

COREY TAYLOR

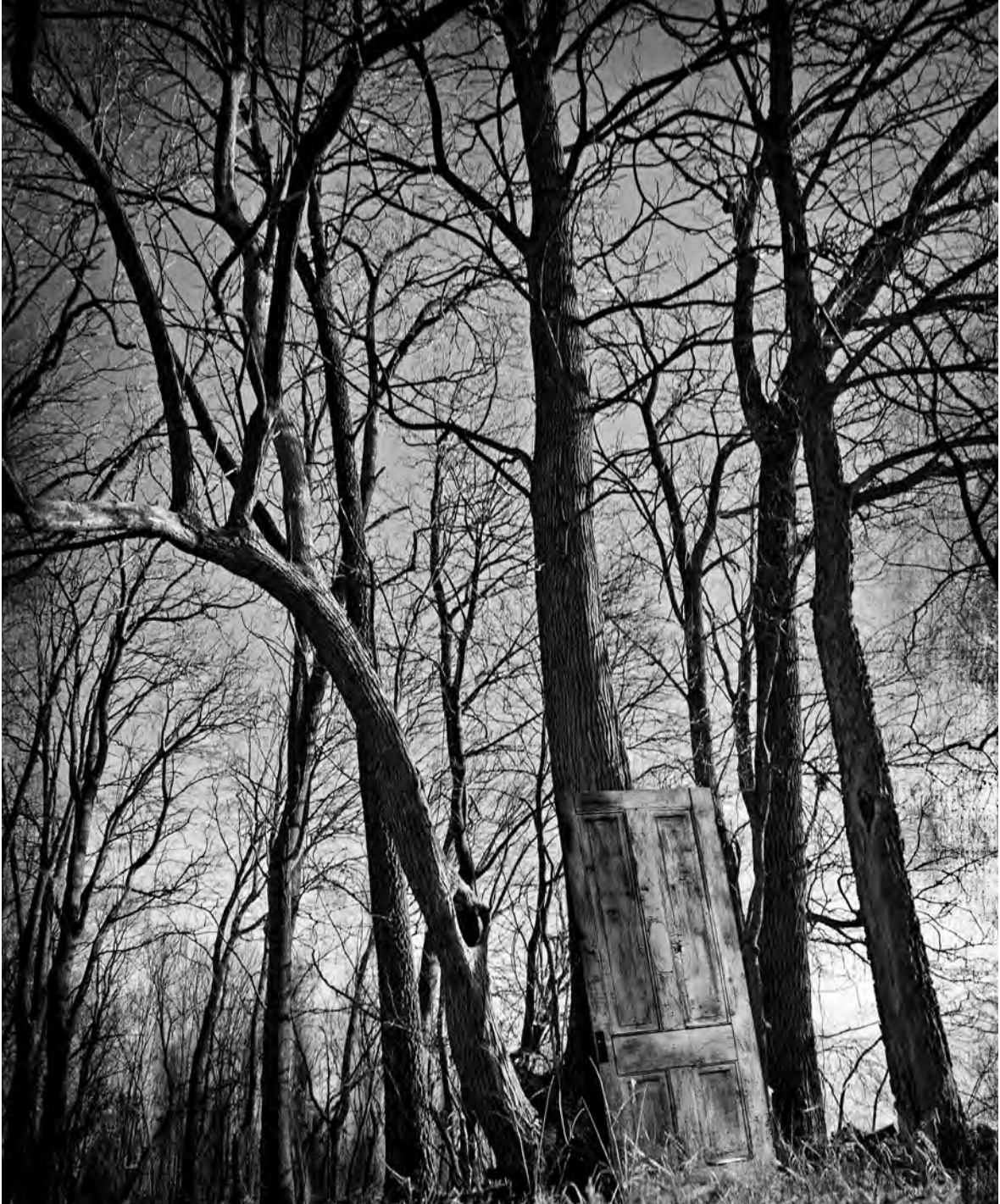
New York Times BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *Seven Deadly Sins*

SAMPLE
CHAPTER

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN

OR, HOW I MADE PEACE WITH THE PARANORMAL
AND STIGMATIZED ZEALOTS AND CYNICS IN THE PROCESS





COLD HOUSE

You see them everywhere these days. You see them in movies and cartoons, advertisements and reality shows. Celebrities line up to tell their stories just so they have a good excuse to shiver and shake in their designer sports jackets. They are so common today that it is almost crazy to imagine a time when the very idea was disturbing. But there was indeed an era when the thought of ghosts was enough to send a tendril of chilly dread down your spine. I am not talking about the guy under the sheet with the eyeholes cut out or the “groovy” spooks that have been plaguing Scooby and the gang since 1969. I am talking about the footsteps right behind you, the padded shuffle on hardwood floors where there should be no noise at all. I am talking about the shadow in the corner of your eye when you are sitting at home alone. I am talking about moving objects and flying silverware and waking up with scratches you know for a fact were not there when you went to bed. There are spaces between spaces and doors that go nowhere. From orbs to shades, the spirit end of the paranormal pool is anything but shallow, but it is easy to find yourself drowning.

When you are young, if you are anywhere near a group of same-aged folk and you want to freak each other out, you tell ghost stories. You gather up a blanket and you swap them like baseball cards at the expo, waiting with your breath held for your turn at the mike because, nine times out of ten, everyone in that room has a ghost story. They can be as vanilla as seeing your great grandfather in the cellar or they can be as mollifying as the dark shape that follows you to every town you have lived in since you were still taking naps in school. But in my experience almost everyone I know has a ghost story, and anyone who does not have one secretly and desperately wants one.

People have been infatuated with the supernatural almost as long as they have been with religion. In fact, if religion were a lounge singer, then the paranormal would be a rock star. Unless you worship snakes or speak in tongues, most of the time your chosen faith is fairly banal. But the unexplained . . . shit, that is like your first leather jacket or your first French kiss. Taboo is always the more appealing possibility. Maybe it is the implied darkness or the fantasy side, but I do know ghost stories are more intriguing because no two are really the same. The Bible only really changes when someone new comes to power.

And let's face facts: people love being scared. It is the same reason I watch every damn shark movie that comes out, even though the mere sight of them makes me want to fill my pants with the brown sound—I love the feeling. You do not take a first date to a chick flick; you take her to something that is going to make her jump straight into your arms in terror, preferably at a drive-in. Nothing too gross and gory—something that is just intense enough to close the deal for you. Ghost stories are quite simply our early introduction into that fierce side of the world. It is bonding and sharing and fucking with people all rolled into one. It is delicious masochism.

I am about to tell you a story that I have not recounted to anyone since I was fourteen years old. It is extraordinary, terrifying, and, at the risk of committing the sin of pun, very haunting. It is also true; some of the events are a bit loose, as this happened to me thirty years ago, but the pieces I remember are as vibrant today as the night they occurred, and the more I write it down, the more it is all coming back to me—stronger, clearer, and more defined. Doubt if you want. Scoff if you wish. It does not change the fact that *it happened*. And I was there. For better or worse, I was there.

I was nine years old in the summer of 1983, “growing up” on the south side of Des Moines, Iowa, my hometown backdrop off and on for most of my life. Unbeknownst to me, I was a year away from moving to Florida and spending the better part of my teens on the move, forever giving up any semblance of roots in favor of a second-rate vagabond existence. But in ’83 I had been in Des Moines for three wonderful years and had managed to find some semblance of a real life, to feel like a real kid. I was a Cub Scout until an unfortunate brake failure caused me to ride my BMX through the screen door of my scoutmaster’s house. I played little league baseball and bowled on a kids’ league (on a team that was *meant* to be called “The Cannibals,” but some adult renamed us “The Cannon Ballers” . . .) at a beautiful old alley called Bowlerama, where my grandmother had bowled since before I was born. I lived in a basement apartment just a short walk away from the corner of South East 14th and Watrous Avenue, and from first to mid-fourth grade I attended Andrew Jackson Elementary School, which was only a few blocks away. You could follow Watrous right to Jackson’s front door if you wanted, wind around the corner-hook that finally t-boned at Indianola Avenue, then cross the school’s vast front yard. But there was another more direct and mysterious route that led you to the school, opening out onto its parking lot and the outside playground.

Before the convenience store moved years later, the Quik-Trip gas station on 14th and Watrous was on the other side of the street. Perpendicular to the shop was nothing but forest, only really cut off by the houses that lined the way to school. But there was a path through the woods that was very nearly a straight line to Jackson Elementary. So my friends and I would sidestep the street, make our way through the trees, and head deep into what

COLD HOUSE

we called the South Side Woods. The path itself twisted and turned, providing a virtually crazy maze that we happily skipped on as the morning dew dried under a warm morning sun. But as we got closer to school, the woods took on a fairly sinister feeling.

About halfway through the expanse, bizarre “traps” and gnarly rusted tripwires started popping up on the path. They were specifically designed to fuck with anyone on the path itself—the wires crossed it like someone was trying to catch us and hurt us. Knowing the trail as well as we did, we still had to watch where we were going. The strange thing was that every once in a while the wires and traps would move—someone was moving them. We never knew why. However, as dangerous as these hazards were for a bunch of kids, what lay up ahead was like something out of a Wes Craven movie.

In the middle of this forest, clearly removed from the community that surrounded it, stood a two-story abandoned house, gutted and decrepit, a tower of foreboding set against this suburban gothic landscape like a hangover from the Brothers Grimm’s seedier days. It was the essence of the color gray and defiant in the face of the elements; no one really knew how old it was, how long it had been there, or who had wanted to live there, seeing as it was not on any street nor did it have a driveway that connected it to the outside world. It was just a hulking mess that scared the ever-living shit out of us kids—terrifying messages had been scrawled on the outside walls, most likely by teenagers who hung out there. Thinking back now, it was really just a creepy house that creaked and shuddered, but to impressionable nine-year-olds, it was the vacation spot of the devil itself. Of course we were fascinated by it even as we avoided it like the plague. But none of us had the stones to go in. Even on a dare—which to a kid is like a binding contract you could take to

court—we would not go near it. We hurried past as much to get away from it as we did to get to school on time. But even when we could not see it, we knew it was there, and we talked about it constantly, so much so that my friends and I started referring to it as Cold House.

The summer of '83 was a huge time in my life. I was beginning to think a lot like I do today, and I was starting to realize that kids liked spending time with me because I had no fear and was constantly entertaining. After *Return of the Jedi* came out, my friends and I would recreate the movie, and I was always voted Luke Skywalker, charging onto the field we usually played stickball on with my broken secondhand plastic red lightsaber to save the day. I rolled with a lot of neighborhood kids, some the same age and some a little older. You could find us at my house after school—watching *G.I. Joe* cartoons on WGN and videos on a newer station called MTV because we were one of the few families who actually had cable, albeit stolen. So I always had friends around, and during that summer there was always a sleepover at someone's house.

It was July when my friends and I decided to sneak out of my apartment and go explore Cold House.

There were six of us: I was basically the ringleader, and then there was my first real best friend, Henry, along with Matt, Joe, Tina, and Brock. Henry and Matt lived a few blocks away and were the only ones technically staying overnight with me. Joe, Tina, and Brock lived in other buildings in the complex. The plan came together earlier that day while we were roaming around looking for shit to do. When kids are starving in the brain, their heads seek out mischievous fun. There is the old adage “idle hands are the devil's playthings.” No truer words have ever been said: I almost got my family evicted from that apartment com-

COLD HOUSE

plex because I broke into one of the storage garages—and by “break in” I mean I went through the wall with a used iron bar.

For a long time I had wanted to go into Cold House and see what was there. We had heard it was haunted since we had first started taking the trails to school. The thought of a potentially real haunted house not two blocks away from where I slept was too much for me to contemplate, and I was bound and determined to get inside and see what I could see. My cohorts were of course a bit more reticent than I was. Tina did not want to have anything to do with it; the others only wanted to go during the day. I wanted to go at night, possessed by the idea that the only time we would see anything was after midnight. No one had to go who did not wish to—this was “Join Us at Your Own Risk.” Finally we found ourselves on the same scary page and went to work.

The plan was this: we would meet behind the work shed near my building at 12 a.m. Henry, Matt, and I would sneak out of my bedroom window, which I had done countless times before. The rest would find a way to get there, if they were indeed going to come along. Tina, Joe, and Brock still hummed and hawed at the idea, but at midnight, when my group was safely behind the shed, the other three soon met us and we were on our way. We had managed to smuggle four flashlights into our bedrooms that day. We walked down 14th, crossed at the lights, and, making sure to keep out of sight of adults who might try to send us back home, proceeded into the South Side Woods, waving the flashlights around like Jedis to keep the jitters at bay.

Before we go any further, let me tell you first that, as always, I have changed my friends’ names out of respect to what happened and because, even though I have not seen them since shortly after this incident, they will forever be tied to me as friends and as

people who got through this unscathed. I doubt they would even admit remembering this night if pressed. But my profession has a way of keeping youthful exuberance fresh and, therefore, my recollection of the following events are as vivid as yesterday. So this is my book, my obsession, and my quandary; to call them out would mean making them question shit from the past they have probably done their best to forget. Make no mistake though: these are actual events; I was not by myself, and I have the scars to prove it.

The six of us found ourselves fairly jovial, even though we were traipsing through the darkness toward something that frightened us to death. Even when we tripped on the wires draped over the path, we laughed and helped each other up. We kept moving, each of us certain we were going to see something “so fucking cool!” Then, before we knew it and a lot sooner than we expected, we were there.

I cannot tell you how much more terrifying Cold House looked in the dark. Years later, watching the end of *Blair Witch Project*, I experienced a horrendous and violent flashback. I felt petrified because it took me directly back to that night. It was like someone had been with us filming. Of course that was a movie designed to make you piss your pants and give you motion sickness—memory and reality can be so much more vicious.

Casting our flashlights across its dilapidated façade, it had the appearance of a killer. It was like discovering an alligator in the water next to you. All of the windows were gone of course, targets for teens throwing rocks and those hard green things that smelled like Pine-Sol that fell from the trees everywhere. In fact, the trees around the house looked like ghoulish fingers, either holding it in place or pointing at us, the interlopers, seeming to tell us to keep away. The front door hung on one hinge at an aw-

ful angle, and the steps up onto the front porch looked so weak that even Indiana Jones would have found another way inside. We all stood there, kind of frozen in excitement and fear. Were we really going to fucking *do* this? It seemed like I was the only one ready and willing to make this happen. With a fire I still cannot describe or explain from whence it came, I left the path and took four steps toward the house—the closest I had ever come to going inside in my life. My legs were rubber and my heart was threatening to escape from my chest, but I moved even closer. The sound of feet sliding through tall grass let me know my comrades were following, although not too closely.

I moved cautiously on the porch steps. Each one that took my weight complained loudly, and even though there was city noise not too far away, in the dark and silence of the woods, those creaking sounds were like needles sliding across your ears. We might as well have been in Romania—home seemed a million miles away. The porch itself was a little more stable, and we gathered there before I reached out with inactive fingers to move the front door and gain access to Cold House. One by one, we crossed its threshold.

Then all our flashlights went dead.

Studying the paranormal as I have over the years, I have read about spirits draining batteries and power sources for the energy to manifest. I found this to be true when, in 2003 and part of 2004, I experienced similar activity at the fabled mansion on Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. But we will talk about that later. Back in 1983 I did not know about this phenomenon. I was just a nine-year-old kid suddenly plunged into pitch black in an abandoned house. We were shaking the flashlights, trying to get them to turn back on, wondering what the hell could have killed them all at once—I think Tina had even put fresh batteries in

hers before leaving her apartment. That is when I noticed a sort of glow coming from the second floor. By that time my eyes had adjusted a bit, and I was vaguely able to make out blobs and shapes in the dark, like the walls, a broken chair, and the stairs leading up to the floor above us, and it was there, on those stairs, that a hint of light was reflecting primitively for all to see. We shut up immediately. I took a step toward the staircase, but there was a hand on my arm. It was Henry—he whispered something like “Do not be stupid—where are you going?” but I kind of shuffled out of his grip and, with a deep breath, I placed one foot on the bottom step.

Before I took another step, the glow had gotten brighter. So I turned my eyes to the top of the stairs. That is when I saw the shape.

I assumed it was a man—it was definitely man looking. It was the craziest thing we had ever seen. Here was this silhouette of a giant man, backlit so you could not see his face, but apparently casting the very light it was silhouetted against. It was like a blue-white nightmare. I remember its hands clenching and unclenching. I remember it heaving like it was gasping for air. I remember the hands of my friends pulling on my clothing trying to get me to join their escape. I remember the sight of what looked like blood on the walls. The last thing I saw before I screamed was that thing, seemingly without moving a muscle, coming toward us.

We almost killed each other running out of Cold House. The front door, now a hindrance, was finally torn from its last hinge by running children. I was the last one out of the house. As I took the porch steps, my left leg plunged through old wood, tearing into my shin. I looked behind me, and that thing was framed in the doorway—menacing, unnatural. I could *feel* its light on my

face, understand? I was utterly shell-shocked and I could not move. For some reason I knew it wanted me. This had been my plan, my idea, and this thing knew it. And it was going to punish me. I closed my eyes.

Then Henry was pulling me from the steps. He dragged me behind him, and I limped to keep up. We did not stop until we saw the lights of the streetlamps, shedding illumination and a bit of safety on our tiny bodies as we collapsed with the others next to the entrance to the woods. Nobody spoke. Someone was crying.

After a long time we all sort of stood as one and shambled quietly back toward the apartments. We were almost a walking funeral procession. As we came upon my building, Tina, Joe, and Brock silently peeled off to slip back into their own homes. Matt, Henry, and I crawled back into my room and, without another word, did our best to fall asleep. The next day we crawled out into the afternoon sunlight and sat against the wall of the complex, suddenly very vocal about what we had seen. Henry asked me if it had said anything to me, and I shook my head. Matt was convinced the thing had a hook for a hand, and nothing I said could change his mind. After a while Joe stopped over, and he was overly excited. He wanted to go back. I said I was in—so did Matt. Henry did not say anything. When we went to Tina's house, she said she was not feeling well and did not want to go. Brock's mother said he refused to even come to the door and asked us if we had been fighting. He never hung out with us again and avoided us around the complex.

As Matt, Joe, and I headed toward 14th, Henry suddenly had to go home. He said he would call me the next day after baseball practice. We were never very close after that day; I became more interested in music and comics, and he got more involved with

sports. Tina still came around, but she flat-out refused to talk about Cold House. She even went as far as to say it never happened, that our imaginations had gotten the best of us.

The three of us who were left refused to pretend that it did *not* happen, and that afternoon we made our way back to the trails, leaping over the tripwires that now seemed pedestrian compared to what we had seen the night before. We came up on the house quickly and only really paused to take our time on the steps. As Matt and Joe bounded inside, I stopped for a second to look at the hole where my leg had broken through. I had cleaned up the gash without alerting my mother, who would have asked too many questions. I stood beside the hole, and immediately my mind went back to the moment when I was face to face with that supernatural spectacle, and I studied it a long time. So by the time I entered the house, the other two were already upstairs. I did not even notice that the front door was missing until I heard Matt and Joe shouting for me to “get up here NOW!” Moving to the bottom of the stairwell, I saw that there was nothing on the walls. No blood, but nothing that would have reminded me of blood in that ghostly light either. It was just gone.

As I came up the stairs—careful not to fall through anything again—I saw what they were going on and on about and could not believe it. The front door, which we had all smashed into in our haste to escape, eventually pulling it from the doorframe, was lying on the floor in an upstairs room. We recognized it from walking past it every day on our way to school. We recognized it from the split second we had seen it illuminated in the light of our torches before they had gone dead. It *was* the front door, and it was lying inexplicably in the middle of a room many feet away from where we had left it. However, we were not so interested in how it had gotten up the stairs into this room

or who had put it up there in the first place. No, our attention was focused squarely on the word that was scrawled on its visage, almost scrubbed into the filth and grime that had built up on the door over the years:

“GO.”

We ran like hell.

After school started that fall, I kept taking the trails through South Side Woods. Occasionally Matt and Joe did as well. Tina avoided it altogether. Brock in turn avoided *us* everywhere else. Henry waved at me at school, but by the time I moved away, we just were not best friends anymore, and that really kind of broke my heart. I left Iowa for Florida a few months later. I never saw any of them again, even after I moved back to Des Moines when I was sixteen. They had really just disappeared. Over the years I have forgotten their last names. If you asked me to imagine what they looked like as adults, I would not be able to pick them out of a random police lineup.

But I remember that night. I eventually told new friends about that night, and some of them made faces like I am sure you are making faces right now as you read about this. And yet most had had experiences as wild as mine. It was wonderful having friends who had gone through circumstances so close to my own, and we talked about what had happened and what we believed in. We believed in ghosts: real deal, holy-shit ghosts. We explored other abandoned houses together, never really finding anything as extreme as the incidents we had gone through before on our own. But our belief was strong—mine has never been stronger, for over the years I have seen things and heard things that are not only insane but also very real. I have a few pieces of proof that I have gathered, but much of what I have experienced is really just eyewitness accounts, and I will share them all right

here. Before we go anywhere, though, before I start telling you these ghost stories, let me hit you with why I am writing this book in the first place.

You see, I am fairly famous—or infamous in most circles—for being, if you can excuse the term, a “devout atheist,” which in a lot of ways can come off as a contradiction in terms. Cutting to the chase, *I do not believe in god*. Honestly, I really never have. I did not when I was too young to get out of going to church, and that continues right up until this moment, sitting in this chair, writing on this computer. I do not believe in God. I do not chastise or regard with disdain those who do, but my reaction to those who purportedly do terrible things disguised as “God’s work” is acidic and maligned, to put it politely. I am just quick to judge those who are quick to judge, really.

So here is the question: How can I believe in ghosts . . . and not in God? How can I mock the very existence of Jehovah and his creepy winged minions while straight-facedly maintaining that there are ghosts, spirits, poltergeists, and haunts among us? How can I go on record with a whole book for that matter, dedicated to my version of the various events of my life, knowing full well that I might be regarded as a hypocrite at best, a nutcase at worst?

As you will find in this book, the running theory is a case of knowing versus believing.

I do not believe in God for various reasons. One, there is no real proof of the existence of God other than the usual suspects that the clergy and the like point to, such as man and the universe and all that jazz. But that, to me, is horseshit. Science has given us so many more bits of proof than God has, and even though He is lauded, He has no track record in my eyes. Just because the universe exists and man exists in it, that is no reason

and no proof for the existence of an invisible man in the sky. I would sooner believe that Santa Claus was our creator, seeing as I get my wishes answered with the same relative consistency. God never saved me and Santa never gave me a harpoon gun, so fuck my life.

Two, too many of humanity's fingerprints are on God and his so-called achievements. Men wrote all of God's books, fought all of His wars, and have been the first to point out all of His miracles since he first blamed snow on His Holy Frosty Breath. Now why humans, who are vainglorious to a fucking fault, would give credit where it is not due is a psychotic fucking mystery to me, and yet people adhere to doctrine because they have been indoctrinated. It has been *hammered* into their skulls that God exists, even though men were so busy swinging the hammers at the time, they never realized they were using them on each other.

Three, God is about as real to me as those who reside in Asgard or in Valhalla. He might as well be in comic books, which is actually a good idea if you want the younger generation to take the idea of Him seriously. At the end of the day, God is infallible because man is fallible, and a lot of people need someone to believe in who is better than ourselves. Fair enough . . . but then why not believe in the Tooth Fairy? The Tooth Fairy at least pays you for pieces of your face that you were going to throw away anyway. God makes you put those same quarters in His collection plate, even though the church is tax exempt. Well, because of inflation, my son gets dollars for those molars, so a lot of tooth money goes to them now. Sounds pretty fucked up to me, but then again, none of it is mine.

I am appalled at the hate that His followers pour into the world like factories spewing pollution into country streams. I laugh at the self-proclaimed prophets who are too busy selling

their own side of His story to consider that because their prophecies do not jibe with everyone else's accounts, there is no real continuity to His word. I abhor the fractious state of these worldwide Judeo-Christian and Islamic cults because they *all* think they are right. Religion has divided us more than it has brought us together, and normally anything that violent and dissenting would have been outlawed or driven from society if not for the fact that these pious pricks have their fingers in all the pies on Earth.

So yeah, I am not a God man, myself. But therein sits the fucked up rub: How can I be an atheist, a man who dismisses the grand conjectures of the righteous with no connection to religions and the like, and yet believe wholeheartedly in the existence of the paranormal? I do not pretend that one has anything to do with the other, but they have been intertwined since we were monkeys scrambling to make sense of anything that we could not eat, fuck, or excrete. Cynics will claim that my "eyewitness accounts" can easily be described as "flights of fancy," or "the trappings of an overactive imagination."

"There is no possible way that could have happened." "I do not believe you—you are a liar and a charlatan." (Well, no one ever called me a "charlatan," but, man, it would be great if they did). Oh, and the one that I hate even worse than those others: "You saw what you wanted to see and nothing more."

Let me fucking tell you something: I did not want to see this shit, and I still do not want to see this shit. These things have haunted me for a very long time, and anyone who has had to wrestle with terrible memories will know they *never go away*. I can see them as clearly now as I did when they happened. So you can be as skeptical as you like. I believe in ghosts because I have seen ghosts, and I do not believe in God because I simply have

never seen God. There is a huge difference between the unexplained and the unsubstantiated. And yet all over this blue-green planet there are monuments, churches, statues, great paintings, books, and fanfare for He Who Sits in Heaven. People everywhere weep and cherish his name like a good piece of ass they had when they were busy wasting their twenties. But these same organizations have mocked people like myself, who have experienced firsthand the amazing sight of paranormal activity. Are they kidding?

With this book I am going to attempt to come to terms with this. I am going to tell you true stories that have happened to me—and there are several—and I am going to take you with me as I go searching for some proof, joining various “ghost-hunting” groups who do their best to gather information about and evidence of the existence of spirits. I will tell you other people’s stories and get the other side of things—from nonbelievers in the unnatural and from the religious alike—so that I can make some sense out of all of this.

I am also going to do some things I have never attempted to do before, and if I fail miserably, I will certainly not attempt it again. I am going to try my hand at a version of “armchair science” and possibly formulate some sort of scientific reasoning for these mysterious things we call spooks. I have some pretty far-fetched tidbits percolating upstairs in the old Bank of Stuff and Nonsense, but the more I have gone seeking validation in certain arenas and schools of thought, the more I have found that some of these conjectures on my part are really not so out there as I had imagined, reinforcing my original hypothesis and bringing to an end my internal stalemate that would not allow me to say it out loud in the first place. So I am prepared to make a statement to the proper authorities on the matter and do my

best to speak eloquently and persuasively about my bullet points and evidence. Unfortunately this does mean there will be a brief respite from my almost diabolic use of the word “fuck” for several pages. I know you are all expecting an unspecified amount, in addition to various demurrals about farts and dicks. But this *must* wait. I promise to circle back and regale you with these things at appropriate times, but it may mean that many pages will indeed be filled with ideas and forethought. You have my condolences, and I urge you to send angry letters to my editor—he loves those.

Fuck me, I am getting a bit bleak, right? This is *not* what you would expect from a Corey Taylor book. I know you have come to expect the odd pee pee story and ceiling fan scars. But I did not set out to write a sequel—I set out to write a continuation. People have the misconception that the first book was my life story. That is just completely false. This book and the previous tome are not autobiographies, and this is because I am not done *living* yet. Christ, I only turned thirty-nine while I was typing this tripe out—I am only halfway there! I do not even know what you would call these books technically, but they are not lifers just because I tell some assorted and sordid tales of woebegone days gone by. If they are anything, they are essays sprinkled with memoirs. But that looks a bit like crap on a plank of wood at your local W. H. Smith. So we will just shuffle this into the “non-fiction” section, although I am very confident various booksellers will shove these deep into the “music” section, much to my chagrin, of course. There is very little music discussed in these pages, so once again I am misunderstood. As the saying goes, however, shit happens. It seems like I always end up being the statue surrounded by rogue pigeons after a feast of berries and bugs. Bring it on, birds: if you strike me down, I shall become more powerful

than you could possibly imagine . . . or so Lucas and Guinness would have you believe.

This book is more in line with *The Empire Strikes Back* than *The Wrath of Khan*. *Star Trek 2* was a proper sequel, while *Episode 5* was the next chapter in the story. Before you get all weird and bombard poor innocent folk who have no access to me and mine, there is a difference. So take it up with your solicitors. Better yet, I will see if I can build this specific debate into my Comic-Con panel entitled, “Shit or Split: A Pointless Argument Based Around an Innocuous Conundrum Only Three Hundred People in the World Will Lose Sleep Over.” It will be a star-studded cast: the guy who played Biggs, the man who provides the arm for the puppet formerly known as Alf, one of the Jonas Brothers (they will appreciate the work), and Jonathan Frakes, if he is not too busy directing wonderfully bad movies on the Syfy Channel. I will be the asshole in the middle, because there is always an asshole in the middle. It is true: check your taint. What did Gandhi say? “Between the crack and the sack lies a friend you have to deal with your whole life.” Wait—was that Gandhi or my Uncle Bill?

It looks like I went off on another tangent. I will never get that time back. Let’s get back on track before I start talking about Benedict Cumberbatch. I agree: he *is* wonderful! Fuck—sorry . . . back to the book.

It has been a conundrum I have wrestled with for so long that it has actually made me question what I have seen, and yet with every replay in my mind, I know these things have happened. I *know* it. I know it as sure as I know that if I flip a switch, the lights will go on, or if there is gas in my car, it will start on the first turn of the key. Maybe that is not the same as believing—knowing always has a benefit of being there. Believing is more for the folks

on the other side of the fence who are trying desperately to get me to come on over and join their holy hoedown. But in a way I believe as well. I believe when people tell me their stories. I believe when someone tells me that a place is haunted. I believe when I hear an EVP or see a video with something so bizarre that I have to watch it again to figure it out, then when I cannot figure it out, I stew over it for a very long time. I do all of this because I believe. But I have a *reason* to believe. I have been in those situations myself. I have no past experience with the Lord; I have no videos or sound bites to pull out to prove He is out there. And do *not* even get me started with the Muffin People, the ones who see His face in the side of a tortilla or a grilled cheese sandwich. What is it about the Almighty and grains, anyway? Apparently, Jehovah has a hard-on for complex carbohydrates.

So if you are like me—or even kind of like me—keep flipping the pages and we will see what we can see together. Sometimes there is an advantage to knowing the script before you have seen the movie. We all struggle with the known and unknown alike. It curbs our enthusiasm and keeps some of us moral. But it also keeps all of us looking, searching—hoping to see the other side of the metaphysical gymnasium, where all the kooks are bounding around, flinging giant red dodge balls at one another. You just know that at some point their attention is going to turn toward your side of things and all hell is going to break loose. By then you will not even know which direction the barrage is coming from, but you will know that *something* is coming. At least you will *know*, and that is all we really want. We just want to know. There are inconceivable mysteries beyond our horizons, out into the nether of space, millions upon millions upon millions of miles and lifetimes away that most of us neither have the capacity nor the patience to venture toward. Fuck, there are still places

on this planet that man has not explored and there are species that we have not discovered, not to mention the rapid advances in technology on a regular basis. So for skeptics to tell me there is no way these things can exist or that what I am saying herein cannot be true is a pile of obstructive dick snot.

Let's face it: at the end of the day, aren't you glad there are still some fantastic things to figure out down here?

Leave math to the spacemen. Leave theory to the wish masters. Leave condemnation to hypocrites and bastards. Take one more deep breath, savor it, and plunge forward without thinking. Do not allow yourself hesitation. Do not allow yourself a moment of doubt. Follow your instincts and go where you never would have considered possible. The pale fabric of reality has so many hidden pockets that we can find some change in here somewhere—you just have to dig a little deeper to avoid the chewing gum and past mistakes. But if you give it time, we can find something wonderful, something to believe in. It is far better to explore and come back sated, albeit with more questions, than to stay behind and bitch because you are terrified of the answers that lie in the unknown. Sometimes the reward is richer when the journey was yours from the start. Sure, you enjoy the stories the truly brave bring back and share, but what really builds us all are the ones we share as one. Of course, that first step is the scariest. Do not worry—I am right here with you. No one here is going to scoff or judge or fuck with you. I will not allow it. That right there is the beautiful thing about new knowledge, really.

It may be strange, and it may scare the fucking shit out of you, but you will wonder.

YOU WILL WONDER.