor, SUSAN DANIELS, a very attractive lady in her mid 40s. Beside her is MARK RICH, the assistant DA.

In front of their tables is the huge, ornate judge's bench. Seated behind the bench is Judge RALPH BENSON, a man in his mid 60s, who nods at the defense table.

BENSON

Proceed Mister Bonner.

BRAXTON

Thank you, your honor.

Braxton stands and approaches the witness stand, which is attached to the judge's bench. A middle aged bald-headed man, FREDRICK HURST sits inside.

BRAXTON

Mister Hurst. You are a ballistics expert with the FBI, are you not?

HURST

Yes, that's correct.

Braxton turns and picks up a rifle off a table. A tag on a string dangles from the trigger.

BRAXTON

At my request you recently examined a rifle I sent you.

HURST

Yes, I did.

He steps up to the bench and shows the judge the weapon.

BRAXTON

Your honor, the rifle I'm holding, marked exhibit 'A,' has been confirmed as the murder weapon and the very same rifle mister Hurst examined.

Benson nods his head. Braxton walks over to the witness stand and hands the rifle to Hurst.

BRAXTON

Mister Hurst, what can you tell the jury about this weapon.

HURST

It's a Winchester, Model 94. Very common. Can be purchased just about anywhere.

BRAXTON

Did you find anything unusual about this particular Winchester?

HURST

Yes, I did.

Hurst holds the rifle very carefully and points to the shell stuck in the ejection chamber.

HURST

As you can see, the casing didn't fully eject and is still lodged in the chamber, obviously from the last bullet that was fired.

BRAXTON

And that is what's unusual about this rifle?

HURST

Not exactly, these rifles are known for stuck shells. Actually, it's something peculiar about the shell itself. It doesn't have a pin mark.

BRAXTON

A 'pin mark?' Would you enlighten us on that term, sir?

HURST

A gun is fired by a hammer striking the back of the bullet which leaves a small indentation on the shell. The shell stuck in this casing doesn't have this indentation.

BRAXTON

Is there any other way a bullet could be fired, maybe some type of mechanism malfunction?

HURST

No. That's the only way this rifle operates. It either fires with a hammer strike or not at all.

Braxton retrieves the rifle from Hurst and shows it to the jury.

BRAXTON

Then tell me, how could that bullet have been fired from this rifle?

HURST

I sent the rifle over to our metallurgy department for analysis. They concluded that the casing had been instantly super heated to approximately four thousand degrees, which caused the gunpowder to ignite and fire the weapon.

BRAXTON

Four thousand degrees? Sir, that's hotter than the sun.

HURST

I am aware of that.

BRAXTON

What could cause that rifle to instantly heat to four thousand degrees?

HURST

It wasn't the rifle that super heated. The heat was contained to the bullet itself, a circular area on one side about the size of a pencil point.

BRAXTON

And what caused this super heating?

HURST

Unknown. Our lab speculates it had to be a very tightly focused beam of energy that passes through some surfaces but not others. It went through the rifle's outer casing without a scorch, yet burned the bullet inside the rifle.

BRAXTON

Are you aware of any laser beam or any other form of focused energy that could produce those results?

HURST

My expertise is in ballistics. But after consulting with our scientific division, it is our conclusion that the rifle fired due to an energy beam of unknown origin.

BRAXTON

Not because someone pulled the trigger?

HURST

In my opinion, no one was at the trigger when that bullet was fired.

The courtroom murmurs.

BRAXTON

Thank you, sir.

Hurst steps down from the stand as Braxton turns toward the judge.

BRAXTON

Your honor, that report has been submitted as evidence along with the prosecution's ballistics report. Which incidentally, states the very same thing.

Braxton heads for his seat and glances at the prosecutor along the way.

BRAXTON

Your witness, counselor.

Daniels stands and remains behind her desk.

DANIELS

Mister Hurst, are you suggesting that this 'energy beam' is of extraterrestrial origin?

HURST

I believe I said 'unknown' origin. Which I suppose by definition includes extraterrestrial.

DANIELS

In your opinion is that very likely?

Hurst pauses, glances at Braxton then back to Daniels.

HURST

I would have to say no.

Daniels points to the rifle on the table a few steps away.

DANIELS

And the rifle. It's obvious the last bullet fired came from the shell that's stuck in it. But was it the fatal shot? Can you say that bullet was the same one that killed James Sampson?

Braxton leans over and whispers to Betty.

BRAXTON

See what told ya.

HURST

No.

DANIELS

So, it's very possible Alfred Whatley shot his nephew, then later used a, so far 'unknown' method, to fire that last bullet to back up his story.

Whatley squirms in his seat and leans forward as if about to say something.

HURST

Yes, I suppose that's possible.

Discreetly, Braxton grabs his arm and pulls him back.

DANIELS

Then you're telling this jury that an earlier shot has just as equal of a chance of being the kill shot, as this 'magic' bullet does.

HURST

I would have to say yes.

DANIELS

Thank you, Mister Hurst. No further questions.

Daniels looks down at the paperwork on the table then gazes up at the judge.

DANIELS

Prosecution calls Sheriff Craig Hamilton to the stand.

From a front row seat, Hamilton stands and makes his way to the witness stand. He's sworn in.

Daniels steps from behind the large table and strolls toward him.

DANIELS

Sheriff, your men were called out to the scene of the crime at around midnight that night. Am I correct?

HAMILTON

Yes, ma'am.

DANIELS

Describe the scene for the jury.

HAMILTON

The victim, Mister Sampson, was lying on the ground deceased while Mister Whatley was leaning against his pickup truck with the murder weapon in his hand.

DANIELS

Did you see any 'flying saucers' hanging around?

Hamilton attempts to hold back a smirk.

HAMILTON

No, ma'am, I did not witness any unusual craft in the sky.

DANIELS

What was the sky like that night?

HAMILTON

Clear. As I recall, there wasn't a cloud in the sky and the moon was nearly full.

DANIELS

So, no clouds that as Mister Whatley describes?

HAMILTON

None.

DANIELS

What did you find in the immediate area of the victim?

HAMILTON

Not much, except the body was surrounded by five, spent shell casings.

DANIELS

From bullets fired by the murder weapon?

HAMILTON

Yes. Those shells did have registration marks which matched the hammer found on the murder weapon.

DANIELS

So, there IS evidence the weapon was indeed fired earlier and at the murder scene.

HAMILTON

Yes. It appears five rounds were discharged prior to the sixth, in which the casing is still lodged in the weapon's chamber.

DANIELS

And any of those five could have been the fatal shot.

HAMILTON

In my opinion, one of those five WAS the kill shot.

DANIELS

Thank you, Sheriff.

As Daniels strolls back toward the table she looks at Braxton.

DANIELS

Your witness.

Braxton stands up then walks straight and steady to the witness stand.

BRAXTON

Sheriff, I'm a bit confused and could use some enlightenment here.

Again, Hamilton chokes back a smirk.

HAMILTON

Well...okay. I give it a try.

BRAXTON

You just stated there were five, spent shell casings scattered around the victim. How close were they to him?

HAMILTON

Oh, I don't know, a few inches.

Braxton steps over to the evidence table and picks up a picture.

BRAXTON

What I have here is a photograph taken by one your good deputies just minutes after the department arrived.

HAMILTON

Okay...

Braxton hands the picture to Hamilton.

BRAXTON

Would you mind taking a good look at that picture and tell me how close those casings are to Mister Sampson's body?

Hamilton gazes at the picture a moment then looks over it at Braxton.

HAMILTON

Inches, just like I remember.

BRAXTON

How can that be if Mister Whatley was the shooter? Seems like they would have been piled up around him, not the victim.

HAMILTON

We did locate scratch marks in the sand and thought Mister Whatley dragged Mister Sampson to where we found him.

BRAXTON

Scratch marks? Leading from where?

HAMILTON

From where Mister Whatley had his pickup parked.

BRAXTON

Then it is your contention that Alfred Whatley shot his nephew somewhere close to his pickup truck, then dragged his body AWAY from it? What for?

Hamilton squirms in his seat and starts to look a little nervous.

HAMILTON

I...don't know.

Braxton quickly steps over to the evidence table and grabs another picture.

BRAXTON

Are these the scratch marks you're referring to, sir?

Braxton hands the picture to the Sheriff. He looks at it.

HAMILTON

If this was taken at the crime scene, then yes.

BRAXTON

It was taken by one of your deputies the morning after. But do they look like what you remember the night before?

HAMILTON

The Sheriff gives the picture a good look.

HAMILTON

Yes, I would say so.

BRAXTON

According to the experts next door in Travis County, those drag marks were made by someone being lifted by the shoulders and dragged forward. Would you agree?

HAMILTON

Yes, I probably would.

BRAXTON

That means Mister Sampson should have a great deal of sand embedded in the toes of the tennis shoes he was wearing that night.

HAMILTON

That would make sense.

Braxton turns, faces the jury and holds up a piece of paper.

BRAXTON

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a report here from the County's own forensic lab who examined those sneakers at my request.

He reads.

BRAXTON

And I quote, 'no unusual accumulation of sand were found anywhere on the deceased shoes, including the toe area, and no scratch marks indicative of dragging were found.' So it appears James Sampson wasn't dragged after all, which leads us back to the question.

Braxton returns his gaze toward the Sheriff.

BRAXTON

How could the spent shells end up in a circular pattern around the deceased and who was drug through the sand?

HAMILTON

At the moment I can't answer either one of those questions.

Again Braxton faces the jury and slowly walks toward them.

BRAXTON

Well sir, I can. Those shells ended up the way they did because James Sampson was really murdered by an unknown craft, in just the manner Alfred Whatley described.

Braxton holds his hands as if he's holding a gun and mimics his narration.

BRAXTON

It was James Sampson, a shooting at an object overhead, slowly turning in a circle as he fired, that caused the shells to fall the way they did.

He gawks at the Sheriff.

BRAXTON

That would leave the same pattern of shell casings you found. Wouldn't it Sheriff?

After a brief stare-down, Hamilton responds.

HAMILTON

Theoretically, I suppose it would.

Braxton again turns to the jury.

BRAXTON

And what about those drag marks? No sand on the victims shoes, but according to the Sheriff Department's property master, Alfred Whatley DID have an unusual amount of sand caked around the laces of his work boots. I had those shoes examined as well.

Then back to Hamilton.

BRAXTON

And what do you guess the conclusion was by your own forensics lab?

HAMILTON

I wouldn't know.

Braxton shifts the paper in his hand and reads.

BRAXTON

Again I quote, 'a large amount of sand wedged around the eyelets and laces. Also scratches on top of the boot indicate it was dragged upside down, heel forward.' Much the way a persons foot would flop backward if picked up by the shoulders and dragged forward. Wouldn't you agree, Sheriff?

HAMILTON

Sure, I'd agree with that. But it doesn't mean a thing. Alfred Whatley had plenty of time to stage the whole thing, boots and all.

BRAXTON

That sir, IS a possibility. But the evidence clearly demonstrates otherwise.

HAMILTON

I suppose...

BRAXTON

Thank you, Sheriff. No more questions your honor.

With a slight look of disgust, Hamilton stands and steps away from the stand as Braxton heads back for his seat.

INT. COURTROOM - MINUTES LATER

Mark Rich stands in front of the witness stand. Seated is Doctor STAN NELSON, a middle aged man with gray hair. Rich approaches the stand.

RICH

So it is your contention that the accused, Alfred Whatley, WAS sane on the night on the night of the murder?

NELSON

In my opinion, yes.

RICH

Thank you, Doctor.

Rich glances at Braxton's table.

RICH

Your witness counselor.

Braxton smiles as he stands.

BRAXTON

Thank you Mister Rich.

He approaches the stand.

BRAXTON

Doctor Nelson, it's clear from your report that Alfred Whatley passed his sanity test and I suspect he's no more insane than you or I. But I'm interested in his emotional state the night you examined him. Was he proud, boastful, remorseful...

NELSON

No, he was more in a state of shock. Almost catatonic, blank stares, very withdrawn.

BRAXTON

In your mind, did he seem like a man who'd just committed a cold blooded murder?

The Doctor thinks a moment.

NELSON

Honestly, no. He seemed like a man who had witnessed something for which his mind just couldn't cope.

BRAXTON

And you didn't find that strange?

NELSON

Actually, no. It can be common with people who have never committed murder. Their mind simply won't accept what they've done, especially when it's a family member. I felt that would account for Mister Whatley's behavior.

BRAXTON

Could that behavior also be attributed to folks who have witnessed something incredible, say having a tornado rip their roof off while they're in the home or maybe seeing an object they've never seen before?

NELSON

Well, of course, their reactions would be nearly the same. But due to the nature of the crime, at the time I felt it was nothing more than a post traumatic reaction.

BRAXTON

What about any physical abnormalities, did you find anything out of the ordinary?

NELSON

Just one thing that I thought was unusual. The tips of Mister Whatley's ears each have a very small but highly patterned arrangement of skin pigmentation. They resemble 'tattoos' for lack of a better word.

BRAXTON

Tattoos?

NELSON

Not the typical tattoo you may be visualizing. There's no ink. This is more of an arrangement of different colored skin pigmentation.

BRAXTON

Like a birth mark?

NELSON

Yes, I suppose they could be described like that. Except these are absolutely identical and are on both ears in exactly the same place.

BRAXTON

Sort of like he was 'branded' with a double iron.

The Doctor chuckles.

NELSON

Yes, I guess one could make that analogy. But I see them as birth marks, so it would have to have been his DNA that was 'branded.'

BRAXTON

Could these 'tattoos' be something other than birth marks, maybe caused by something external or environmental?

NELSON

Absolutely. Our skin color changes simply by staying in the sun too long. But to make those markings would take a tightly focused, very powerful source of energy which I'm unaware of.

BRAXTON

These 'markings,' what did they look like?

NELSON

I studied them with the best scope I have in the office. Both resemble intersecting lines enclosed in a circle.

Braxton steps over to the evidence table and picks up a page-sized photograph. He steps back over to the witness stand and hands it to Nelson.

BRAXTON

Shortly before this trial I had the opportunity to have Mister Whatley's ears photographed using a super magnifying camera. Do these markings resemble what you remember?

Nelson gawks at the picture.

NELSON

Yes, but now that I see them this close, this is even more amazing.

BRAXTON

I don't know about you, sir, but I know what they remind me of.

The Doctor snaps his gaze back to Braxton.

NELSON

A circuit board.

The room mummurs, Daniels stands.

DANIELS

Objection your honor, counsel is leading the witness.

Nelson turns toward the judge.

NELSON

Honestly judge, I was going to make that very comment.

Judge Benson looks at Daniels.

BENSON

Overruled.

Then turns his gaze to Braxton.

BENSON

Mister Bonner, you got a free pass on that one. But I suggest you back away from the fence a little.

BRAXTON

Understood your honor.

Braxton looks at Nelson.

BRAXTON

Thank you, Doctor. No more questions.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

The huge ornate doors open. Braxton and Betty step out into the bright sun. Both squint as they walk side by side down the long sidewalk.

BETTY

I think that went well.

BRAXTON

I don't know, I'd be hard pressed to acquit him if I was a sitting on that jury. They definitely demonstrated motive with all those public fights Alfred had with little Jimmy. That hurt us.

BETTY

But what about Mister Hurst and Doctor Nelson's testimony? They were great.

BRAXTON

Hearsay and 'expert' testimony doesn't substitute for hard evidence, which is what we're 'a lacking and they've got. Alfred at the crime scene 'a holding the murder weapon, his own rifle? If that ain't 'opportunity' I don't know what is.

BETTY

But all we have to do is introduce a 'reasonable doubt.'

The two come to a fork in the sidewalk. Braxton turns and smiles at Betty.

BRAXTON

This is true. But honestly, if I was a sitting in that box, Alfred's story is the one I'd have 'reasonable doubt' about.

BETTY

We still have Doctor Fanning.

BRAXTON

Another 'expert.' More 'he said, she said.' We need hard, physical evidence.

Betty looks off.

BETTY

At this point, that would be a miracle.

BRAXTON

Well, I hate to have to do this but I promised Loretta I'd meet with her after today's session, give her my thoughts on how things are going.

BETTY

What are you going to tell her?

BRAXTON

I ain't a going to sugar coat it, I'm a gonna have to tell her it ain't looking all that good. Manslaughter may be the best we can do to keep him out of the chair.

INT. WHATLEY RESIDENCE - EVENING

Braxton sits on the edge of the sofa with Loretta sitting beside him. She's softly crying.

BRAXTON

I am so sorry, Loretta. There's still a chance to save him from capital punishment if we can take the premeditation out of the picture.

Through bloodshot, weepy eyes Loretta looks at Braxton.

LORETTA

You mean, have him tell a different story? Have him admit to killing little Jimmy? Have him lie, Braxton? We both know Alfred will never agree to that.

BRAXTON

You're right, that's why I figured if we both talk to him, try to get him to let me change the focus of the trial. He doesn't have to change his plea.

LORETTA

You're preaching to the choir, Braxton. But you know not even both of us could persuade Alfred to admit to something he didn't do.

BRAXTON

I know, you're right.

Braxton stands with a frustrated expression and strolls toward a wall with a montage of pictures.

BRAXTON

I suppose I was just trying to pull a rabbit out of my hat.

Loretta stands and joins him at the photographs.

LORETTA

I'm hoping you can, just not that rabbit. We both know it's not the right one.

Braxton turns his gaze to the pictures. Loretta follows. A few seconds pass before she sniffs and points to one of them. Many are of Alfred and Jimmy holding a catch of fish.

LORETTA

Jimmy was the son we never had. They used to always go fishing in that river bottom.

Braxton examines one closely.

BRAXTON

Nice catch of rainbows. Good clear picture.

LORETTA

Yea, that surprised me. That picture was taken with Alfred's mobile phone. It has a camera built in to it.

BRAXTON

Really? I think mine has a camera, too, but I've never taken a picture with it.

LORETTA

It'll even record a few seconds of video. You don't even have to have it turned the right way, it's got a lens on both sides.

BRAXTON

I'll declare. I remember when I was happy just to have the phone, now there's all these gadgets in them...

Braxton snaps his head toward Joanna.

BRAXTON

You said a lens on BOTH sides? So I could hold it up and take a picture of what's behind me?

JOANNA

I suppose so, if you wanted to...

Braxton rushes toward the door.

BRAXTON

Joanna, I've got to go check something out. And I mean a right now.

JOANNA

What is it Braxton?

He opens the door.

BRAXTON

Possibly, the miracle we've been a looking for.

EXT. WHATLEY RESIDENCE - EVENING

Braxton leaves the house walking briskly toward his pickup truck. Along the way he pushes a button on his cell phone and raises it to speaking position.

BRAXTON

Betty? Meet me at the evidence locker down to the Sheriff's office as soon as you can get there. Go right now. I'm on my way.

Braxton gets in and speeds away.

INT. EVIDENCE LOCKER - DAY

Braxton and Betty walk briskly down the long hallway of chain link fences. Betty is the first to step up to the counter. She rings the bell with several hits.

BETTY

Michael? It's Betty Bonner.

Michael's unseen voice responds.

MICHAEL (OC)

Hang on, I'm coming.

He steps from behind a shelf with a paperback book in his hand and walks toward her.

WOODS

Hey Miss Betty! What can I do for you?

BETTY

Alfred Whatley's cell phone. Is it still here?

WOODS

If it WAS here, it's STILL here. Let me go look.

Woods heads to the back as Braxton steps up, a bit breathless.

BRAXTON

I suppose I should do a bit of working out if I'm a gonna keep up with you.

Betty acknowledges him with a smile. Woods returns looking at the cell phone in hand.

WOODS

Yea, here it is.

BETTY

Great!

Woods looks up and sees Braxton.

WOODS

Hey Mister Bonner.

BRAXTON

Good to make your acquaintance again.

Woods steps up to the counter and hands the phone to Betty.

WOODS

Just turned it on for you.

BETTY

Thanks.

Betty immediately flips it open. BEEPS are heard as she scrolls through the menu. A moment later, strange sounds are heard from the phone's speaker.

BRAXTON

Well?

BETTY

I think I found it.

As Betty continues to watch, her face turns more and more blank, as if she can't believe what's she's seeing.

BRAXTON

What is it? Sure sounds weird.

BETTY

You're not going to believe this.

INT. COURTROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Braxton stands in front of the jury box with two large televisions flanking both sides. A video begins to play on both.

The images depict a view from inside Whatley's pickup, over his shoulder. Although a bit jerky, it does clearly show Sampson in the background, shooting toward the sky.

Whatley's close-up face occasionally darts into the foreground as his frantic words ring through the television speakers.

WHATLEY

...come on...come on... what's wrong
with this damn thing? Why won't it work?

Many of the jurors drop their jaw as they watch a beam fall from the sky and engulf the rifle. A second later, the view widens as if the camera had changed positions.

The jurors are now able to see the bottom of a bright object hovering above Sampson in the upper right corner of the video. The object's beam snatches the gun from his hand.

Sampson stares in disbelief as the rifle, in one sweeping motion, quickly twirls around and fires.

The beam releases the rifle the instant it discharges. Both Sampson and the weapon hit the ground at the same time. A second later, the object vanishes.

The video image swirls before coming to rest on a close up of the seam in the truck's seat.

WHATLEY

Oh my God! They've shot Jimmy! Those bastards shot my little Jimmy!

Whatley's voice trails off but is still very audible. He's screaming.

WHATLEY

You son of a bitches! Jimmy! Jimmy can you hear me? Jimmy!

(pause)

No! No! No! No Jimmy, you can't die! Come back you bastards, take me instead! No Jimmy...

The video stops. The room is silent as Braxton steps over to the player and turns it off. He turns toward the jury and speaks softly.

BRAXTON

Is there any member of this jury that would like for me to replay this video?

In unison, most all the jurors nod their heads "no."

BRAXTON

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to reemphasize that what you saw was not computer generated, a re-enactment nor staged. It was absolutely real.

Braxton ejects the DVD.

BRAXTON

This video was recorded on Alfred Whatley's cell phone the night of the murder and transferred to this disk under the watchful eye of the Sheriff's department. It has not been doctored in anyway by anyone.

He glances at Daniels, who also looks dumbfounded.

BRAXTON

As difficult as it is to believe, this evidence clearly shows Alfred Whatley is innocent of the crime of murder. That indeed a flying craft of unknown origin was the true perpetrator.

Braxton strolls toward the jury gazing at each as he speaks.

BRAXTON

Now, this flying craft wouldn't have to be from Mars and piloted "little green men." We've shown it's highly possible our own government has the technology to construct and pilot such a craft. But either way, it's crystal clear Alfred Whatley did not pull the trigger that ended his nephew's life. That presumption becomes absurd in light of this evidence.

He glances at Whatley.

BRAXTON

What happened to Alfred Whatley is something I hope none of us will ever have to go through. Witnessing the senseless killing of his precious family. And having to live with the fact that the true murderer will never be brought to justice.

Then back to the jury box. He points at the televisions.

BRAXTON

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to recall that video you saw a few minutes ago then place yourself in the shoes of that unwilling cameraman, Alfred Whatley. Imagine yourself watching a loved one being murdered right before your eyes by something you can't even begin to understand. Then imagine being blamed for that murder and the only alibi you have is a far-fetched story that just happens to be the truth. And finally if you will, imagine a horrific memory. A memory of a tragedy you'd carry for the rest of your natural life. A memory Alfred Whatley will always endure regardless of today's verdict. That's already more punishment than anyone should endure for .

Braxton heads back toward his table.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Everyone is seated as the Bailiff hands a slip of paper to the judge. Benson gazes at it a moment then hands it back to the Bailiff, who takes it to the jury box.

Benson looks at Whatley.

BENSON

Mister Whatley, would you please stand.

In unison, Whatley, Braxton and Betty comply. Benson looks at the foreman.

BENSON

Foreman of the jury, would you please read the verdict.

A man stands. He reads from the slip of paper.

MAN

We the jury, find the defendant Alfred Whatley, NOT guilty of first degree murder.

The courtroom cheers, everyone stands. Braxton shakes hands with Whatley, who instead, gives him a hug. Loretta bolts from the audience and breaks them up for a hug of her own.

Benson slams his gavel.

BENSON

This trial is now adjourned. (under his breath) If anybody cares.

He gets up and steps away from the bench, disappearing through a back door.

INT. BRAXTON BONNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Braxton sits behind his desk holding a cup of coffee. Betty, in her chair beside the desk.

BRAXTON

Well Betty, I'm as giddy as a newborn fold.

BETTY

I can imagine how Alfred feels. Have you talked to him since the trial?

BRAXTON

I did last night. He and Loretta are a packing their bags and gonna start traveling in an RV.

BETTY

That sounds like a good retirement.

BRAXTON

Retirement? They both joined an organization called 'mufon' or something like that. They're a gonna drive around the country documenting UFO cases.

Betty leans forward and giggles.

BETTY

Now THAT sounds like fun.

A CHIME rings from the other room. Braxton looks in the direction of the sound.

BRAXTON

There's another email singing at you again. How many of them do you get a day, now?

BETTY

Hundreds, I think.

Betty stands.

BETTY

Most just want to know more about the case.

BRAXTON

You mean Alfred's?

BETTY

None other.

Betty heads for the door.

INT. BRAXTON OFFICE - BETTY'S DESK- SECONDS LATER

Betty steps in and sits behind her desk. She grabs the mouse, begins moving and clicking it while gazing at the monitor. Her face starts to turn blank.

Behind her, Braxton steps up to the door.

BRAXTON

Is that blog of yours how so many people know about Alfred's case? I didn't think they all took the local paper...

BETTY

Braxton, take a look at this.

BRAXTON

What is it?

Braxton steps up behind Betty. He gazes over her shoulder at the computer monitor.

BETTY

Someone asking for your help.

She reads.

BETTY

'This is not a joke or a hoax. I've been arrested for the murders of of my friends and am begging you to represent me. I swear, I did not murder anyone, but something horrible did. I'd rather tell you the details in person. Please, Mister Bonner, no one believes me, not even my lawyer. I'm praying you will.' He goes on to include the name and location of the jail he's being held in.

Betty gives Braxton a serious look.

BETTY

Braxton, this kid just graduated High School, he's barely eighteen. You've got to help him.

BRAXTON

Where is he?

BETTY

She gives the monitor another look.

BETTY

Somewhere in Florida. A little town called New Port Richey.

Then turns back to Braxton.

BRAXTON

Well, I suppose we'd better pack our bags and call the cleaners. We may be out of town for a while.

THE END