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by stanley lieber

His brother's death affected him more than he expected. Beyond the fact that T was not really his brother was the reality of their shared history, their unique perspective as time-traveling entrepreneurs, and the commonality of their interests. This hole in the black inkwell of his heart would not be so easily filled.

He would of course assume command of the New York operation. The real estate alone was of staggering value. After cutting headcount and streamlining his operating costs, he was confident that he could right the ship in time to avert catastrophe. Something good could come of this yet.

The job had set things right, but it had also set so many things wrong. Just one of many examples he was now prepared to cite: Was he, himself now a target? The burgeoning line of thought set him on a course he found difficult to steer. Why had T been taken out? And by whom? Where would the money trail ultimately lead? He allocated considerable company resources to finding the killer, even as his instincts told him the investigation was a lost cause. He owed it to his brother to at least try to get to the bottom of this.

Inside the Chrysler Building sat an intimidating inventory of T's belongings. Seventy-seven stories, most having been used for storage at one time or another. One elevator shaft was completely filled with loose baseball cards, the result of a failed venture into the speculator market. Excavating the various piles of collectables was complicated by the need to employ the talents of experts from various fields related to the contents of the piles. Who knew what treasures might be hidden amongst the duplicates, rejects, and lames. A proper checklist needed to be created and reviewed.

Within a month of his brother's death he was settling into the indignity of his new routine. Paperwork, paperwork, and other, new kinds of paperwork. He began to understand why he had always worked in the field. He preferred to keep his hands free of bureaucracy and his eyes on his own paper. ("I'm allergic to your text," as the man who was not his father had said.) It was no great surprise that T had become deranged. Trapped here, as he was, toiling behind a desk in this office where he had probably had to raise his hand before getting up to use the restroom. It was an embarrassment to their legacy, and he was glad that his brother had not lived to see himself in this light. The final dissolution of their partnership, affected not through any kind of direct action by their enemies, but through the slowly proceeding degeneration of the self. Self-inflicted.

Whatever came next, things would be different.