

ABOVE

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NATIONWIDE MANHUNT FOR THE POD CONTINUES FBI TASK FORCE SEARCHES WIDELY

Members of the domestic terrorist group known as the Pod remain the target of a comprehensive FBI nationwide search.

“They’ve gone to ground,” FBI agent Tia Ryan stated during a brief press conference earlier today.

The Pod is thought to be composed of former members of the Weather Underground Organization, a radical group active in the late sixties and seventies. Their alleged leader is Dr. Lawrence Oliver Dane. Dane was taken off the FBI’s Most Wanted list decades ago, after he was presumed dead in an accidental bomb explosion at a safe house belonging to the group, also known as the Weathermen.

The FBI has been reluctant to release any details of their ongoing investigation of the Pod, but a source close to the

investigation confirmed that Dane is indeed believed to be alive.

Following his reported death, Dane led a group of radicalized followers, including some family members, to a top-secret, abandoned nuclear fallout facility beneath the borough of Manhattan in New York City. There, the group built a self-sustaining community that they called the Deep and lived undetected for decades.

Dane, considered by many to be a genius, received his first university degree at the age of fifteen. Other advanced degrees quickly followed. He has master's degrees in business administration and agriculture, and PhDs in computer science and psychology.

It is possible that Dane's degrees in agriculture and business administration inspired him to found the gourmet mushroom wholesale business Cloud's Mushrooms, which investigators believe was created as a means to keep the underground group solvent.

Executives of the now bankrupt global company issued a statement categorically denying any knowledge of Dane or his underground followers.

"We had no idea where the mushrooms were grown, or who the owner of

the company was,” ex-CEO Paul Pence said. “I’ve never met Dr. Dane. I was told that the unnamed owner was very reclusive and wanted to remain completely behind the scenes.”

When asked if this unusual way of doing business raised any suspicions, Pence claimed that it did not.

“We were selling mushrooms — not arms, sarin gas, explosives, or anything else the Pod has been associated with. I will admit that it was a strange way to operate a business, but in the twenty-plus years I worked for Cloud’s Mushrooms, it was a well-oiled machine. The mushrooms went out and money came in.”

Pence indicated that profits were in the millions.

“But I’m unemployed now,” Pence said. “All of us at Cloud’s Mushrooms are unemployed. I left work on Tuesday evening with tens of millions of dollars in our account. When I returned on Wednesday morning the money had vanished.”

So too have Dane and several of his followers. The FBI is warning the public not to approach suspected members of the Pod and they are asking anyone with information to contact local law enforcement immediately. The Pod are believed to be armed and extremely dangerous.

BENEATH

the newspaper article are police sketches of Lawrence Oliver Dane, aka Lod, aka Lord of the Deep, and several of the original members of the Pod, the so-called Originals.

I'm sitting inside Union Station in Portland, Oregon.

I need a shower.

I need a Laundromat.

I need a real bed.

I need a hot meal.

I haven't seen Coop and Kate for five days.

I'm not sure why we're running.

The train station is crowded because all the trains are late.

Snow all across the country, blocking tracks.

It's snowing outside right now.

Twenty-eight degrees.

I came in from Salt Lake City.

Kate is due in any minute from Seattle. I hope.

Coop is coming up from Los Angeles in a couple hours. Maybe.

The stationmaster just gave me a look the last time I asked him when the LA train would arrive. I'm guessing it's because the answer is the same as the first five times I asked.

The waiting area is packed because of the delays. We're all sitting on these long oak benches, guarding our gear. All I have is a small backpack with a change of clothes; a laptop,

which I haven't used since we left DC; and an iPhone, also unused except for a couple texts from Kate several days ago.

Oh, and this journal, and a couple of pencils, which I bought in DC just before I boarded the train. I bought journals and pencils for Coop and Kate too. I wonder if they will use them.

Kate's friend the Librarian gave us the packs and the electronics after we escaped from the Deep. The Librarian's real name is Alex Dane. He's Lod's younger brother. *Younger* is a relative term. They're both in their seventies, though you wouldn't know it by looking at either of them. Good genes, I guess.

Alex said that he would let us know when it was safe. He hasn't called, texted, or emailed. He said we needed to change our appearance. Stay off the grid. Travel separately, because Lod and his people would be looking for three kids traveling together.

I cut my hair.

Ridiculous.

Because it's been so cold I've worn a sock cap since I left DC.

I quit shaving.

Ridiculous.

Because it would take me about a hundred years to grow a beard.

People are starting to get up from the oak benches. Picking up their packs and bags, they begin lining up at the door leading out to the tracks.

The Coast Starlight Number 11 is pulling into the station from Seattle.

Between people trying to board and people detraining, it's impossible to pick Kate out of the crowd. I'm making a minor spectacle of myself standing on tiptoes and craning my neck trying to spot her in the mass of colliding humanity until I realize that's exactly how one of the Pod people will end up spotting me.

Kate is either on the train or she isn't. If she is on it she'll find me. Most of the people inside the station are boarding the southbound Coast Starlight. Those who have just detrained are hurrying toward the station exit.

I sit back down on the hard oak bench.

It doesn't take long for Kate to appear.

She sits down twenty feet away.

She's cut her hair and dyed it blond, but she is perfectly recognizable.

She's wearing sunglasses, which is the last thing anyone needs inside the dimly lit station. She might as well have had a sign around her neck that reads: HI, MY NAME IS KATE DANE. THE REASON I'M WEARING SUNGLASSES IS BECAUSE I WAS BORN AND RAISED UNDERGROUND AND MY EYES ARE SENSITIVE TO LIGHT, EVEN DIM LIGHT, WHEN I'M ABOVE.

I doubt it matters though. We're nearly three thousand miles away from New York City. From the sound of things, Lod and the Originals have more important things to worry about than three kids — like every law enforcement officer in the world trying to find and capture them.

Kate seems to be looking everywhere, and at everyone, but me. I want to jump up and shout: *I am right here!*

But I don't.

It must have been so strange for her to see the country for the first time on that long train ride. She's never been outside of New York City before, and most of that time she was living underground.

Traveling cross-country by train can be deceiving. Railway tracks do not run through the nicest parts of cities. If Kate was judging the country by what she saw clacking through the run-down parts of towns and cities, she might be thinking she made a big mistake surfacing and blowing the whistle on her grandfather.

Minutes pass.

I open my multi-tool pocketknife and carefully cut out the newspaper article. I've been snipping articles about the Pod at every stop and sticking them into the back of my notebook. I'm putting together an epistolary journal — from the Latin *epistola*, meaning letter. The author uses diaries, letters, and newspaper articles to tell the story.

Coop and I are no longer using digital recorders to communicate, but I still keep my recorder in my pocket out of habit. There could come a time when I might need it again.

It's interesting that none of the newspaper articles have pointed out that Pod stands for People of the Deep, or that if you reverse the words in Cloud's Mushrooms you come up with the symbol of a nuclear bomb explosion. Not that they

have a bomb; at least I don't *think* they have a bomb, and that's the problem. We don't know what they have, where they are, or what they're planning. All we know is that they are planning *something*, because, according to Kate, "Lod always has a plan."