

A career state cop is retiring, questioning "Maryland's Finest" legend. Casualties are severe; friends die on the job, his marriage fails, his beloved Tidewater Country is overwhelmed by urban sprawl, and demonic nightmares plague him until he finally confronts them.

SIGNAL 13

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SIGNAL 13

Chronicles of a Calvert Trooper

A Novel

by

S. Eric Briggs

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Chapter 1

THE TOAST

He doggedly clung to his days like a diffident priest clutching a cross on his first exorcism, but the pervasive demons, the “restive tiger” in his head, savaged his nights.

Standing hunched over in the half moon’s silky luster, he peered ahead at the vaguely familiar tobacco barn. He shook his dependably fickle state trooper flashlight in a vain attempt to give it life, cursed it, then edged closer to the looming behemoth. Deja-vu sensations washing over him, he warily gazed back at the hanging crescent for reassurance. Nothing. For a fleeting moment, a shooting star stole his attention as it streaked to its fiery death high above. When he turned around, she was standing there, stoop shouldered and wide-eyed, frozen beside the open barn door. In the pale moonlight he could see she was barefoot, dressed in a simple peasant skirt, and she had a distorted, all-knowing smile on her opaque face. On his approach, the little girl dreamily waved him on before she drifted into the barn and faded into the darkness. He gnawed on his lip and paused, wondering if she was just one more apparition on another long, tiresome night shift. Years of honed intuition begged otherwise. *Damn !!* The first signature strands of Jimi Hendrix’s *Purple Haze*, shrill and grating like never before, echoed crazily in his head when he started her way. This one was gonna be a real doozy!

The strong, pungent smell of the tobacco leaves drying overhead greeted him as he entered the dark cavernous structure. He flinched as the barn door creaked shut behind him, but forced himself to stand still, hoping to see her Lilliputian figure somewhere up ahead. In front of him, merely a few steps away, the child’s soft plaintive voice suddenly broke the silence. “Jesus loves me, yes he I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Blindly, he pitched forward after the verse was sung again, only to stumble across something on the packed dirt ground. He froze for a

moment before squatting down to find out what it was—hoping it wasn't. It was just one piece of many scattered at his feet, but the touch of the mangled arm, cold and clammy, sticky with coagulated blood, announced his return to that hideous Parker Creek scene again; the hacked up remnants of the hapless Bowen girl, an unsolved grisly murder from many years past. *PURPLE HAZE !!* The hair on the back of his neck rose, and his throat went dry as blood iced in his veins. And from the dark it came again, the child's voice more sluggish and deeper, falling off at the end. "Jesus loves me yyes I knowww...for the *Bl...*for the *BIBLE...*!"

For several gut-wrenching seconds there was deafening silence, a sweet prelude until her buoyant giggles filled the air, then silence again. He shuffled closer and was rudely greeted by a shrill hiss and the acrid stench of death. His eyes jerked wide open as the hooded animal-like specter with the beaded ember eyes floated from the shadows. Vaguely discernable in the shards of moonlight filtering through gaps in the barn siding, there was a double bladed, long-handle axe at the end of the towering specter's appendage. Horrified, he broke out of his near paralysis and eased himself up, his service weapon already drawn and aimed at whatever it was.

A warm stream of urine ran down the front of his trousers, but he didn't notice. The deranged hissing grew louder, the embers blazing brighter, as the entity came on. Firing pointblank and dead-on, he emptied the revolver at the massive bulk. Unfazed, it kept coming as he frantically pulled the trigger, the hammer finally falling on empty chambers. *Click!! Click !!* He stumbled backward, wildly off balance, and the gun flew from his hand when he fell against a pile of tobacco sticks. Throwing his arms in front of him, he tried to scream. But nothing came out, as the axe cleaved through the electric air.

He woke up with a start, gasping, with sweat rolling off his face. Welcome daylight was finally piercing the musty, cramped bedroom of the stucco cottage. He never could sleep late, but during the last few months it'd gotten worse, with more incessant nightmares and damning, maddening, headaches. Fitful sleep amounted to maybe an hour of real shuteye a night. Insomnia, after his career's very *last* late

shift, was an uninvited beastly guest at another maniac party he was forced to attend.

Catching his breath, he rolled over and pushed himself up from the cold tile floor. Poised on the edge of the platform bed, he stretched his arms over his throbbing head and yawned. Recoiling from the reek of his stale, funky breath, he stared blankly at the cobweb cracks on the blood-streaked mirror above the dresser. His eyes strained against the midmorning sunlight beckoning under the faded vinyl blinds of the tiny bedroom window. What glared back at him was, questionably, one of “Maryland’s Finest,” a stubble-chinned, bleary-eyed fifty-one year-old Sergeant Dalton Bragg of the Maryland State Police, who, in just two days, was metamorphosing himself back to civilian status after a twenty-six year hiatus.

“Sweet Jesus, have all those ball-buster twenty-six frickin’ years *really* added up to tomorrow?” he muttered lamely at his callous reflection. His smile rolled up into a tight grimace when he held up his right hand and studied his flayed, blood-crusting knuckles. He sucked on each violated knuckle until it stung enough to stop. Nice, another bout with the tiger.

Skittish fingers combed through the thinned out tangles of blonde hair before his scruffy face escaped the mirror to stare at the heap of boxes cluttering the floor. Dalton studied several duct taped boxes of career trivia and uniforms, along with the rules and regulations books he’d gathered for the conclusive equipment turn-in at the Supply Division tomorrow. Yeah, like someone would give a royal rat’s ass if anything was missing, right?

His jaded blue eyes darted back to the MSP regulations books, the yellow manual marked “Patrol,” and the black one marked “Administrative.” He sighed and shook his head. “Ahhh, the “rules of life” in the MSP...the dual nemeses and bane of too many potentially great troopers,” he mused out loud. The first MSP rules and regulations book was a mere thirty-five rules to abide by, totaling only thirty-one pages. Even twenty-six years ago, there was only the puny, two-inch thick, MSP bible “guide.” Now, there were two grossly-obese manuals serving as a testament to the changing times and too many

vain job justifications as dictated by the Wizards of OZ on the third floor planning and research unit in the Executive building.

Being on sick leave for his last two days wasn't a total cop-out either. No doubt the cheeky first sergeant had changed his sick leave report to indicate an ailment other than the incurable case of "draggin ass due to lobotomy complications" Dalton had scribbled out on the much-abused form. They weren't about to mess with him at this stage of the game, knowing he'd yank his papers out if they did, an irksome aspect they definitely had to avoid. So, it'd be a truce, more or less. He'd paid his dues several times over, but he also knew it was time to leave, as others eventually realized when the sun set on their fading careers.

Dalton had spurned the grandiose idea of a few cohorts who were willing to throw him a customary retirement party. He'd deferred, avoiding the stereotyped, genuinely meaningless accolades and tributes from hollow department figureheads and plastic politicians who'd never met him, those who hadn't walked in his shoes.

Divorced, as most of his fellow troopers had been at one time or another, houseless, and with kids flown from the coop, Dalton eventually found a quaint cottage to rent in Calvert Beach, a beach community on the bay in mid Calvert ("Culvert") County. There, in this pivotal life's moment, he lived—very much alone. When the cottage walls closed in on him, as they too often did, he had only to walk a short distance to the open sandy beach to bask in the welcome solace that nature invariably granted him. He particularly relished spending time at the special place he called Purgatory Ridge, the lofty outlook on top of the regal Calvert cliffs, a scant mile north of the beach entrance. High above the bay, his more frequent sojourns to the haven aptly served as a dependable antidote for his problems. Today's "antidote" session would be lengthy, one badly needed to assuage his dark, increasingly convoluted life perspective.

His bleak outlook was never manifested in his physical self, as he took great pride in his regimented approach to staying in shape, daily pushing himself hard with weights and grueling miles of running along the beachfront. At six feet even and a strapping one hundred and ninety-five pounds, the blond-haired sergeant with the boyish good

looks knew he was in better shape than most troopers half his age. No, his steely mindset pushed him harshly, usually to total exhaustion, giving him that welcome euphoria, however fleeting it was. But within hours, the sleeping tiger in his head would rouse itself to prowl again. As usual, he'd try to restrain it any way he could, evidenced by the slew of beer cans cluttering the kitchen sink each morning.

Dalton tugged on a faded pair of jeans, pulled on a sleeveless camo T-shirt, then jammed his bare feet into the ragged running shoes he'd kept far too long. To loosen up some, he forced himself through a series of sit-ups, grueling crunches and blood pumping pushups. Warm-ups finished, he plucked a frayed canvas knapsack off a closet shelf, brushed off the cobwebs, then tossed it on the bed. Next, he eased the shiny Sam Browne belt from the shelf and removed his service weapon, the state-owned, highly venerated, 40-caliber, locked and loaded Berretta semi-automatic. The handgun and two full magazine clips were tucked into a knapsack side pocket. Today, his most reliable "friend" was coming along for the jubilee.

Unlike some former MSP cohorts who'd digressed from friends to persona non grata types, his sinister looking metallic pal had never failed him. Funny thing how the job warped people so badly! Dalton stuffed the knapsack with a sundry collection of beer, throwing in a half empty pint of Jose Cuervo tequila and a few munchables for good measure, before scribbling out a short message on the chalkboard hanging on the side of the wheezing refrigerator. Had to give a heads-up to Diane, his long-term squeeze, just in case she showed up unannounced again, perplexed by yet another one of his odd absences.

Everything in order, Dalton shouldered the knapsack, adjusted the straps, and strode out the front door. When he passed his Ford Crown "Vic" cruiser in the driveway, he solemnly patted the hood. After a few steps, he stopped abruptly and slowly turned around. Dalton's eyes roamed over the olive-green and black patrol car which bore the distinct State of Maryland emblem on the driver's door. His gaze drifted to the *State Trooper* decal on the front fender, then up to the red and blue roof lights, and finally down to the yellow tag bearing the designation U-17. He always thought they were sharp, quasi-military looking cruisers, really something to be proud of, very much unlike the

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pale, baby-puke, “Chiquita Banana” rollers that were foisted on the troops years ago. Minutes later, he was standing on the warm sandy beach with the welcome sun on his face.

Staring over the calm, blue water bay to the Eastern Shore, the sergeant spotted the familiar outlines of several sparsely wooded islands on the surprisingly clear morning. A school of silvery iridescent alewives, just off the beach in the shallows, suddenly shattered the still water, chased by a cow-nosed ray whose dual wingtips cut the surface right behind the big-eyed bait fish. High above, he saw three ospreys circling lazily overhead, chortling to each other as they rode the thermals. Only the muffled grumbling of the work boat manned by the sun-baked, leather-skinned watermen checking their crab pots just offshore, hinted of any other human presence on this otherwise pristine day. He always relished the rarity of such treasured times.

Smiling broadly, Dalton began hiking over sand, shells, shark teeth and other fossils marking the way to Purgatory Ridge, some twenty minutes away. He effortlessly jumped over a shallow stream next to a crumbling concrete barrel seawall, then hurried on to where the beach narrowed and the cliffs loomed high. Heavy recent rains had caused more erosion in the cliffs, he noticed. Along with a few mammoth poplars that had lost their earthen grips to tumble down the cliffs, there were also several new dirt slides. No doubt the fossil hunters searching for prehistoric evidence of past life had scrambled about in ecstasy after the recent storms.

Dalton was fascinated, knowing that the very fossils and shark teeth he was treading came from the Miocene Epoch, millions of years ago. The entire area, even up to the cliff tops, had been under salt water once upon an unfathomably long time ago. Although adept at finding shark teeth along the beach, he had never found one from the Great White shark or XXXXX, as the efficient marine eating machine was fondly known to the avid fossil hunters. Flashing back to an earlier time in his career, Dalton recalled a fossil hunting incident that occurred along the cliffs, barely a mile to the south. A young schoolteacher trudging along the shoreline during a spring thaw had

been crushed, killed instantly, when a large clay boulder suddenly broke off from the cliff top. He also vividly remembered being ordered by his gonzo ID sergeant to stay with the gruesome, crushed corpse until it was removed by the rescue squad. Of course, there was no advice given as to how he was supposed to hold back the cliff sections that were steadily collapsing around him. Damn new guys always had too much to prove.

Dalton hurdled over another fallen poplar tree and was startled when he nearly landed on an exploding blur of gray and blue feathers. With a loud, panicky squawk, the ungainly bird took to the air, its strong wings flapping hard to escape. With a racing heart and a smile, he watched the large blue heron soar away to settle down on a large, mossy rock, several hundred yards beyond. Continuing on, Dalton approached to within yards of the pterodactyl-like bird before it gave a raucous cry and flew off for needed privacy.

Beads of sweat dotted his forehead when Dalton stopped to gaze up at the large clump of branches and sticks marking the bald eagle's nest high atop the oak near the edge of the cliff. Motionless, he waited, hoping to catch another glimpse of his much revered, magnificent raptors. Eyes beaming, he finally spotted one in the distance as it gracefully soared back and forth over the warm air currents rising above the cliff.

Several weeks ago, just before the dusk of a glass-clear day, he and his nature loving girlfriend, Diane, were meandering along the beach at this very spot. When they heard the shrill cries of the two eagles cavorting high overhead, they immediately plunked themselves down on the sandy beach. Open-mouthed, they watched the acrobatic birds make dazzling loops and dives, once even swooping close enough to briefly grasp each other's talons.

Yes, if there were any validity in the reincarnation theory, Dalton knew without a doubt that he'd return as an eagle, a vision he'd mentioned to Diane months before. From his interest in Native American lore, he knew that the natives saw the eagles as sacred messengers from the creator of them all. They were the ever-vigilant watchers who looked over them, the regal sentinels who flew the

highest and saw the farthest of any other living creature in their mystic worlds.

Graced by the eagles' appearance, Dalton trudged further down the beach, eventually arriving at the rotted pilings and scattered scraps of weathered plywood, all that remained of the on-shore duck blind marking the spot that led to his Purgatory Ridge, high above. He took off the knapsack and rubbed his shoulders, then sat on the shell-strewn beach for a short rest. Minutes later, he grunted and slung the knapsack over his back for the big climb. He gazed up at the majestic cliff, his Chesapeake Himalaya, in silent admiration, marveling at the evidence of a million years before. His eyes roamed over several levels of packed sediment, from the bluish-gray clay base, on up past the higher saffron and ruddy-colored sand and clay layers, before they rested on the towering trees of his favorite refuge.

"Here we go again, big boy," he muttered out loud before starting up the unmarked stairway leading to his coveted overlook.

At first, he scrambled straight up the face, moving slowly in a crouch, grabbing any convenient roots to pull himself upward. Soon he was crawling on hands and knees, struggling to keep himself at the lowest gravity point. Sweat trickled from his forehead and ran down his back, while the pack straps bit into his shoulders. Finally, with the help of an outcropped tree root, he pulled himself up and over the top of the one hundred and ten-foot cliff. Once again, king of the mountain!

Prone on his stomach, he wiped the sweat from his face and rested until his gasps tapered off. He rolled over onto his knees, unlimbered the pack from his aching shoulders and set it against the base of a massive oak. Behind him, as far as he could see, there was nothing but oak, poplar and sweet-gum trees, surrounded by several mountain laurels and heavy undergrowth. No residences for a good half mile or so. Dalton stood up and turned around to savor the panorama. The warm easterly breeze felt good as it stroked his sweaty face and mussed up hair. Time after time, ever since his first climb to this treasured ridge, it always had the same humbling effect on him. Just standing on fossils which had actually been part of a seabed millions of years ago, was mind-boggling in itself. He could only

imagine the alarm of those early native hunters, four braves of the proud Piscataways, on that June day in 1608, when they gawked at the “Great Canoe,” the pretentious Captain John Smith’s shallop, the Discovery Barge, as it sailed north to explore uncharted waters.

Dalton could make out the faint outlines of houses and piers on the Eastern Shore, miles across the brilliant blue bay. There were several listless sailboats, “blow boats,” plying the waters in search of good wind, and just to the south, he spotted a small armada of charter-fishing boats shifting for position, trolling deep along the shipping channel for rockfish, he imagined. Scanning to the north, he saw a massive container ship heading south and making good headway. And several miles beyond, the Bay Bridge, with its majestic twin spans, came vaguely into view.

Combined with the sweet and salty tang hanging in the air, Dalton was once again transfixed into his world of solace. He stood there for several minutes, arms slack by his side, sucking it all in. Satiated, he knelt down and rummaged his knapsack until he found his treasured, weather-beaten “dream-catcher” of native Indian lore. Almost twenty years ago, while hunting for elusive whitetails in the deep woods of Battle Creek Swamp, Dalton found the webbed, feather-laden dream-catcher. Strangely, it was hanging from the lower limb of a scraggy pine next to an abandoned, tumbledown farmhouse. Although it was badly weathered, Dalton was captivated enough to bring it home and hang it beside his bedroom window, wishing beyond a prayer that it’d work its magic.

Today, he mused to himself as he tied it to a sapling branch, he would set it free again. He gently ran a finger down the rim of the small hole in the middle of the web where the “good dreams” were thought to be snared. A reflective moment later, he brushed the hanging feathered tail with the back of his hand and gazed at the outer webbing where the bad dreams were snagged in the dead of night, taking care not to touch it.

Satisfied, he liberated the first can of beer from the knapsack and hunkered down against the deeply furrowed tree trunk. Dalton glanced down at his watch and scowled when the Casio confirmed that 11:00 AM hadn’t quite yet arrived. For a fool’s moment, he thought about

setting it ahead to five o'clock—*Here*, not just somewhere. Instead, he took it off his wrist and pitched it over the cliff edge. Chuckling to himself, he popped the beer tab, wedged the can between his legs, then lit the cigar to relish the sweet smell of the tobacco smoke he'd never allow himself to inhale. "Let the party begin," he carped to the beer can now held aloft in a mock salute.

"Sooo...Sergeant Bragg," he muttered lamely, "How the Hell ya *really* been during the last twenty-six years of your dubious existence, huh?" He grinned and drained the beer can, tossed it out a few yards and studied it closely as it rolled to a stop, a silver round end taunting him. This might be a tough one, he mused, as the Beretta came up. He quickly focused on sight alignment and squeezed the trigger. *Blam!* Instantly, his efforts were rewarded as the can spun several feet beyond, a perfect round hole in the center of its perfect round end. It was also a perfect violation of one of those puritanical departmental rules pertaining to service weapons too. Probably found in the grossly obese, yellow patrol book, somewhere under pukey Commandment Chapter 25, Sec. 8, subsection b "Thou shall not use departmental weapons for the desecration of dead beer cans, or some shit like that," he thought, as a chorus of giggles engulfed him.

Fresh beer in hand, the sergeant settled back against the tree, took another drag on the cigar, and blew out a few dislocated smoke rings. With the "tiger" fast asleep, he closed his eyes and drifted back twenty-eight years ago, searching for the lightning bolt that had zapped him hard enough to become obsessed with the prospect of being one of "Maryland's Finest." Unable to find the electrifying moment in his faulty memory bank, he only remembered the dumbfounded look and stony silence coming from his girlfriend Cindy when he told her he was quitting the band to become a Maryland State Trooper.

She was quizzically gazing back at a longhaired twenty-five year old, one hundred and sixty pound, gangly-built, hard rock drummer who she'd presumed was trying to emerge as a rock-n-roll star—some day. Years earlier, he'd initiated a pen pal relationship with her after he'd been smitten with the tall, thin-boned, blonde Scandinavian beauty while he was home on leave from the Army, the Army he'd enlisted in after signing a medical waiver, and in the midst of the Viet Nam war at

that! He'd volunteered as an obligation to the country, and for the chance to be a "warrior," to test his mettle amongst so many others who were destined to be a part of the only big game being played at the time. His brother, however, had usurped that reckless, youthful desire.

Dalton's orders for the *Nam* were abruptly changed when Uncle Sam learned that his older brother was already there, humping the hills in the central highlands. Dalton had several friends who'd served on the front lines, and a few of them came back in flag draped caskets. Those who made it back said they had seen the wretched tragedy of war firsthand as it rambled and wrecked lives, spirits and countries. Dalton would be guilt ridden forever for not being there, guilty for being alive today, a status that probably wouldn't have been, if he'd visited the *Nam*.

It began with a not-so-innocent, curious letter, and soon enough, their written exchanges turned intimate. Every letter he wrote to Cindy screamed of his aspirations to come home and form a band to pursue the Beatles with a vengeance on a quest for fame, riches, and too many other naive etceteras of youthful, carefree days. And then, merely two and a half years later, he was altering his life's course 180 degrees, to become—a cop? Dalton knew that proclamation would go over like a lead balloon, yet he decidedly couldn't continue without suffering serious repercussions to his body, soul and spirit. Being a hard-rocker in the volatile late sixties, was the ticket alrighty, but he never fathomed being part of the sordid drug world he'd brushed against along the way. Time to return to his true self—if he could still find it.

Dalton was athletic, and he thrived on challenges. Morally, his integrity was rooted, although he did have a scampish Dennis the Menace streak infected with a warped sense of humor, an impetus which foddered countless provocative pranks: frogs in toilets, snake shows in the den room, BB-gun battles with neighborhood pals, underage joyrides in the family car late at night, cutting school to go fishing or skinny-dipping, chucking eggs or cherry bombs at the Good Humor truck on listless summer evenings, and other shenanigans. Rampant boredom was judiciously staved off with juvenile buffoonery. On the flipside, Dalton embraced a few attributes that tempered such flaws, including a heartfelt tendency to help others when he could.

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Yes, it was prime-time to challenge himself and hope to become a member of what he felt was the most elite and prestigious agency in law enforcement—a trooper in the quasi-military, highly-disciplined Maryland State Police!

Weeks later, Dalton drummed out the last gig with his befuddled band members. The next day, after shearing his hair, the trooper-wannabe paraded into the Annapolis Barrack and proudly requested an application to the MSP, hoping to pass the challenging entry hurdles in time for the next academy class. The gauntlet included a written test, which he passed easily. Dalton was later interviewed at by a poker-faced, anemic-looking investigator who'd lost his personality somewhere, obviously not interested in finding it, on Dalton's lucky day. Weeks later, he reported to the Pikesville MSP headquarters gym for the "cattle call" physical and an easy agility test, and a month later he took a nerve-wracking polygraph test at the Annapolis Barrack, a nigh exorcism performed by all-knowing Corporal Floyd White, which satisfactorily released all the shrieking skeletons in his closet.

The final step in the trooper application process was the applicant interview board. All those awaiting interviews lined up anxiously along the long hall of the MSP training academy at Pikesville. Sharing restless gibberish, they waited their turns to be dissected via interviews conducted in stuffy, vacant academy bedrooms. The prim captain and the other two uniformed board members were polite and courteous, yet direct and assertive, and while Dalton felt he'd handled himself well, the interview ended way too soon. His rock drummer background yielded several headshakes and a few consternated scowls. When the captain delved more into his "hippie" rock drummer lifestyle, Dalton jokingly quipped that *hippie* really stood for Highly Intelligent Person Pursuing Interesting Endeavors. The pregnant pause afterwards, told him that with this granite-faced group—all three in dire need of a courtesy colon flush—the comment had gone over like the fart in church. Still, Dalton thought he'd be a slam-dunk for the next class.

Obsessed with lofty aspirations, Dalton, working full-time, evening hours at a local concrete plant, enrolled in a law-enforcement

curriculum at his community college. He also toned up physically, pushing himself hard, in hopes of gaining acceptance to the conservative department. It took him *two and a half* more years, four more polygraphs, physical agility tests and interview boards, and an enduring dissection of his dubious “hippie” background several times over, before the MSP closed its eyes, held its breath and invited him into the club.

After his first rebuff, Dalton requested an appointment with the commander of the personnel division to review his tenuous applicant status. He’d never forget the stern-faced, Irish molded Captain Moran when he shut his door, locked eyes with him, and stated emphatically that he’d never get on the job if *he* had anything to do with it. Dalton felt the eye-daggers pierce his back as he left the captain’s office—but they didn’t stick, however, and more important, they were no match for the fuel that had just been poured on his burning obsession to become a Maryland State Trooper.

Dalton was cooling down after finishing a grueling three mile run along the winding dirt road to the summer cottage he and his new wife Cindy were renting on the Magothy River near Arnold. Short of wind, with his pulse racing madly, he checked the mailbox and yanked out a thick manila envelope. His eyes sparkled when he saw the Maryland State Police return address. *Yes!* Such positive news, right before Christmas, signaled an approaching new dawn in his life, and Dalton was deliriously giddy—and totally oblivious to Cindy’s muted reaction upon learning of his acceptance to the MSP academy.

“Ahhh...the frickin academy,” the sergeant sighed with drifting reflection. Smiling broadly, he pitched out another dead beer can. True to form, it was sent spinning with a second, neatly placed Berretta round direct to mid-center. Uncanny at the least, he never seemed to have a problem with putting holes in things where he wanted them.

A career state cop is retiring, questioning "Maryland's Finest" legend. Casualties are severe; friends die on the job, his marriage fails, his beloved Tidewater Country is overwhelmed by urban sprawl, and demonic nightmares plague him until he finally confronts them.

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