Doxa

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About this Piece

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CHAPTER ONE

Doxa

Block 997,342

South of the Aleutian Chain and over the trench a man is reminded of how central the sun is to his life. At all times of the day, it pulls him upward and sets its eye upon the dark things that cast shadows on the earth and cause him to yearn for a day when he himself will no longer cast shadows but rays of glory. Vincent Deveraux stood from his squatted position in front of his office door and walked toward the sun until his hands gripped the railing.



"It's not the way these things are supposed to be done," he said.

"When did you start doing things the way that they're supposed to be done'?" His brother, Jesse, asked from a few feet down the railing. He had a sprightly stance, as if he might leap over the railing at any moment, but held a contented seaward gaze below the bill of his taupe company ballcap. The light shone well upon him and he was pleased with the way it shone everywhere else.

"How can nine out of every ten wells be technically unrecoverable?" Vincent asked. "We confirmed before we ever put bit to earth! They said that every well site was viable for recovery!"

Jesse rested his forearms on the rusted railing. "You know as well as I do that it's political, Vince, but your decision to cut Banks in is what's killing us. He gets the recoverable wells."

Vince nodded in agreement. "Not a single viable well. It's my fault. We will likely have to stop any further drilling."

Jesse smirked and spit over the railing. The wad of saliva disappeared from sight before it dropped into the obsidian sea. "This rig is your fault too, ya know?"

"What do you mean?" Vincent asked.

"The 'Tap Rig'. It was your invention, wasn't it?" Jesse asked.

Vincent shrugged. "Sure, it was my idea, but the engineers made it happen. It was their creation, not mine."

Jesse pushed himself off the railing with verve. "The first of its kind and wildly successful for deep water, hydrocarbon recovery. You were the first to fully embrace pattern recognition software in exploration, as well. It was your fault that the world had to change its mind, not once, but twice."

"What are you warming me up to, Jess? What are you about to sell me? I feel as though I'm about to be made to swallow a pill," Vincent said.

"Ha! No, I'm not about to make you feel better, Vince. I'm not here to make your days airy, and aimless. Brothers don't do that. I'm here to help you bear the weight, and direction of what must be done. I'm here to make you better."

"No, not that, again. We've had this discussion too many times. We've spent nine hundred hours on this."

"Good, only one hundred hours to go."

"Its ridiculous. No one is doing it."

"No one was using AI to explore undiscovered hydrocarbon deposits when you began that either."

"I've only heard bad things about it."

Jesse laughed. "You hear only bad things about guns, but you keep buying those."

"That's different. I'm a collector."

"I agree, but the same people that hate your guns hate Bitcoin."

"There's so many of those scams. It's just another false problem dreamt up to be solved by an even more false solution."

Jesse held up a calloused index finger. "You know it's a real problem and there can only be one solution."

"I'm unconvinced. It feels like a trap."

"We'd be using a mining company in a jurisdiction with the least amount of regulatory capture. In fact, I've already contacted them."

"You wha—! Without telling me?"

"Of all the things I have to say, or want to say, I believe this might convince you—"

"No!"

"Have I not earned your respect, Vince?"

"I'm quickly losing it."

"I'm being sincere. Have I not earned it?"

"Yes."

"Please, listen to this."

Vincent checked the time on his smartphone. "I make the call on the next drill in ten minutes. You have until then. Make it simple. I'm not ready for a lecture." Vincent expected Jesse to take a moment to compose himself—a deep breath, pause to gather the right thoughts and words, something of that nature—but Jesse wasted none of the most precious commodity on earth.

"Some twenty something is sitting in his double wide scheming against you. He's watching roaches run away from him when he opens the cabinet door for a baby bottle. He's got an unused degree and dreaming of monetizing abandoned or stranded wells. He's screaming at his propane company for missing a leak on his tank that put the pilot light out and nearly killed his family from monoxide poisoning. He wants to struggle out of this. He wants to pull everyone up over the edge of this miserable hole with him. He's you except he's found Bitcoin and paired it with an application that no one else has the balls to taste. He doesn't just want to taste it. He wants a tableful to gluttonize over. This kid wants it more than you."

"Let him have it," Vincent said. He turned and began to walk away from his brother. His boots echoed on the metal walkway

until one step coincided with a louder ring. He turned back toward Jesse, who had struck the railing with a fist that now bled over the blue paint. "Why are you pressing this so hard, Jess?" Vincent asked.

"Vince, I am with you to the end of this business. If you say no, I'll stick around and work like I always have, but you are wrong, brother. I'm glad you're finally hanging by the strand of spider's web above the fire, once again. It's when you see most clearly, when you're most decisive. You beat the old wildcatters at their game and became the 'Technocatter', but somebody is always going to want to beat you and this is how they'll do it. Below us is milk and honey, Vince. Vines we did not plant, flocks we did not rear. Take them now and bid those midstream giants a good last day in the sun!"

"You didn't answer me, Jesse. Why are you pressing this?"

Jesse wiped the blood on his jeans. "I have sons."

"I'm well aware of my nephews. Kasper will celebrate his eleventh birthday next month and I think he'll like his present from his uncle."

"I want this for them. This is the best way that I know to build something for them," Jesse said

"We've already conquered the world, Jesse! How much more must you expand the kingdom before you can say 'it's enough'?"

"I know you don't understand, but—"

"What don't I understand? I know about inheritances! I know about our inheritance. I know what happened to Dad's inheritance. I know that Grandma would drive up every week to Oklahoma to piss it away on the penny slot machines. I know what Dad wasn't

given. I know what he wasn't able to give us so he ran after every quick scheme he could find. I know what we started with. Your sons will be starting with plenty! Just because I wasn't given children doesn't mean I don't know about inheritances"

"You know that's not what I meant!"

"Hm..."

"It's not about how much, Vincent. It's never been about how much a father is able to give to his son. My sons need to see their daddy give them absolutely everything that he can. Whatever they get will always be *enough*. It will be everything that I *can* give. That's what my sons need."

"You can do that without me."

"But I'd rather not."

"You're going to have to. I've got a call to make on this next bore."

"Technically recoverable?" Jesse asked.

"Yes. Adam Banks can go to Hell."

"He may indeed. His way is dark, old."

Vincent shaded his eyes with his palm and gazed westward. "Things are darker and older by the day, Jess."

"There is light. It is far older, more ancient than day and night, in fact, it governs both. You've chosen light in these situations before, Vince. Do it again."

"I see no light in the direction you're pointing toward. I see little light at all these days."

A greasy, beanpole of a man rounded a corner of the railing to the west of them. He was vulpine in many ways—nose, gait, ears—so the other men on the rig called him Todd. He stopped before Vincent and placed his hands on his head to catch his breath.

"Where are we at, Todd?" Vincent asked.

"Twenty-one thousand," Todd said between a wheeze and a cough.

"Who's on the Tap?" Vincent asked.

Todd's eyes shifted from left to right and though he tried to make eye contact with Vincent, he could not bring himself to look straight at his employer. "Dale's on the rig," he said.

"What is it, Todd? What's the 'but'?" Vincent asked.

"He thinks Mr. Devereaux is the only one who can drill it," Todd said.

Vincent waved off the suggestion. "If Dale can't do it, I'll call in Gentry or Foster from the mainland. I can have them here in under two hours."

If Todd had had a tail, he would have tucked it.

"What is it, Todd?" Vincent asked.

"He said that you would say that, and he said to tell you that Jesse is the only one in the world who can drill this one," Todd said.

Vincent's face ripened and turned to Jesse. "Go figure. If there's anyone on this rig that can preempt their disrespectful little lips, it's Dale." He turned back to Todd. "Call Dale's ass in from the Tap room. I'll fill his ears and send him back to the deepest woods in Little Dixie." He marched into his office and slammed the door behind him.

Todd slinked down the railing and around the corner. Jesse wiped the railing clean with a handkerchief, where a few drops of his blood had fell and began to dry. He reached his fist past the railing and squeezed a single droplet of blood from his palm. He watched it as long as he could. The wind carried it to and fro, but he eventually he lost sight of it. It pleased him to have picked this battle with his brother, though he knew he had lost.

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After his meeting with Vincent, Dale came out of the office looking very much like he did when he had walked in—indifferent.

"What did you tell him?" Jesse asked.

"I told him the same thing that I told Todd," Dale said.

"What did he say?"

"Nothin'. He just drank his water bottle real aggressive like and muttered under his breath."

Jesse slapped Dale on the back and said, "Thanks, Dale. Is he sending you back to the rig?"

Dale shrugged. "He just told me to get out and send you in."

"Right. What are you going to do?"

"I've got an ice chest full of beer and a lawn chair that I'm going to set up outside of the Tap room so I can watch you drill the rest of this son of a bitch," Dale said.

"A well-deserved break. Hope I can keep you entertained," Jesse said.

"After twenty-one hours in that chair, I don't think I could start another bore even if I wanted to." Dale walked away with a briskness that made Jesse doubt he had been in the driller's chair for twenty-one hours but remembered how much Dale loved beer.

Vincent was flipping through sheets of the drill plans when Jesse walked in. "'The only one in the world'," Vincent said without looking up.

"Dale has been wrong before," Jesse said.

"He has, but he's not wrong this time," Vincent said.

"If I'm good enough to hit it, I'm good enough to miss it."

Vincent shut the package of sheets and pointed a finger at his brother. "You miss this on purpose, and I'll toss you over that railing by your belt loops."

"So, we drill it, we hit it, and everything goes to Banks?" Jesse asked.

"That's all we can do. You're in the Tap room. I already radioed down. They should have it set up how you like it before you get down there," Vincent said.

"Thanks."

Neither of them moved nor looked away from one another for a time. Then Vincent said, "Do you remember what you said when you were drilling the twenty-four-inch steel under the Red River?"

"Yes."

"You had already been in the chair for ten hours. You were taking medication for blood clots. Your blood oxygen levels were in the low nineties. That damned rig was beating you to death. What did you say?"

"I said even if I was rich, healthy, and warm, I'd still be in the same chair doing the same thing."

"You are now rich, healthy, and warm. What are you going to do?"

"I'm not the one turning away from my rightful seat, Vincent. I know I'm supposed to be in that chair. I'll do what I'm supposed to do."

"What are you trying to say?"

"We have an equal number of shares, but this was your company in the beginning. It's still your company. It looks like something only you could build. You've always been best at managing risk, but over the past few months you've quit looking forward. I have to believe it has something to do with not being able to convince the Crown Prince and that stupid bet with Banks. Get over it and make the right decision!"

"I'm tempted to take you by your belt loops right now."

Jesse laughed. "You can only be tempted? Can't even bring yourself to go all in on a fight." He dropped a blood-stained business card on the drill plans in front of Vincent. "In case you have some fight left in you," he said and left the office.

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Vincent was halfway through dialing the number from the business card of the mining company, when an unknown number from an unknown location filled the screen of his smartphone. He answered as quickly as he could. He preferred to answer what would

likely turn out to be a spam call over dialing a number just to prove his brother wrong.

"Mr. Devereaux." The accent was clearly Semitic and most likely Arabic.

Vincent thought it confirmed his suspicion of it being a spam call. Feeling in great need of a distraction, Vincent planned to keep this caller on as long as he could. "Whatever you're trying to sell me, I want to know the most expensive and convoluted way I might acquire it."

The Arabic accent had become much more strained. "Mr. Devereaux, this is Hakimi, advisor to His Majesty the Crown Prince of Khaldunia."

Vincent detected offense from halfway around the world. "Forgive me, Hakimi. I thought you might be someone else."

"It is forgiven. I have called to discuss the potential bore sites on our Northwestern coastline."

"Ah, well. As we had discussed in our final meeting, the sites are obviously the Crown Prince's and he can do with them whatever pleases him, but the drill plans and pattern recognition data are property of our company."

"Yes, we are still in full agreement in those matters. The Crown Prince has expressed a desire to have your company explore the potential well sites after all," Hakimi said.

Vincent stood, shuffled all of the Aleutian Trench drill plans into an untidy pile to one side of his desk, and ran to a black filing cabinet on the opposite side of the office. He fought with the temperamental latch and asked, "Why the sudden change of heart?"

"His heart remains, as ever, true, Mr. Devereaux. He is a wise man, who does not hasten decisions that might affect the kingdom that his tenth generation will inherit from him. It is the Crown Prince's belief that you are the only man capable of a successful exploration."

"Jesse knew you would call us back."

"I'm sorry?"

"My brother, Jesse. He said you would call back."

"Is he often prophetic?"

"Not that I can remember."

"Your Jesus said that a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household. It is similar to what the Crown Prince has said of his late grandfather," Hakimi said.

Vincent paid only half his attention to Hakimi as he licked his fingers each time he rifled through a few more drill plan pages. "What did he say about his grandfather?"

"He said we did not appreciate the gravity of the Khaldunian footstool until his grandfather's feet did not rest there. The same could be true of your brother, Mr. Devereaux."

Vincent fiddled no more with paperwork. He sat in his desk chair and realized that every other driller might as well have been a mist and vapor when they sat in the chair. Nothing made a job more real for Vincent than when his brother sat in that seat. Even the bores he drilled himself, were copies of his brother's original work. And though he had just given Vincent some licks, every other friend was a foe compared to Jesse.

"Maybe you're right, Hakimi. Does the Crown Prince have a date in mind? I'll be in the Aleutian Islands until April seventeenth, but I'll be in Texas for the rest of April and May."

"The Crown Prince will be sending a jet to Juneau on April fifteenth. Board it when you are ready. His wish is to finalize an agreement as swiftly as possible. Will this be a problem?"

Vincent chuckled. "No, this works much better. It won't cut too deeply into vacation."

"It is agreed. We hope to make you most welcome in Khaldunia. Goodbye." Hakimi hung up.

Vincent could not have expressed himself better if he had leaned back in his chair and laughed. Something threatened to force its way out of him in the form of song and dance.

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Dale's feet were perched up on the sea salt-rimmed sill of the Tap room window. Vincent peaked into the ice chest next to Dale and found seven crushed cans. Dale snored and held just enough grip around the current beer can to keep it from spilling on his bib overalls. Vincent unclipped the radio from Dale's overalls and turned up the volume. Jesse worked the joysticks and focused on the screen inside the Tap room. The bottle of water next to him hadn't been touched and his ballcap was turned backward, a clear sign to Vincent that Jesse had already entered a state of deep-work comatose.

"Jess, you on this channel?"

Jesse leaned away from the screen and let go of the joysticks. He squinted at the long viewing window and picked up his radio. "Vince? Did you make a call on that next bore, yet?"

Vincent chuckled. "Nope. Forgot all about it."

"Good. Before you do, give Gentry a call. I'm not going to be able to hop on another bore after this one. I'll need a rest."

"Gentry and Dale should be able to handle the next one just fine. I'll need you to go with me back to Texas after this bore anyway," Vincent said.

Jesse accidently allowed the radio to catch the end of his groan. "Do I at least get to stay a night at home before we hop on another flight? Beth has been struggling with some of the boys growing into their testosterone and I miss them."

"I'm leaving for Khaldunia in mid-April, but I'll need you to stay home from now onward. After the buyout and paperwork are wrapped up, you're the only fella I know that would know how to run a company that specializes in mining from stranded wells."

Jesse punched the air and shouted something inaudible from behind the looking glass. He grabbed his radio and said, "Go to Hell, Adam Banks!"

"He may indeed."

The end.

Source

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